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War Versus Peace Logics at Local Levels:

Findings from the Conflict Research Programme on
Local Agreements and Community Level Mediation

Mary Kaldor, Marika Theros, and Rim Turkmani



About the Authors

Mary Kaldor is Professor Emeritus of Global Governance and Director of the Conflict Research Programme at the London School of Economics. She has pioneered the concepts of new wars and global civil society. Her elaboration of the real-world implementation of human security has directly influenced European and national governments. She is the author of many books and articles including *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era* (3rd edition, 2012), *International Law and New Wars* (with Christine Chinkin, 2017), and *Global Security Cultures* (2018).

Marika Theros is a policy fellow at the London School of Economics based at LSE IDEAS, and has worked at the intersection of research, policy and civic engagement over the last 15 years. Her research focuses on political mobilisation, civic activism, global-local dynamics of violence, local agreements, and the impact of international interventions on the prospects for justice and security for local communities. She has designed a number of research and dialogue processes in the Balkans, South Asia, and the Middle East, in order to support multi-level, multi-dimensional peacemaking and peace-building approaches. She is also a non-resident senior fellow at the Institute for State Effectiveness and at the Atlantic Council's South Asia Center, and co-founder of the Civic Ecosystems Initiative. She has been engaged on Afghanistan since 2007, most recently supporting peace and civil society initiatives including grassroots networks.

Rim Turkmani is a Research Fellow at the Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit in the Department of International Development at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She directs the Syria conflict research programme at the unit. Her policy-oriented research work focuses on identity politics, legitimate governance, transforming war economy into peace economy and the relationship between local and external drivers of the conflict. She is a member of the Women's Advisory Board to the UN special envoy to Syria and sits on the advisory board of airwars.org. She directed the project: 'Crowd-sourcing Conflict and Peace 'Events' in the Syrian conflict' which produced a detailed database of instances of violence and peacemaking.

About the Conflict Research Programme

The Conflict Research Programme is a four-year research programme hosted by LSE IDEAS, the university's foreign policy think tank that was completed in March 2021. It was funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The goal was to understand and analyse the nature of contemporary conflict and to identify international interventions that 'work' in the sense of reducing violence or contributing more broadly to the security of individuals and communities who experience conflict. The research is continuing with the framework of the FCDO funded Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PCREP).

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Executive Summary

This memo summarises research on local agreements and community level mediation undertaken by the Conflict Research Programme (CRP) in five sites – DRC, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria in collaboration with the Political Settlements Research Programme (PSRP) and the Center for Security Studies in Zurich, Switzerland. By 'local', we refer to any type of agreement other than a top-down centralised national agreement, which has been the main focus of the international community until recently.

International peace efforts have typically focussed on national level deals between warring parties, but these are very slow, infrequent, and increasingly prone to breakdown. Local agreements meanwhile are prolific across many conflict sites; they often provide practical solutions to problems and disputes, and offer insights into how national level approaches could gain broader credibility. We argue that the spread of local agreements can be explained by the fragmented and decentralised nature of contemporary conflicts. International actors often overlook such agreements because it is assumed that the conflict consists of a binary contest between two sides, which can only be resolved at the national level.

Key findings include:

- 1) Local agreements are not necessarily peace agreements; they may also be a form of surrender, or about tactical alliances and deployment of armed groups. Although the distinction is not clear-cut, it is useful to distinguish between local agreements that are closer to a peace logic and those that are closer to a war logic. The former involve a reduction in violence, contribute to local well-being through, for example, the provision of services, and are more likely to be durable. The latter may also reduce violence, but they may involve forced displacement, the shift of violence to a different area, civilian repression, and are more likely to be temporary.
- 2) Local agreements tend to be about the **concrete situation** on the ground – ceasefires, lifting sieges, provision of services, managing checkpoints, redeployment or demobilisation of armed groups, and so on – rather than political or constitutional issues.
- 3) Local agreements cannot be treated in isolation. What happens in one area affects other areas. What happens at one level affects other levels (local, national, regional). Local agreements are part of a broader ecology of both conflict and negotiations. It is important for

negotiators **to include concrete local issues in high-level national talks.**

Where **civilians, civic and community figures, and multilateral actors such as the United Nations are involved in the negotiation process, agreements tend to be closer to a peace logic.** By contrast, where the dominant actors are armed groups or representatives of external states supporting one warring party or another, the agreements are more likely to follow a war logic. This conclusion is supported both by case studies, especially in Syria, and by quantitative data relating to the role of UN peacekeeping missions in local agreements involving non-state actors in Africa. Multilateral actors can act as third-party mediators, contribute to logistics, monitoring and security, and press for the inclusion of civilian actors (local traditional leaders, grassroots groups, women, and youth) in the talks. **Support for local agreements should be included in UN mandates.**

- 4) **Process** is important and not just concluding agreements. Periods during which talks take place tend to be associated with lower levels of violence. The implication is that multilateral actors should not just focus on reaching agreements but aim to **contribute to a long-term reconciliation process that continually addresses local grievances.**

- 5) A detailed understanding of local level concerns over time is a necessary condition for effective involvement in the negotiation or mediation process. Conflict research must be both bottom-up and top-down. There is a need **to establish databases of local processes and not just agreements,** based on local knowledge and not just media reporting. There is also a need for conflict databases to expand mapping of conflicts beyond violent events.

The overall conclusion is that local talks and community-level mediation can contribute to a peace logic. They are more likely to contribute to do so if they involve local civilians and regional or international multilateral neutral actors, are related to the national, regional, and international level, and are based on a detailed knowledge of context. An effort to expand this type of process on a broader scale may be the best opportunity for addressing the social condition that characterises contemporary intractable conflicts.

1 Introduction

This memo summarises research undertaken by the Conflict Research Programme (CRP) aimed at understanding the processes and outcomes of agreements forged at the local or sub-national level in intractable conflicts. By 'local', we refer to any type of agreement other than a top-down centralised national agreement, which has been the main focus of the international community until recently. Local agreements are not a new phenomenon and can be observed as far back as the English Civil War in the 1600s, but they appear to be growing in number, and are gaining increasing visibility and generating considerable interest among policymakers and practitioners alike. On one hand, this reflects the difficulty of reaching national level political settlements in places like Libya, Syria, and Yemen, or sustaining them once concluded.¹ On the other hand, the proliferation of local agreements across contexts and within a single context can be read as a response to the decentralised and fragmented nature of contemporary conflicts.

Although major UN peacekeeping missions are often mandated to engage and respond to local conflicts, many UN missions lack the mandate and the instruments to play a role in local mediation, protection, and

monitoring.² New operational concepts like 'sustaining peace'³ as well as new mediation approaches and guidelines are being developed to respond to local-level conflicts while also accounting for the multi-level dynamics that shape and sustain the broader conflict.⁴ Yet, as a class of agreements, 'local agreements' remain poorly understood, and there has been little systematic investigation of their nature, diverse manifestations, and implications. Engaging in and supporting local-level agreements is a recent approach, one that challenges traditional mediation approaches and hierarchical perspectives on conflict settings. These agreements are extremely diverse in form and engage multiple actors, while their content and impact can vary considerably across and within the same context. This creates conceptual and operational challenges for those seeking to support and engage with local agreements and their processes. If their complexity is not correctly understood, the choice made by external actors to engage or not to engage may risk contributing to the underlying dynamics of conflict and competing logics of power.

Research undertaken by the CRP sought to fill the knowledge gap. Indeed, the relative neglect of research on local agreements leaves a vacuum in our understanding of contemporary war- and peace-making.

1 Arthur Boutellis, Delphine Mechoulan, and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, "Parallel Tracks or Connected Pieces? UN Peace Operations, Local Mediation, and Peace Processes," International Peace Institute, December 2020; World Bank, World Development Report 2011 (Washington, DC: 2011), 2-3.

2 See Allard Duursma, "Non-State Conflicts, Peacekeeping, and the Conclusion of Local Agreements," Peacebuilding, forthcoming (2021). He writes that the UN Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) in 2010 was the first peacekeeping operation mandated to support 'local conflict resolution mechanisms,' the UN Mission in the Ivory Coast mandated to support local reconciliation in 2011, while the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), Mali (MINUSMA), and Central African Republic (MINUSCA) have been mandated to support "local peace processes" in 2011, 2013, and 2014 respectively.

3 United Nations; World Bank. "Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict," Washington, DC: World Bank (2018); United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, Peacebuilding and sustaining peace, Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/707-S/2018/43, 18 January 2018.

4 Thomas Carothers and Oren Samet-Marram, 'The New Global Marketplace of Political Change,' Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2015); United Nations, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnerships and People*. Report of the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations. New York: United Nations (2015); European Union (2016). 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy' http://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/eugs_review_web.pdf.

Today's conflicts are characterised by fragmentation, the involvement of multiple actors, diverse forms of political and criminal violence, intensified external and geopolitical involvement, and a breakdown in legitimate political authority. They can be understood as a 'pervasive and persistent social condition in which multiple groups associated with fragmented forms of authority depend on violence itself both for finance and for political mobilisation.'⁵ The social condition that constitutes war represents a kind of order where different logics are enmeshed across a fragmented and decentralised conflict landscape.

We argue that local agreements are an inherent and endemic feature of this type of conflict. They are an expression of the fragmented social condition. Various actors seek to shape local agreements whether as a tool to negotiate for their survival, for the purposes of power, to secure immediate community benefit, or to influence a broader national settlement. They cover a variety of topics and can serve multiple functions within and across contexts.

Local agreements can have both positive and negative effects on the community, broader conflict dynamics, or both. In this memo, we draw an analytical distinction between agreements that are characterised by what could be described as a war logic and those that are characterised by a peace logic. Agreements that could be said to be based on a war logic include those that entrench the power of armed actors and are associated with power-grabbing and predatory activities; impose ethnic divisions and demographic engineering; and lead to the distribution of the spoils

of the local, national, regional, or global political marketplaces. Some are a mix of all three. Agreements that could be said to be based on a peace logic, on the other hand, lead to improvements in everyday life, provide benefits for the community as a whole by reducing violence and providing public services or access to humanitarian assistance, tend to be longer lasting, and may help to change reality in ways that are more conducive to reaching further agreements at different levels and in different areas.

The distinction is not always clear cut. Some local agreements may produce meaningful reductions in violence in the local area while shifting or creating new conflict dynamics in other areas. One can often detect the competition between both war and peace logics during the process of negotiating these agreements.

This memo draws on research undertaken by the CRP in five sites (DRC, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria) with additional inputs from PA-X Local, the database of the Political Settlements Research Programme, and quantitative data undertaken at the Center for Security Studies in Zurich, Switzerland.⁶ The goal was to elaborate a framework to better understand and analyse local agreements, the functions they serve, the process by which they are mediated, and their implications for the conflict and peace-making landscape. A better understanding of these agreements and their processes can provide insight into conflict dynamics while also offering lessons for external actors on how to intervene in these processes in ways that mitigate the conditions on the ground that drive conflict.

⁵ Kaldor, Mary, Radice, Henry, De Waal, Alex, Benson, Matthew, Detzner, Sarah, Elder, Claire, Hoffmann, Kasper, Ibreck, Rachel, Majid, Nisar, Morgan, Azaria, Mehchy, Zaki, Rangelov, Iavor, Sarkar, Aditya, Spatz, Benjamin J., Theros, Marika, Turkmani, Rim, Vlassenroot, Koen and Watkins, Jessica (2020) *Evidence from the Conflict Research Programme: submission to the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*. Conflict Research Programme, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK. (<https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/106522/>).

⁶ See list of publications at end.

2 Emerging Literature on local agreements

A growth in conflict resolution studies and mediation activity has accompanied the expansion of intractable conflicts in the post-Cold War period, and increasingly emphasises the potential of agreements forged at sub-national levels to support a national-level political settlement, or at least not undermine it. Moreover, new mediation approaches acknowledge that the mediation environment itself has significantly changed, and tends toward longer more complex processes involving multiple topics and third parties and requiring long-term commitment throughout multiple phases.⁷ Even so, as Martin Griffiths notes, 'mediation is still operating on the old model of two parties coming together in a small room in a third country under the auspices of a disinterested third party to reach a written agreement.'⁸

As shown in the box below, there have been recent efforts to construct databases of local agreements. There is also an emerging literature, mostly in the form of grey literature, case studies, and participant observations that seeks to document and understand these agreements.⁹ The emerging study and practice of local

'peace' agreements is characterised by confusion and conflation of terms, as well as normative perspectives that emphasise 'bottom-up' interventions when addressing conflict. Some of the early advocates for 'local' approaches emphasised supporting efforts by indigenous communities and civil societies, as well as the use of more traditional and culturally-relevant conflict resolution mechanisms and strategies.¹⁰ While the shift in focus to the local is important, there remains a tendency both to assume greater legitimacy in bottom-up approaches and to treat the local as a bounded category, with many scholars and practitioners continuing to separate domestic and external forces, actors, and processes when addressing conflict resolution despite political economy analyses that helps reveal linkages between levels, networks, and resource flows.¹¹ More recent concepts like hybridity seek to problematise the strict distinction between the local and international spheres but still risk ignoring the multiplicity and multidimensionality of both local and international dimensions.¹²

7 Boutellis et al. 2021; International Peace Institute, "Mediation and Peace Processes," *IPI Blue Paper No. 8, Task Forces on Strengthening Multilateral Security Capacity*, New York, (2009); Oslo Forum, 'The End of the Big Peace? Opportunities for Mediation', Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, (2018).

8 Martin Griffiths, 'Reinventing our toolkit for Peace,' European Institute for Peace, October 2016, available at: <https://www.eip.org/reinventing-our-toolkit-for-peace/>

9 Tatiana Carayannis Vesna, Bojicic-Dzelilovic, Nathaniel Olin, Anouk Rigterink, and Mareike Schomerus, (2014) Practice without evidence: interrogating conflict resolution approaches and assumptions. Justice and Security Research Programme, International Development Department, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK.; J. Turkmani et. al 2014; P. Johnson and P. Raghe, 'How Somali-Led Peace Processes Work', in *Book How Somali-Led Peace Processes Work*, ed.^eds. Editor (City: Conciliation Resources, 2010).; M. Bradbury et al., 'Local Peace Processes in Sudan', in *Book Local Peace Processes in Sudan*, ed.^eds. Editor (City: Rift Valley Institute, 2006). Heathershaw, "Unpacking the Liberal Peace: the Merging of Peacebuilding Discourses", *Millennium- Journal of International Studies*, Vol 38, (2008).

10 See J.P. Lederach, *Building peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington D. C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, (1997); Severine Autesserre (2009), 'Hobbes and the Congo: Frames, Local Violence, and International Intervention', *International Organization* 63 (2), 249-280.

11 O.P. Richmond, "Becoming Liberal, Unbecoming Liberalism." See for instance Chandler, "The Road to Military Humanitarianism.

12 A Björkdahl, K Höglund, G Millar, J van der Lijn, 2016 *Peacebuilding and friction: global and local encounters in post conflict societies*. London: Routledge; Paffenholz 2015.

Box: Existing Datasets of Local Agreements

Local Pa-X¹³ is currently the only available open-access dataset of local peace agreements globally. It is a sub database of the PA-X peace agreements database developed by the Political Settlements Research Programme. Currently it provides data on 286 local peace agreements between 1990 and mid-2020 worldwide, with 27 percent of them taking place in Syria between 2012 and 2019. The database maps publicly available written agreements and allows them to be viewed on a timeline. The database acknowledges the limitations of mapping local peace agreements, stating it only includes agreements for which it was possible to obtain a text and that 'it is therefore neither exhaustive of all local negotiation practices, nor clearly representative of them, nor of the range of armed actors and groups involved in local agreement-making.'¹⁴

Another example of datasets of local agreements is the ETH/PRIO Civil Conflict Ceasefire Dataset which maps intra-state and non-state conflicts globally between 1989 and 2018.¹⁵ The dataset covers the 338 local ceasefires declarations that have been announced in English-speaking media derived from Factiva media archive. Other available datasets either concern a particular country or aspect of local agreements, such as the rich data provided by the UN peacekeeping missions in Africa. Certain contexts, in particular Sudan, Somalia, and Syria, have a rich history of local agreement-making processes and can provide a laboratory for studying them. Several studies and papers have been published based on local agreements datasets that are gathered from Syria such as the work of Karakus and Svensson which examines 106 local-level ceasefires that were reached in Syria from 2011 to 2017.¹⁶ Also, Turkmani et. al., examines more than 35 local negotiations in different parts of Syria, between October 2011 and June 2014.¹⁷

Some of the large datasets from peacekeeping missions provide an important resource to investigate a specific aspect of local agreements, such as the role and effectiveness of local mediation. In addition to contributing to this issue, an earlier paper by Duursma analysing the effectiveness of mediation at a sub-national level draws on event data compiled by the Joint Mission Analysis Centre of the UN–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur between 2008 and 2009.¹⁸ Based on a dataset of 199 armed clashes, he finds that local mediation efforts following armed clashes significantly prolong lulls in fighting in these areas and are more effective at preventing further attacks.

13 <https://www.peaceagreements.org/>

14 <https://www.peaceagreements.org/lsearch>

15 See more on this database under Clayton et al, 'Introducing the Eth/Prio Civil Conflict Ceasefire Dataset', Preprint (2020).

16 Dogukan Cansin Karakus and Isak Svensson, 'Between the Bombs: Exploring Partial Ceasefires in the Syrian Civil War, 2011-2017', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32, no. 4 (2020): 681-700.

17 R Turkmani et al., 'Hungry for Peace: Positives and Pitfalls of Local Truces and Ceasefires in Syria', (2014).

18 Allard Duursma, 'Making Disorder More Manageable: The Short-Term Effectiveness of Local Mediation in Darfur', *Journal of Peace Research* (2020): 2234331989824.

3 Defining local agreements: scope and content

We define **local agreements as relating to space**, and not the actors, agendas, or structures involved. They are defined as local only because they concern a specific 'sub-national' geography and are not national comprehensive agreements. Some local agreements may address a specific local issue, but often the issues addressed by such agreements are not local, or are local manifestations of a failure or an issue at a higher level, national, and/or geopolitical. Others may involve a disputed border area, such as in the case of Abyei in South Sudan/Sudan. The agreements over Abyei, for example, included (i) community-level agreements over such matters as nomadic rights; (ii) agreements between Sudan and South Sudan (prior to 2011, the SPLM); (iii) regionally mediated agreements to suspend the fighting and bring in peacekeepers; and (iv) rulings at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague. All these levels are intertwined and have served to reinforce one another.¹⁹

Typically, local agreements **relate to concrete issues on the ground rather than overall political fault lines**, as Pospisil shows in his analysis of the agreements contained in the PA-X database.²⁰ Local agreements are often about ceasefires, lifting sieges, provision of services, managing checkpoints, redeployment, or demobilisation of armed groups, and so on, rather than political or constitutional issues. These may include:

- Lifting or managing a siege, such as allowing humanitarian aid in, evacuating humanitarian cases, or allowing civilian movement in and out of the besieged areas. The long process of agreement in Al-Waer neighbourhood in Homs, Syria, included such provisions.
- Border or territorial disputes, or access, such as the Abyei agreement.
- Managing exchanges of goods and/or services across conflict lines whether within a city, countryside, or between a city and its neighbouring countryside. The agreement reached between opposition and government-controlled areas in Deraa in Syria in 2014 was about exchanging water in return for the provision of electricity. ISIS and HTS in Syria also cut similar agreements related to services and trade with all actors. These agreements often include a truce in order to guarantee the continuous provision of services and trade.
- Temporary truces as a military tactic. This includes agreements that lead to a period of calm that gives parties an opportunity to arm and redeploy, and agreements that aim to secure access through a local area in order to attack another area. One example is the agreements that the Syrian authorities reached in 2013 with opposition forces in Madaya to secure the road that leads to the neighbouring area of Zabadani.²¹
- Open-ended ceasefire and cessation of attacks on civilians.
- Release or/and exchange of prisoners and kidnapped persons.

¹⁹ M. Ochaya Lino, *Local peace agreement in Abyei: achievements, challenges and opportunities*. Conflict Research Programme, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK, (2020).

²⁰ Jan Pospisil, 'Dissolving Conflict. Local Peace Agreements and Armed Conflict Transition,' *Journal of Peacebuilding*, Forthcoming 2021.

²¹ Turkmani et al 2014.

- Provisions addressing arrangements regarding rebel fighters such as:
 - Offering amnesty from the state for those who joined the rebels and amnesty for army defectors.
 - Deferring army conscription. Many of the local agreements in Syria included provisions offering men of army recruitment age a period of three to six months before they are called for conscription.
 - Redeployment of fighters to another area.
 - Enrolling fighters in local police/security force or in a specific army corp.
 - Disarmament within a schedule.

Most agreements contain a mixture of some or all these issues.

Local agreements **vary in how they relate to the broader conflict and peace landscape.**

The case of the agreement-making process in Galkaio, Somalia, for example, prompted the involvement of the UN mission and other actors because of fears it could unravel the national-level political settlement and ongoing state-building effort.²² A local agreement might potentially be a means of constituting local authority or a mechanism through which the state reasserts its authority, for better or worse. In South Sudan, politicians and the government have used demands for local reconciliation as a way to rearrange political loyalties and rebuild authority.²³ This was the case during Riek Machar's 2012 efforts as Vice President to start a reconciliation process. The recent National Dialogues in South Sudan also appears to be an attempt by the government to assert authority through a series of local meetings. In other cases, local agreements aim to 'disconnect' conflict in a specific

area; this includes community-led peace zones and can be identified in contexts as diverse as Bosnia, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Philippines. Local agreements are **not necessarily local peace agreements**; they cover a wide variety of issues. Some agreements are about reducing violence or ending hostilities, while some are about coping with the consequences of conflict and improving the living conditions for civilians until an end can be seen on the horizon. Local agreements that could be said to be **based on a war logic** are often a way that warring parties manage conflict and violence or seek to curb it on a temporary basis, e.g., while they rearm or recuperate. They reflect broader conflict dynamics or are used by armed and/or state actors to influence war-fighting dynamics, rearrange political loyalties, and reassert their authorities. Others, as in some cases in Syria or more recently with the Taliban advances in Afghanistan, may imply a form of surrender of one side, while potentially enabling violence elsewhere in the country.

By contrast, a peace logic can be detected in the content and provisions of some local agreements that seek to address community concerns and underlying drivers of violence, in the involvement of civic actors in the process or as signatories, or in the strategies that mediators and negotiators employ to reach an agreement. The Galkaio agreement in Somalia, for example, included provisions on the norms and rules for resolving future disputes and provision banning hate speech and removing licenses from media espousing hate speech, while also providing immediate community programs to both sides in order to demonstrate the peace dividends of the agreement, and in part, address some of the underlying inequalities that drove the conflict. The distinction is illustrated in the table below.

²² Majid and Theros, op.cit.

²³ Discussions with Naomi Pendle, London School of Economics.

Table 1: Peace Versus War Logics in Local Agreements

Aspect	Civic logic	War logic
Long term target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - End of conflict through peaceful means - Lasting peace - Improved living conditions - Long term solution to conflict drivers including rights and justice issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Military victory - Improving military standing/power - Increasing profits - Coercive reassertion of authority (local or state) - Moving the battle to a new ground
Motivation for cease-fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce casualties - Allow aid and support in - Improve conditions for civilians - Have a period of talks and dialogue during calm as a stepping stone to a long-term solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tactical step within a war strategy - An opportunity to recuperate, rearm, and redeploy - Facilitate illicit trade and other activities - Reduce pressure from civilians - Assertion of political authority
Issues discussed during talks	Mainly occupied with the specific concerns of the civilians such as children unable to go to school, inability to access healthcare, prisoners, and other local grievances	Mainly occupied with the concerns of the armed actors, details about arms, maps of frontlines and checkpoints, the delivery of humanitarian aid under armed groups' supervision, as well as prisoners and detainees
Solutions for civilians	Tries to avoid any displacement and find protection solutions for civilians who could be at risk as a result of the agreement	Civilians are displaced in large numbers leading to a demographic change
Solutions for fighters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integration in new local security/police force - Disarm and redeploy - Obtaining amnesty to protect them from arrest - Obtaining special arrangement to protect from conscription 	Move to another area with their arms
Release of detainees and kidnappees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Includes mainly civilian detainees and kidnappees from both sides - Release takes place as confidence building measure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Includes mainly detainees and kidnappees who matter for armed groups - Release takes place mainly through exchange
Decision makers	Civic figures, women, and community leaders play key role. Also multilateral actors	Mainly driven by military/rebel leaders and external parties to the conflict
Civil peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreement involves provisions banning the incitement of violence and hate speech - Provisions for local peace committees and/or agreeing to start local dialogue - Avoids identity-based privileges/punishments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No mention of hate speech, no plans for dialogue...etc. - Involves sectarian/ethnic provisions

4 Actors, the balance of local and international actors: Are international actors a help or a hindrance?

The types of actors involved in local agreements include local, national, and external/international actors.

On the local level, the main actors are local armed groups, traditional leaderships (tribal, religious, family), civil society actors both as organisations or as civic voices such as doctors and lawyers, the de facto governing authority (such as the Local Administrative Councils in opposition-controlled areas in Syria) and traders and businessmen whose business would benefit from a ceasefire and/or a more organised and managed conflict line. In Galkaio, external mediators recognised the power of women and youth activists already playing a role in peace and brought them into the official processes which resulted in extending the reach and content of the discussions to include civilian issues. They adopted an 'activist' approach with an emphasis on facilitation, coordination, and coalition building, not only to end violence but also to begin to restore social relations and address social drivers of conflict at different levels.

Civilians can be seen as actors in local agreements even when they are not represented in the talks. Civilians, for example, put pressure on armed actors to engage in talks and agree to a ceasefire or arrangements to provide them with services. This role of the civilians is most salient when the local talks fall apart or stumble because one of the armed actors is refusing to concede to certain conditions. In these circumstances, the civilians who live under the control of this armed actor are often deliberately targeted by violence, and services get disrupted so that the civilians themselves put pressure on this actor to return to the talks (e.g., Homs, Eastern Ghouta).

In general, women rarely play a direct role in local agreements, especially if the talks are dominated by armed actors. Where they do play a role as mediator, as in Galkaio, they create space for the inclusion of women in the talks.²⁴ Jessica Watkins, in her research on local agreements in Iraq, found that local mediators in Iraq cite the inclusion of women as one of the key ingredients for the success of a local agreement by providing insights and details about issues that tribal leaders and security actors did not, such as the social effects of implementing tribal exile customs on families, employment and welfare, and the social stigma attached to displacement.

When do national players get involved?

On the national level we see the local representatives of the central power. For example, army and security officials, mayors, and heads of municipalities and local councils. In some of the major local agreements in Syria, even ministers take part. In the early local talks in Homs, for example in 2012, ministers, senior Ba'ath party officials, army and security officials, and the mayor of Homs were all present in the local negotiation meetings. At times the government itself could be represented in local agreements by local informal actors such as the heads of loyalist militias or a loyal local dignitary rather than by formal institutions and representatives.

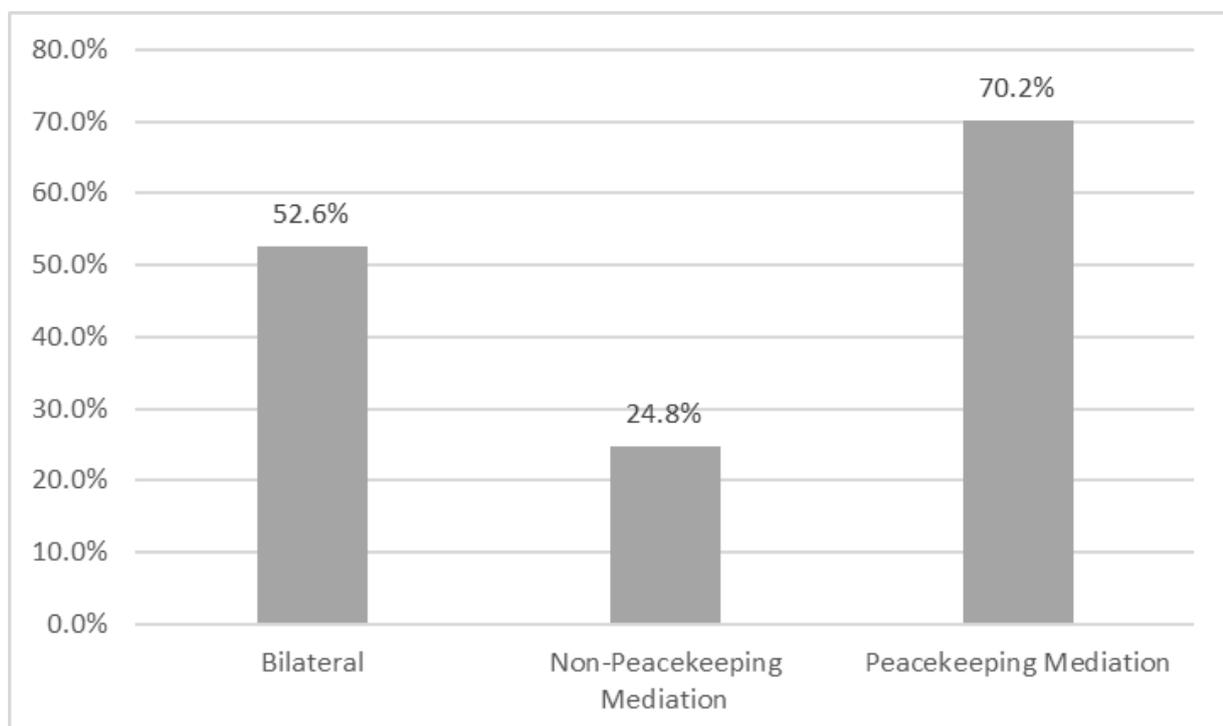
International actors e.g., states or other international groups: External actors in most cases are either unilateral or multilateral actors. The unilateral actors are more often than not the external states that are already part of the conflict, and this is exactly what makes their presence problematic. Both Russia and Iran played key roles in many of the major local agreements in Syria. The United States of America and Turkey played a major role in the Manbij agreement. In some cases, neutral countries attempt to play a more constructive role such as the role Norway tried to play in the al-Waer agreement

of Homs. Their involvement makes the talks and the agreement geared more towards the interests of these states rather than local interests. In some cases, such as the Iranian role in Homs, the interest of the external state is to prolong the conflict and therefore they are likely to play a spoiler role in the talks. Other external states, like Russia, appeared to have an interest in concluding the conflict even if that means using violence to prompt talks and push for concessions. As a result, the major agreements that Russia played a role in, such as Eastern Ghouta and al-Waer in Homs, involved a sharp increase in the level of violence shortly before an agreement was concluded and they involved deportation of armed groups as well as civilians who felt unsafe to stay in the local area after the agreement.

Multilateral actors on the other hand are better positioned to play a more neutral and constructive role. This includes the UN–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur, or the role of the UN in Galkaio, as well as international NGOs. Allard Duursma draws on the Uppsala Conflict Dataset and the African Peace Processes (APP) dataset to conduct a systematic review of the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping missions in supporting a subset of local agreement-making processes, namely local conflicts fought between non-state actors, although many are linked to state or external actors and issues. He finds that, "in locations of peacekeeping operations, the involvement of peacekeeping staff in negotiations makes these negotiations more likely to end in the conclusion of an agreement and more likely to last."²⁵ This is shown in the table below.

25 Allard Duursma, "Making disorder more manageable: The short-term effectiveness of local mediation in Darfur," *Journal of peace research* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319898241>.

Figure 1: Negotiations in Locations of Peacekeeping Operations in Africa and the Conclusion of Agreements, 1989-2018



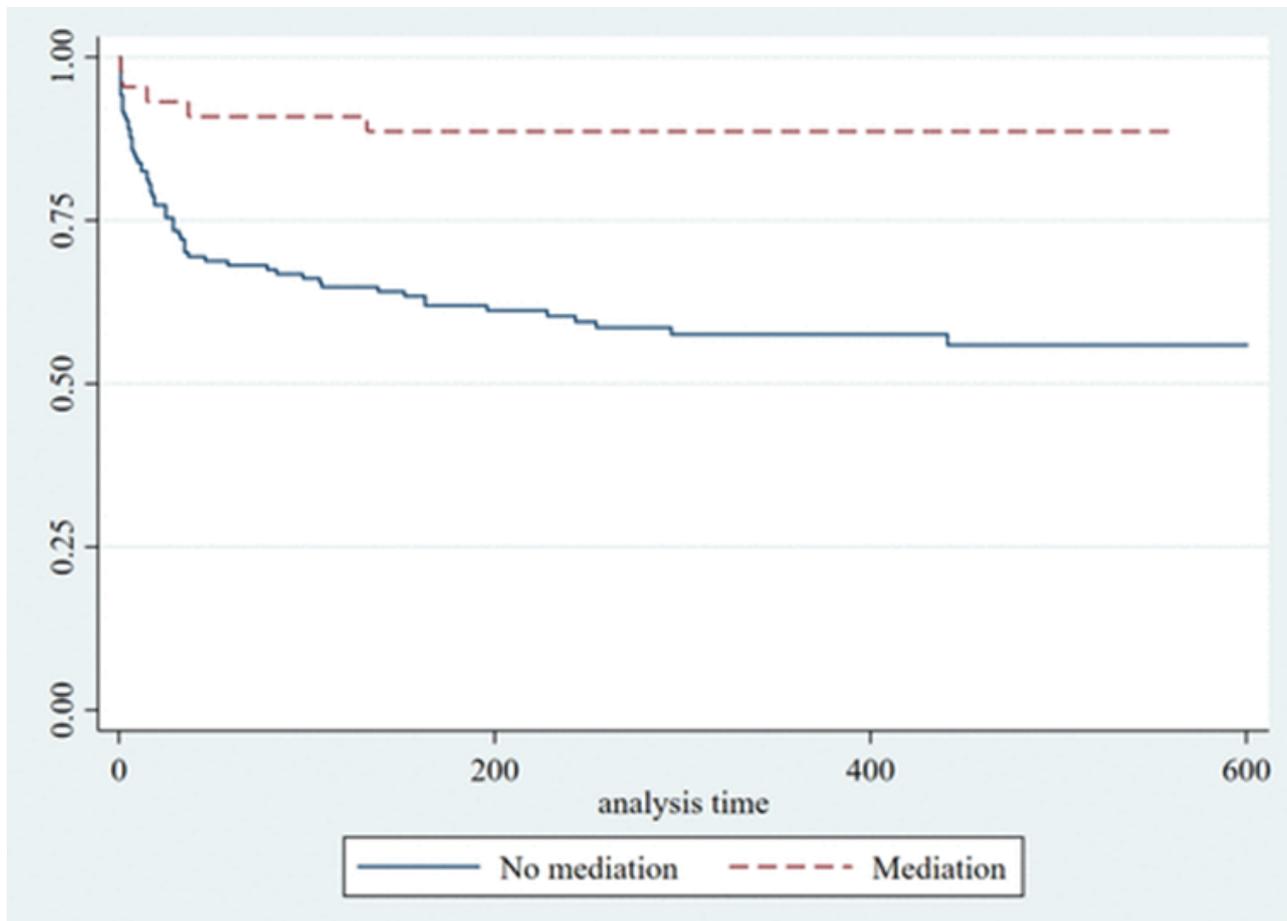
He suggests that this is because peacekeeping missions have a comparative advantage over other third-party actors – domestic and international – because of their ability to leverage their military and logistics capabilities, political capital, and resources on the ground. This enables them to support and facilitate negotiations processes by arranging logistics, providing security, and mitigating government bias where national actors instrumentalise local conflicts.²⁶

Similarly, an analysis of the role of peace mediation in local conflicts in Darfur shows that the involvement of international peacekeepers in mediation makes recurrence of armed conflict less likely as shown in the figure below.²⁷ The vertical axis shows the probability of a lull in fighting, that is to say non-recurrence. The horizontal axis refers to the number of days since the agreement.

²⁶ Allard Duursma, "Non-State Conflicts, Peacekeeping, and the Conclusion of Local Agreements," *Peacebuilding*, forthcoming (2021).

²⁷ Allard Duursma, 2020, fn 24 above.

Figure 2: The impact of international mediation efforts on the reoccurrence of armed clashes



In Syria, the UN role in local agreements was hindered by two main obstacles. First, the UN did not have the mandate and the tools to play a role in local peace-making and peacekeeping. Second, the Syrian regime opposed such a role for the UN. In the cases where they were able to play a role, their presence was constructive and made a positive difference to the output. For example, when the UN resident coordinator was requested by the opposition to attend a meeting in Homs in May 2014 to finalise the details of the Homs agreement, he was able to change the article on aid provision which was part of the agreement. Initially the agreement stipulated that humanitarian aid should be delivered to the loyalist towns of Nubul and Zahra, which were besieged by the opposition in Idlib. But he insisted that aid should also be provided to the seven other villages under opposition control, which were equally in need of humanitarian aid. His intervention not only improved the inclusivity and fairness of aid distribution but also prevented a potential conflict between the villages had they delivered aid exclusively to Nubul and Zahra.

On the other hand, the paper on the Galkaio local agreement in Somalia demonstrates the important role the UN Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) played at multiple levels in order to secure an agreement at the local level. The UN understood it needed to reach a public agreement at the inter-state level between the Presidents of Puntland and Galmudug in order to create the space for local efforts to be supported. Moreover, managing the different external actors helped increase coherence and support to a locally-owned process. A key concern in international engagement in peace-making is the involvement of multiple actors that might work at cross-purposes and confuse the mediation space. From the start, the SRSG's office helped to manage a fragmented aid landscape and stressed its

facilitatory role, enabling local actors to feel empowered, rather than part of an external project.

With regards to external actors, including INGOs, involved in supporting local peace processes, granular knowledge of the local and national landscape is critical. In Somalia, Interpeace's long-term presence in the country, combined with their efforts to build a knowledge base of local agreements in the country several years before their involvement in Galkaio, positively impacted the process and implementation of the agreement.

Ghassan Salame the head of the UN mission to Libya, was able to bring the parties together to reach a ceasefire for Tripoli in September 2018. His efforts succeeded in agreeing a ceasefire which he reported in the UN SC briefing: "On 4 September, the Mission brokered a ceasefire between the major parties to the conflict. This has effectively halted the fighting and started the restoration of some order to the city. The Mission is now working to protect this fragile peace and enable it to take root. As a first step, we are offering technical assistance and good offices in support of the ceasefire."²⁸

The type of external engagement tends to reflect the type of external involvement in the conflict. In our African research sites, multilateral actors play a much more prominent role. In Syria, external actors are mainly Russia, the United States, Turkey, Iran, and the Gulf states of Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Their increasing involvement of external actors in local agreements has reflected their expanded role in the conflict. The first wave of local agreements in 2012 involved mainly local-to-local actors. Most were civic in nature, initiated by local actors themselves and concerned with achieving local civic peace. A good example is the May 2012 Mountain and

28 See SRSG Ghassan Salame briefing to the Security Council 5 September 2018 available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/libya/srsg-ghassan-salame-briefing-security-council-5-september-2018>.

the Plains reconciliation agreement in the south of Syria, which restored peace between Deraa and Sweida governates after a series of violent incidents. As regional powers became more directly involved in the conflict, e.g., by financing violence, their role in shaping these agreements increased, as did the competition between external actors. For example, competing agreements were being negotiated in 2014 in the old city of Homs, and the terms of the final agreement in Homs reflected the interests of the competing regional powers involved, rather than Syrian actors.

Where there is no or little multilateral presence, as in Syria, we often find that the same actor plays different roles that would not be considered appropriate in a traditional mediation model. For example, Russia is a major actor in the Syrian conflict. Yet, since 2016, Russia began to play multiple roles in negotiating local agreements in Syria, as in the Eastern Ghouta agreement and Deraa agreement in 2018. In Eastern Ghouta, Russian forces and Russian-backed forces were part of the military campaign against the area. At the same time, the envoy of the Russian Minister of Defence was leading negotiations to reach an agreement for the area and mediating the relationship with the Syrian government, including obtaining the protection mechanisms requested by the opposition (e.g., amnesty and guarantees to defer conscription for six months). After the agreement, the Russian military police then played the role of security provider in Eastern Ghouta, patrolling the area and opening an office to receive complaints about violations to the agreement by government forces. While the UN also played various roles in some local agreements in Syria, it was very weak by comparison.

In these circumstances, there is a clear missing actor in most local agreement: the role of the independent mediator. Many of the prominent local actors who could play a role are either partisan or have a conflict of interest because of their local connections. The same applies for unilateral external mediators as explained above.

A tentative conclusion is that whether local agreements are driven by a peace logic, based on the belief that dialogue and talks are the best way to end the conflict, or by a war logic, in which the talks are seen merely as either a military tactic or platform to organise the surrender of the opposite side, depends on the actors involved. By and large, the greater the involvement of multilateral actors and civilians, the more likely talks are to be guided by a peace logic. Armed actors in general try to exclude civic actors from the process of the talks and merely use them as implementers of some aspects of the agreements such as organising the delivery of aid. When included in the talks, it is civic actors who bring in the elements of the agreements that are more relevant to people's lives such as aid, restoration of services, freedom of movement, and releasing detainees. Likewise, multilateral actors can act as independent mediators and press for the inclusion of civilians, thereby making a peace logic more likely. Nevertheless, both these logics can be observed within each side of the talks including among armed actors.

5 Process

Policymakers and academics tend to evaluate the success of national-level peace-making and mediation processes by whether an agreement is reached. However, local agreements must be understood as ongoing complex processes, often punctuated by differing levels of violence at various stages, agreements on specific issues, and relationship-building activities, rather than a decisive event.

The agreements and processes examined in our research demonstrate that local agreements are often time-bound (although their impact may last even if they don't) and may lead to improvements for civilians in a specific locale (e.g., reduction in violence, improvements in humanitarian access, etc.) while also shifting conflict dynamics in unforeseen ways in other areas or at the national level. This makes it important to consider both the question of who benefits and the timeframe: the short and long-term impacts these agreements may have not only on the local area but also on larger conflict dynamics and the nature of political authority. In cases where civic local actors are involved more actively, local buy-in can spur a reduction in violence during the talks, support the conclusion of an agreement, and ensure that the benefits are more widely enjoyed by the community. Moreover, reaching an agreement often marks the beginning of a longer process of continuous implementation and guarantees by local, national, and/or international structures. In the case of Galkaio, for example, the agreement began a process where social relations continue to be repaired through further inter-clan agreements forged afterwards.

In many of the cases we studied, we can observe the different ways in which process matters both in practice and as an analytical approach. A process perspective in the case of Homs, Syria, for example, provides preliminary insights into the relationship between violence and local negotiations. Turkmani traces, over a 13-month period, how violence would

significantly decline during moments of talking, intensify again when negotiations stalled and/or the strategic calculations of armed actors shift, and decline again once talks resumed. In the periods of reduced violence, public services would often resume and improve living conditions for civilians. Measuring the success of a single agreement reached in this case would limit understanding of how these talks unfold, how they impact civilians, and how they relate to the broader dynamics and political fault lines that exist across the larger conflict complex. 'Instead,' she states, 'an agreement is part of a long process of talks that is interlinked to other levels and to other localities, during which the terms of an intermittently negotiated agreements are continuously shaped not only by talks but also importantly, by the exercise of violence against civilians.'²⁹

Moreover, successful processes can have a snowball effect. In Sudan, before the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the processes leading to the Wunlit local agreement were hailed as a model that was replicated in different parts of the country.

The rich history of local agreement-making in Somalia illustrates the importance of a process-oriented incremental mediation approach to transform relationships and enable collective local ownership of the process and eventual agreement. In the case of Galkaio, what emerged as critical was the reconstitution of relations across the divided border as well as the strengthening of joint mechanisms in security provision and ceasefire monitoring in order to mitigate conflict escalation and establish a basis for progressive stability. This stands in contrast to previous agreements in Galkaio that functioned more like truces or ceasefires. The recent Galkaio agreement, which was more inclusive in process and content, spurred "a process where social relations across the border could be repaired, evidenced by further inter-clan agreements forged in 2020."³⁰

²⁹ R Turkmani, 'Local Agreements as a Process: The Example of Local Talks in Homs in Syria', *Journal of Peacebuilding*, Forthcoming (2021).

³⁰ Majid and Theros, "Bridging the Border in Galkaio, Somalia," *Peacebuilding*, Forthcoming (2021).

6 Data Collection: Researching local agreements

Local agreements remain difficult to map and identify even if, as Pospisil notes, 'the number of publicly available, written local peace agreements has sharply risen' because they are becoming more formalised and accessible.³¹ While the presence of international actors and organisations has facilitated their visibility, most local agreement-making processes are low-profile and discreet in comparison to top-level agreements, making it difficult to capture the majority of these types of processes and agreements. Some agreements are not written down, and often when they are, they are in local languages or handwritten on a piece of paper, unlike top-level agreements which are almost always available in English. Most hardly make it to the media, and if they do, they are mainly reported in local media in the local language.

Mediators and negotiating actors also deliberately try to keep the talks leading to agreements secretive. Actors involved in talks may even deliberately promote a twisted public narrative of the talks that suits their interests and serves to mobilise public support. Therefore, knowing what exactly was agreed, how it was agreed, who agreed it, and understanding the context and the process that led up to the agreement requires vigorous investigative research based on micro data.

Research on the long process of local agreements in the city of Homs provides an example of the different insights micro data could bring to the analysis. When following the daily events, both violent and nonviolent,

local agreements emerged as a long process rather than an event measured by the signing date of the agreement. In this mixed methods investigation, media sources could provide only limited insight given media bias towards coverage of violent events over peaceful ones. Reliance on media may provide a good starting point on where agreements are being forged, but in-depth analysis of the context and process would be needed to understand and effectively evaluate their impact in the local area and on broader conflict dynamics. For example, Turkmani shows how the agreement forged in Homs on 4 December 2015, which is captured in PA-X local, was built on a previous agreement that concluded a ceasefire two months before but with minor modification. Crowd-based data methods also enabled more granular data for understanding processes, especially if it allows for local researchers to input qualitative data and their own perceptions on how the process unfolded rather than tick pre-defined answers. Through them, the local could be seen through local eyes, and not observed from the outside through what makes its way to the media.³² The example also demonstrates the imperative of collecting both peaceful events, such as negotiations meetings, as well as violent events in order to understand how the success or failure of local talks affects the level of violence and also how violence itself is used to influence the talks.³³ Mapping both peaceful and violent events is also critical for understanding how conflict and peace-making dynamics relate to each other, as opposed to mapping only violent events, a practice followed by most conflict databases.³⁴

31 Pospisil, 'Dissolving Conflict. Local Peace Agreements and Armed Conflict Transition,' *Journal of Peacebuilding*, Forthcoming 2021.

32 R Turkmani, op.cit.

33 R Turkmani, 'Local Agreements as a Process: The Example of Local Talks in Homs in Syria', *Journal of Peacebuilding*, Forthcoming 2021.

34 Turkmani, *ibid.*

7 Conclusion

Local agreements are a pervasive feature of contemporary conflicts. In the research undertaken within the CRP, we have sought to understand the complexity of these agreements and ask if they are a merely of way of coping with intractable conflicts or whether they offer a mechanism for reversing or transforming the social condition that constitutes conflict. Below we summarise our main findings.

Firstly, we find that whether or not a local agreement contributes to peace depends to a considerable degree on the actors involved in the negotiation process. Where civilians and multilateral actors such as the UN are involved in the negotiation process, agreements tend to be closer to a peace logic. By contrast, where the dominant actors are armed groups or representatives of external states supporting one or other warring party, the agreements are more likely to follow a war logic.

The implication of this finding is that it is **very important to include support for local agreements in the UN mandate in a particular conflict or in the mandate of other multilateral actors**. Among the tasks that multilateral actors can perform are:

- Multilateral actors can assist with **logistics and security**.
- Multilateral actors can act as **mediators** and also **protect local mediators** who are often threatened or left unprotected.
- Multilateral actors can press for the **inclusion of civilians, especially women, youth, and civic actors**.

- Multilateral actors can make a big difference by acting as **monitors and observers** even if they are not directly involved as mediators, thereby contributing to transparency. Ideally, this involves a presence on the ground, but international actors can provide the technology for remote monitoring.

Secondly, we find that local agreements tend to be about the **concrete situation** on the ground – ceasefires, lifting sieges, provision of services, managing checkpoints, redeployment or demobilisation of armed groups, and so on – rather than political or constitutional issues. Far too often, the external interest in local agreements is driven by the hierarchical perspective on conflict and the desire to ensure that these agreements can either support or at least not undermine a national-level process. Indeed, the case of Galkaio offers a successful example of how a local agreement can support multi-layered peace-making.³⁵ Yet, our other case studies also demonstrate how local agreements, even if they are not linked to a national-level process, not only could provide immediate benefit to communities but can also undermine the logics of violence more broadly.

Thirdly, local agreements cannot be treated in isolation. What happens in one area affects other areas. What happens at one level affects other levels (local, national, regional). Local agreements are part of a broader ecology of negotiation. While a local agreement improved the security and living conditions of the al Ghouta area, it displaced the conflict to other areas and led to further deterioration in areas such as Afreen and Idlib. These talks included local and national actors with the direct involvement of Russia in reaching an agreement and with its outcome also influenced by Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

³⁵ Majid and Theros, "Bridging the Border in Galkaio, Somalia," *Journal of Peacebuilding*, Forthcoming (2021).

The implication of these two findings is the need **to foreground the concrete situation on the ground at both national and local levels.**

Local agreements need, if possible, to be guaranteed at the national level and related to other areas, even if they have utility as an isolated agreement. A focus on the concrete situation at the national level can improve the situation for ordinary people and by so doing may also contribute to a shift in the dynamics of the political/constitutional discussions.

Fourthly, we find that **process** is important and not just agreements. The agreement to talk on its own could be seen as an agreement even if no final written agreement is reached. Periods during which talks take place tend to be associated with lower levels of violence. The implication is that multilateral actors should not just focus on reaching agreements but aim to **contribute to a long-term reconciliation process.**

Lastly, a granular understanding at local levels over time is a necessary condition for effective involvement in the negotiation or mediation process. Conflict research must be both bottom-up and top-down. There is a need **to establish databases of local processes and not just agreements**, based on local knowledge and not just media reporting. There is also a need for conflict databases to expand mapping of conflicts beyond violent events. Our pilot conflict events database of the process in Homs covered both peace and violent events over a 13-month period and demonstrated how much can be achieved through the combination of digital technology, crowd seeding, and the expansion of the definition of conflict related events.

Our overall conclusion is that local talks and community level mediation can contribute to a peace logic. This is more likely if they involve local civilians, and regional or international multilateral neutral actors, are related to the national, regional, and international level, and are based on a detailed knowledge of context. An effort to expand this type of process on a large scale may be the best opportunity for addressing the social condition that characterises contemporary intractable conflicts.

Publications produced by the Conflict Research Programme on Local Agreements and Community Mediation

Martin Ochaya Lino, Local peace agreement in Abyei: achievements, challenges and opportunities, Conflict Research Programme, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK (2020).

Jessica Watkins and Mustafa Hasan, "Post-ISIL Reconciliation in Iraq and the Local Anatomy of National Grievances: the Case of Yathrib," Journal of Peacebuilding, Submitted (2021).

Claude Iguma Wakenge, Local agreements forging peace? The case of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Conflict Research Programme, London School of Economics and Political Science, unpublished 2020.

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Jan Pospisil
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Allard Duursma
- **Local Agreements as a Process: The example of local talks in Homs in Syria**
Rim Turkmani
- **Galkaio, Somalia: Bridging the Border**
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Find out more about the Conflict Research Programme

Connaught House
The London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE

Contact:
Amy Crinnion, Programme Manager

Tel: +44 (0)20 7849 4631
Email: Ideas.Crp@lse.ac.uk

lse.ac.uk/conflict

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