Assessing the State of Peace Diplomacy: Towards Strategic Adaptation

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Introduction

This chapter will assess the current state of peace diplomacy and explore strategic avenues for its adaptation.[1] It conducts the assessment under the term "peace diplomacy" – and not "peace mediation" – to refocus the activities undertaken by the sector within the range of conflict management, transformation and resolution approaches and procedures.[2] This framing is important in a context in which peace mediation has become a label for activities that, in many instances, have little to do with the distinct activity of mediation, as defined further below. Using peace diplomacy as the overarching frame for the sector's activities will help to rehabilitate mediation as a distinct approach to ending conflict and building peace and will contribute to the reinvention of diplomacy.[3] A focus on peace diplomacy rather than mediation might also help frame a broader arc of support for conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts under which states, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community actors could reinforce their complementary purpose and capacities.

The chapter draws together the author's first year as the Nagulendran Chair in Peace

[1] Teresa Whitfield, ed., *Still Time to Talk: Adaptation and Innovation in Peace Mediation*, Accord, No. 30 (London, Conciliation Resources, February 2024).

[2] This range of approaches include conflict avoidance and informal dialogue, negotiation, mediation, administrative decisions, arbitration and judicial or legislative decisions as well as coercive actions. See Christopher W. Moore, *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict*, 4th ed. (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2014), pp. 5–15. In this article, the term "conflict resolution" will be used as a shorthand for the range of non-coercive approaches and procedures for managing, transforming and resolving conflicts.

[3] Marie-Laure Salles and Achim Wennmann, "Diplomacy in international Geneva: beyond business as usual", *Global Challenges*, No. 17 (May 2025).

Mediation and offers a preliminary stock-taking of ongoing research.[4] It first describes the contours of peace diplomacy, followed by an assessment of current pressures on the sector and a review of sector funding. It then reflects on the adaptability of the sector and concludes with a proposal to move from a patchwork of institutions that define it towards the formation of a global peace diplomacy movement. Overall, the chapter focuses on third-party, non-coercive means of conflict resolution in which the conflict parties control decisions about conflict resolution outcomes. It does not address power- or violence-based approaches to conflict management and resolution among bigger states, corporations or movements, which merit a separate research effort.

The Peace Diplomacy Sector

The peace diplomacy sector differs from the security sector in the instruments, approaches and frameworks it employs to achieve peace and security for a given referent, ranging from individuals and communities to states and entire systems. Peace diplomacy builds on the notions of connectedness, proximity and trust – between individuals or states, different segments of society and in deeply divided contexts. It stands in contrast to the emphasis on the politics of fear that underpin securitized approaches, which build on the construction of separation, distance and the friend-enemy distinction.[5] Peace diplomacy can build a relational form of security through engagement, dialogue and compromise; a security approach aims for domination and control.

While the foundations of the sectors are different, it is essential to remain pragmatic and not fall into the trap of polarization between the security and peace diplomacy sectors. Both sectors intersect on issues of analysis and skill sets, and there can even be shared goals and objectives in constructing more stable and predictable relationships. Backchannels to diffuse misperceptions or manage crises, for instance, can be maintained by both security and peace diplomacy actors. In pursuing peace and stability, a sober strategic analysis should stress the right balance between security measures and peace diplomacy; yet at present, there appears to be an overemphasis on securitization.[6]

A global ecosystem

The current form of the peace diplomacy sector is best described as a global ecosystem comprising a community of organizations with a shared interest in resolving conflict and promoting trusted relationships. Different communities of organizations operate with varying missions, ranging from deal-oriented crisis management or humanitarian diplomacy

[4] The author would like to thank Adrian Bergmann, Sabrina Büchler, Yousuf Al Bulushi, Francesca Caruso, Seán Deely, Solomon Dersso, Ghassan El Kahlout, Tormod Endresen, Luca Fratini, Sidonia Gabriel, Rafael Gude, David Harland, Sara Hellmüller, Julian Hottinger, Itonde Kakoma, David Lanz, Joanne Liu, Elisabeth Lothe, Humaid Al Maani, Katia Papagianni, Lukas Probst-Lopez, Peter Prove, Georg Stein, Johan Vibe and Oliver Wils. Key conferences to study the peace diplomacy sector included the 2024 Berlin Moot, the 2024 ETH Zurich Biennial Policy Forum on Peace Mediation, the 2024 conference of the EU's Community of Practice on Peace Mediation, the 2024 Qatar Mediation Forum and the 2025 Basel Peace Forum. Particular thanks go to the participants of a retreat organized under the chair in Geneva on 29 August 2024, as well as to Emilian Berutti for assistance on the construction of the Peace Sector Database.

[5] Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (Los Angeles, SAGE, 2015); Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, expanded edition (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[6] See Mark Galeotti, *The Weaponisation of Everything: The Field Guide to the New Way of War* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2022).

to facilitation-based mediation to the pursuit of a more pragmatic or normative brand of peacemaking or peacebuilding. There are also distinctions between organizations working at different levels (from local to global) or in a specific country or region.

In operational terms, the peace diplomacy ecosystem represents a global network of access to the people, places and spaces necessary to prevent, de-escalate or resolve violent conflict, manage crises and address collective challenges. Different institutions play different roles based on unique analyses, skills and access opportunities. The practice of constructing "political space for exchange" or maintaining relationships with difficult actors for decades is a professional competency of the sector – not an art. For example, the mediation space approach is critical in contexts where deep-seated worldview differences hinder traditional negotiation processes.[7]

In recent years, much of the sector's work has been grouped under the term "peace mediation", which has become a broad umbrella for wide-ranging activities, many of which are only loosely related to mediation. This is why this chapter opted to focus its analysis on the peace diplomacy sector of which mediation is a distinct conflict resolution process, namely one:

> … in which a mutually acceptable third party, who has no authority to make binding decisions for disputants, intervenes in a conflict or dispute to assist involved parties to improve their relationships, enhance communications, and use effective problem-solving and negotiation procedures to reach voluntary and mutually acceptable understandings or agreements on contested issues.[8]

Hence, we can speak about the application of mediation in peace processes, as distinct from negotiation or arbitration. This framing of the sector as peace diplomacy aims to restore mediation as a distinct instrument in the toolbox of peaceful dispute resolution, alongside negotiation, enquiry, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement and resort to regional agencies or arrangements, as noted in Article 33 of the UN Charter. [9]

Professionalization

Peace diplomacy has benefited from three decades of investment in professionalization, especially in the peace mediation community. A plethora of training courses has set professional standards and developed deep technical competency.[10] These efforts also represent investment in the most critical asset of the sector: its human resources. If access, analysis and trust are the defining features of this sector, they are usually held by individuals and not institutions. This is why investing in and retaining uniquely skilled individuals is so important for the sector.

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[7] Jean-Nicolas Bitter and others, *Mediation Space: Addressing Obstacles Stemming from Worldview Differences to Regain Negotiation Flexibility* (Zurich, Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, 2022).

[8] Moore, *The Mediation Process*, p. 8.

[9] Article 33 of the UN Charter stipulates that any dispute that is likely to threaten the maintenance of international peace and security must first be addressed through negotiation, mediation or other peaceful means, and that the Security Council may call on the parties to use such means to settle their dispute.

[10] David Lanz and others, *Understanding Mediation Support Structures* (Basel, swisspeace, 2017).

From a human resource management perspective, the sector is relatively healthy, primarily because it continues to attract a steady stream of young talent. However, the absence of clear career progression plans has created a structural challenge: senior leaders remain in their positions with limited opportunities for advancement, while the next generation is eager for promotion. At the same time, since peace diplomacy remains heavily influenced by seniority, early-career entrants bring fresh energy and innovative approaches – particularly in applying AI in work processes – but often face barriers. Staff burnout and duty of care are issues the sector is only beginning to address more systematically.[11] The return of power politics has also challenged the mindset of professionals dedicated to a normative brand of peacemaking or peacebuilding.

Institutions

The current peace diplomacy ecosystem is marked by significant diversity of institutions, including international and regional organizations, governmental and non-governmental actors, movements and local organizations. The 27 members of the Mediation Support Network provide some indication of the number of NGOs engaged in the field,[12] but many local and community-based organizations largely go unnoticed in assessments of the sector's strengths. This applies especially to urban peace and violence reduction initiatives, which constitute a particularly dynamic and innovative peacemaking space.[13]

On the governmental side, countries like Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Sweden, Türkiye, the United Kingdom and the Vatican have played important roles. Some of these countries have long histories in peace diplomacy (e.g. Oman in discreet facilitation, Norway in contact diplomacy and Switzerland in good offices).[14] While Gulf countries and Türkiye currently conduct highly visible efforts on Ukraine, Gaza, Iran and Yemen, European countries, the European Union and the UN still have an advantage with respect to technical peace support capacities. This results from investment in professionalization, as noted above, and gives European actors a comparative advantage in peace support activities. Switzerland has a particular comparative advantage since Geneva is a dedicated global hub for peace support.

It is important to emphasize that altruism is not necessarily a sufficient motivation for states to engage in peace diplomacy, which ultimately remains one of multiple foreign policy instruments of governments.[15] In the case of Norway, a recent white paper notes that

[11] I. B. Seu, *States of Mind in Conflict: Enhancing a Psychological Understanding of Peace Mediation*, Final Report (London, Birkbeck, University of London, 2022).

[12] Media Support Network, "Member organisations". Available at https://mediationsupportnetwork.net/member-organizations (accessed on 30 November 2025).

[13] See for instance the special issue of *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*, vol. 2, No. 2 (2020), titled *Illicit Economies and Urban Peace; Achim Wennmann and Oliver Jütersonke, eds., Urban Safety and Peacebuilding: New Perspectives on Sustaining Peace in the City* (London, Routledge, 2018).

[14] James Worrall, "'Switzerland of Arabia': Omani foreign policy and mediation efforts in the Middle East", *The International Spectator*, vol. 56, No. 4 (2021), pp. 134–50; James Larry Taulbee, Ann Kelleher and Peter C. Grosvenor, *Norway's Peace Policy: Soft Power in a Turbulent World* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Markus Heiniger, *30 Jahre Friedensengagement im EDA 1990–2020* (Bern, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

[15] Robert U. Nagel and Govinda Clayton, "Mediation and foreign policy", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 29 March 2017. Available at https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.447 (accessed on 30 November 2025).

"diplomacy for peace and conflict resolution builds valuable political capital and expertise. The work provides links to key countries and actors, and this is important in shaping Norwegian foreign policy and the promotion of national interests". The white paper also emphasizes that for Norway the upside of contact diplomacy can outweigh the disadvantages of isolating an armed actor: "One loses both situational awareness and opportunities to influence when there is no contact, and there is a risk that isolation contributes to miscalculations and strengthens repressive elements internally".[16]

When it comes to leadership in peace diplomacy, we see a clear shift from the United Nations to government- or NGO-led processes. Currently, the UN has been relatively marginalized from peace diplomacy, for numerous reasons: key member states no longer confer the authority on the UN to play a more active role; the Security Council is blocked by great power tensions and there is no consensus on peace mandates; in some places the UN is perceived as biased, which undermines its reputation as an honest broker; and some regions and countries prefer approaches by regional organizations such as the African Union or Association of Southeast Asian Nations. In May 2025, at a signing ceremony attended by 60 countries and 20 international organizations, including the UN, China formalized the creation of a new International Organization for Mediation. Headquartered in Hong Kong, the new multilateral body aims to establish itself as an intergovernmental mediation council for international disputes.

Nevertheless, the UN remains indispensable. It is the only institution where member states can come together to apply peer pressure to powerful states. They can mobilize the web of treaties and conventions, the diplomatic competency of UN staffers and the UN's convening infrastructure to help deal with some of the most formidable challenges. The UN remains, therefore, the best hope for small states seeking help to restrain more powerful states. More specifically, the Mediation Support Unit of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) has contributed to the sector's professionalization and to pooling expertise relevant for peace processes. However, it is also important to recognize that the overall role of the UN in peace diplomacy is constrained because the normative framework it upholds can limit the scope for pragmatism.

Foundations and trajectory of institutionalization

Recent peace diplomacy builds on the three decades of investment in competencies, knowledge and institutions, described above. However, there are also deeper roots, starting with the entire history of diplomacy that builds on the practice of codifying inter-state relations through treaties, and the institutional capacity of foreign ministries to maintain them.[17] There are, of course, also the deeper foundations in political philosophy associated with Immanuel Kant's perpetual peace.[18] Peace activism in Europe and the United States in the mid-nineteenth century led to the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions on the Pacific Settlement of Dispute, the Covenant of the League of Nations and the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, laying the groundwork for the 1945 Charter of the United Nations, which forms the

[16] Norway, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Norway's Efforts on Peace and Conflict Resolution in a Troubled World*, white paper (Oslo, 2025), pp. 8, 30.

[17] Paul Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[18] Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual peace: a philosophical sketch", in *Kant: Political Writings*, Hans S. Reiss, ed. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 93–130.

foundation of today's international peace and security framework.[19] The sector also draws on many different kinds of local approaches rooted in, for example, Ubuntu philosophy in Africa or Confucianism in Asia that emphasize peaceful coexistence and harmonious relationships through dialogue, consensus building and mediation.[20] Ibadism in Oman has played an important role in the country's water management systems and in its network-based foreign policy, in which facilitation and mediation play a central role.[21] Considered together, peace diplomacy can rest on solid institutional, legal and cultural foundations.

A more recent institutional presence in the sector has grown around specific personalities. The role of the UN in conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding was shaped by Kofi Annan. Jimmy Carter and Martti Ahtisaari have also left their mark on the sector, including through two institutions, the Carter Centre and CMI, the Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation. In the 2000s, several other NGOs stepped into the political space for private mediation that opened with the US military interventions following 9/11.[22]

Given the number of institutions involved in peace diplomacy, overcrowding has become an operational problem. In the author's own experience, at least three dozen international institutions, NGOs or think tanks were involved in the economic aspects of Yemen's peace process, leading to significant coordination challenges. Overcrowding has also exacerbated the challenge of localizing peace diplomacy because local actors have few operational elasticities to engage with so many international actors.

Outcomes

The sector produced 582 agreements between 2015 and 2024. Most are limited and local, while large-scale or inter-state agreements are rare, as illustrated by the following breakdown from the PA-X Peace Agreements Database (Version 9) of the University of Edinburgh's Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep): 18 inter-state, 52 internationalized intra-state, 272 intra-state and 240 local agreements. In 2024, there were 43 agreements, mostly intra-state armed (31, including 22 in Colombia), five internationalized intra-state and seven local.[23]

Nonetheless, assessing the sector solely by the number of agreements underestimates its impact, as it produces numerous intangible outcomes essential to peace diplomacy, such as the transformation of armed actors, peace support roles or crisis management. Consider, for instance, the role of Conciliation Resources in transforming the Ogaden National Liberation

[19] Oona Hathaway and Scott Shapiro, *The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2017).

[20] Tim Murithi, "Practical peacemaking wisdom from Africa: reflections on Ubuntu", *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 1, No. 4 (2006), pp. 25–34; D. A. Bell and Hahm Chaibong, eds., *Confucianism for the Modern World* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[21] Worrall, "'Switzerland of Arabia'".

[22] Pierre Hazan, *Negotiating with the Devil: Inside the World of Armed Conflict Mediation* (London, Hurst, 2024), pp. 41–51.

[23] PA-X is a dataset on peace agreements, containing 2,144 agreements across more than 150 peace processes from 1990 to 2024. It defines peace agreements as formal, publicly available documents produced with conflict protagonists to address and end conflicts, and categorizes them into inter-state, internationalized intra-state, intra-state armed, and local conflicts. Available at https://www.peaceagreements.org/agreements/search (accessed on 15 August 2025).

Front from an armed insurgent group into a legitimate political actor.[24] Another example is the vital role played by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in accompanying Syria's transition in late 2024 based on its long-term and principled engagement with all relevant actors.[25]

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue's 2023 annual report offers an instructive example of value for money, illustrating what an annual budget of $50 million can deliver:

- Six outcomes on highly localized conflict dynamics.
- Six initiatives to support broader political processes.
- Targeted contributions to defuse great power competition.
- A sector-wide forum and new regional formats.
- Programme development and innovation on cross-cutting themes.
- Secret activities that cannot be reported publicly.

A bonus is access to an exceptional asset: high-quality human resources that are both a repository of skill and knowledge and define the centre's network value.[26]

These results highlight the importance of showcasing accomplishments – through both stories and data – rather than focusing on what has not worked. What deserves greater recognition is that these achievements result from a minimal budget compared to the funds available for the security sector, an imbalance to which we shall return below.

Understanding the Pressures on the Sector

Based on the contours of the peace diplomacy sector described above, the open question is whether the sector can withstand the pressures it currently faces as a result of the shift away from liberal internationalism.[27] This section takes a deeper look at three sources of pressure on the sector coming from the strategic environment, political change and the constitution of the sector itself, before examining the issue of funding in the next part.

The first source of pressure comes from a sharp increase in the number and complexity of violent conflicts that are straining institutional capacities. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme, 2024 saw a historic high of 61 state-based armed conflicts globally.[28] As a

[24] Aden Abdi, "Pathways to peace in Ogaden: navigating symbolism in early peace talks", in *Pioneering Peace Pathways*, Accord No. 29, C. Buchanan ed. (London, Conciliation Resources, 2020).

[25] Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, *Advancing Peace in Security in an Unstable World: HD's Impact in 2024* (Geneva, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2025), p. 12.

[26] Achim Wennmann, "Peace mediation in times of radical uncertainty", inaugural lecture of the Nagulendran Chair in Peace Mediation, Geneva Graduate Institute, Geneva, 18 September 2024. Available at https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/sites/internet/files/2024-10/Nagulendran-Chair---Opening-Lecture.pdf (accessed on 30 November 2025).

[27] G. John Ikenberry, "The end of liberal international order?," *International Affairs*, vol. 94, No. 1 (January 2018), pp. 7–23.

[28] Uppsala University, "UCDP: sharp increase in conflicts and wars", news release, 11 June 2025. Available at https://www.uu.se/en/news/2025/2025-06-11-ucdp-sharp-increase-in-conflicts-and-wars (accessed on 30 November 2025).

result, the peace diplomacy sector is overwhelmed and can currently offer only temporary fixes rather than comprehensive peace agreements. Many foreign ministries are locked in a cycle of constant crisis diplomacy and have lost sight of the big picture. There is remarkably little political space to push for the kinds of systematic transitions out of war and violence that drove transformations in the 1990s in South Africa, Namibia, Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Ireland or the post-Second World War reconstruction of Germany, South Korea or Japan. Insider reports suggest that at least two dozen mediation or de-escalation opportunities every year are not realized due to a lack of political will, limited funding or overstretched capacities.

Another source of pressure is political in nature. In countries around the world, political currents associated with right-wing politics aim to build legitimacy by creating enemies and generating support for groups whose interests align around particular identity, business or security interests.[29] This type of politics grows from polarization and alienation, and has few interests in the moderation of diversity, co-existence or reconciliation, be it at home or abroad. The dismantling of USAID and organizations such as the United States Institute of Peace, as well as US sanctions on the International Criminal Court, offer a potent playbook for those interested in targeting the peace diplomacy sector. Unprecedented budget cuts and thousands of layoffs across the UN system could also be considered as part of a broader strategy to push the UN operationally to the edge until it becomes unworkable. These political threats to the foundations of peace diplomacy are real and have already shaken the humanitarian, global health and climate sectors.[30]

The third source of pressure comes from the constitution of the sector itself: as donor budgets shrink, many organizations – both large and small – are competing for profile, giving rise to complex competitive dynamics, including competition between governments for peace conference leadership and photo ops.[31] For some governments with an established track record of conflict resolution, like Qatar, Norway or Switzerland, peace diplomacy has become a defining feature of their foreign policy, driving a continuous effort to achieve high-level results.[32] In cities like Doha, Geneva, The Hague or Oslo, peace is part of the city branding, ideally associated with successful peace conferences or agreements. Another line of competition stems from the fact that many governments have been actors and funders at the same time. This has shaped competition for processes and successes between governments and NGOs, and competition between NGOs for government funding, and even within NGOs between different units for fundraising opportunities ("fundraise or perish"). Policy entrepreneurship and close relations with donors have become coveted assets.

Given the evolution of conflict dynamics, there has never really been a shortage of work, but always limited funding to get the work done. As a result, certain conflicts receive much

[29] Quinn Slobodian, *Hayek's Bastards: Race, Gold, IQ, and the Capitalism of the Far Right* (London, Allen Lane, 2025); Anne Applebaum, *Autocracy, Inc.: The Dictators Who Want to Run the World* (New York, Doubleday, 2024).

[30] Kasmira Jefford and Michelle Langrand, "International Geneva layoffs pile up amid painful funding cuts", Geneva Solutions, 8 July 2025. Available at https://genevasolutions.news/global-news/international-geneva-layoffs-pile-up-amid-painful-funding-cuts (accessed on 30 November 2025).

[31] See David Lanz, "Envoy envy? Competition in African mediation processes and ways to overcome it", *International Negotiation*, vol. 26, No. 3 (2021), pp. 499–526.

[32] Sansom Milton, Ghassan Elkahlout and Sana Tariq, "Qatar's evolving role in conflict mediation", *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 31, No. 1 (2023).

attention while others are neglected – even if the human toll and destruction are significant.

Financing Peace Diplomacy

This section focuses on the financing of peace diplomacy, an area that demands many nuances. One key observation must be stated at the outset: the sector does not currently face an existential financial crisis, but it should remain alert and ready to adapt.

Many traditional donors supporting peace diplomacy have cut funding. For instance, the UK has cut its peacebuilding budget for fragile states by one third, dropping from £350 million ($469 million)[33] to £233 million ($312 million). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development reports that funding for peace and conflict prevention in fragile contexts is now at its second-lowest point since 2004.[34] The strategic dilemma is that beyond governments, there are no obvious funders for peace diplomacy. Mobilization of the philanthropic sector on peace issues is moderate at best, and the peace diplomacy field does not have a private sector lobbying arm (unlike the security sector) to tell governments to invest more.

It is important to make regional distinctions when analysing funding cuts. US-based peace diplomacy NGOs face significant cuts from US government funding. For example, Search for Common Ground saw a 40-per cent decline in its committed resources for 2025.[35] In contrast, based on their annual reports from 2024, several European NGOs reported slightly higher levels of income, including the Berghof Foundation, the Clingendael Institute, CMI, Conciliation Resources, Folke Bernadotte Academy, Independent Diploma and the Institute for Integrated Transitions. The US-based Carter Center's peace portfolio and the Colombian CINEP followed a similar upward trajectory. Organizations reporting a relatively small drop in income included the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, the Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution and swisspeace (see Table 1). The sharp reduction at Interpeace from $31.8 million to $19 million appears to be an outlier, due to "the scheduled conclusion of 14 peacebuilding programme contracts during the year, together with significant changes in the government donor environment for peacebuilding".[36]

[33] Conversion rates to the US dollar based on a Google search on 21 August 2025.

[34] Susannah Birkwood, "Holding the line: how Geneva's peacebuilders are adapting as aid shrinks", Geneva Solutions, 21 July 2025. Available at https://genevasolutions.news/peace-humanitarian/holding-the-line-how-geneva-s-peacebuilders-are-adapting-as-aid-shrinks (accessed on 30 November 2025).

[35] Search for Common Ground, "Double your impact". Available at https://www.sfcg.org/double-your-impact/ (accessed on 21 August 2025).

[36] Interpeace, "Annual report 2024: financial statements". Available at https://www.interpeace.org/annual-report-2024/financial-statement/ (accessed on 21 August 2025).

Table 1: Annual budgets of selected peace diplomacy NGOs ($ million)[37]

	2023	2024	Change
Berghof Foundation	20.5	23.8	↑
Carter Centre	35.5	37.1	↑
CINEP, Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular	13.6	15.0	↑
Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue	61.9	58.6	↓
Clingendael Institute	21.2	23.4	↑
CMI, Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation	15.4	19.9	↑
Conciliation Resources	14.5	15.5	↑
Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA)	3.7	4.1	↑
Independent Diplomat	3.2	3.6	↑
Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT)	2.9	3.4	↑
Interpeace	31.8	19.0	↓
NOREF, Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution	6.7	5.6	↓
swisspeace	10.1	9.0	↓

It is more difficult to assess government funding in peace diplomacy because it is distributed across many different budget lines of foreign ministries, intelligence services and the offices of heads of state. For example, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry's Section for Peace and Reconciliation had a budget of 395 million krone in 2025 ($40 million), but additional resources are also available in specific embassies, notably Colombia.[38] The Peace and Human Rights Division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs had a budget of 256 million Swiss francs in the period 2025–2028 ($318 million), or approximately 64 million francs annually ($80 million). But these funds are dedicated to a much broader portfolio than mediation and dialogue.[39] Other investments include 269 million Swiss francs in the period 2026–2029 ($339 million) to strengthen International Geneva.[40] In the Philippines, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity has a budget of 7.1 billion Philippine pesos for 2025 ($120 million). Colombia set aside a budget of 50.4 trillion Colombian pesos ($12.5 billion) between 2022 and 2026 to implement the 2016 FARC peace agreement[41] and invested over 300 billion pesos ($75 million) between 2022 and 2025 in

[37] This table draws on the Peace Sector Dataset that is currently under construction by the Nagulendran Chair in Peace Mediation at the Geneva Graduate Institute. The dataset aims to provide a transparent source for investigating the funding of the peace diplomacy sector.

[38] Norway, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Norway's Efforts*, p. 18.

[39] Switzerland, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland, *International Cooperation Strategy 2025–28* (Bern, 2024), p. 54.

[40] The amount noted is pending approval by the Swiss parliament. See News Service Bund, "The Federal Council is investing a quarter of a billion Swiss francs to strengthen International Geneva", press release, 20 June 2025. Available at https://www.news.admin.ch/en/newnsb/q6uAkjLQmvcWXUCvIATct (accessed on 30 November 2025).

[41] Portal para la Paz, "$50,4 billones son destinados a la implementación del Acuerdo de Paz", 12 June 2023. Available at https://portalparalapaz.gov.co/2023/06/12/504-billones/ (accessed on 30 November 2025).

President Petro's Paz Total initiative.[42]

Overall, the discussion of funding raises several strategic questions: what is the ideal size for a peace diplomacy institution? What is an ideal institutional structure – flat or hierarchical, closed or network-based? And ultimately, what is the purpose of each peace diplomacy organization? To what extent do ambitions match the capacities and funding?

The verdict for 2025 is still out, but austerity measures in some countries and the prioritization of funding for the security sector persist; peace diplomacy may face a more significant problem in the years ahead. Having recently dealt with a significant reduction in funds, Itonde Kakoma, president and CEO of Interpeace, remarked:

> The traditional dependency model – where peacebuilding organizations relied heavily on a few large government donors – no longer holds. We have significantly reduced our overheads and restructured our teams – not just to save money, but to operate within our means, stay true to our purpose and remain agile … we had to transform.[43]

Towards Adaptation

Adaptation has been in the DNA of the peace diplomacy sector for at least over a century, and this is why the sector should look ahead with confidence. It has continuously innovated in the face of changing conflict dynamics, pushing for the outlawing of wars of aggression and the regulation of warfare, and inventing good offices and hybrid diplomacy.[44] It can also draw confidence from the significant outcomes it has achieved with very limited financial resources. Estimates suggest that NGO peace mediation budgets amounted to about $300 million in 2023, which "represents about 0.01% of world military expenditure of USD 2.4 trillion in 2023 … [or the construction cost of] about 10 meters of a US nuclear submarine".[45] It is worthwhile reminding critics of the peace diplomacy sector about this imbalance of funding, the many political decisions made in favour of war and violence, and the global lobby that sells war, violence and enmity as a solution. As the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft notes: "The arms industry spent $2.5 billion on lobbying over the past two decades, accompanied by $285 million in campaign contributions."[46] Peace

[42] IFM Noticias, "Gobierno Petro ha gastado más de $300 mil millones en 'Paz Total' mientras se reduce el presupuesto de la Fuerza Pública", 25 May 2025. Available at https://ifmnoticias.com/gobierno-petro-ha-gastado-mas-de-300-mil-millones-en-paz-total-mientras-se-reduce-el-presupuesto-de-la-fuerza-publica (accessed on 30 November 2025).

[43] Birkwood, "Holding the line".

[44] David Lanz and Philipp Lustenberger, "The evolution of innovation in international mediation", in *Still Time to Talk*, Teresa Whitfield, ed. (London, Conciliation Resources, 2024), pp. 12–15; Pierre Hazan, *Negotiating with the Devil: Inside the World of Armed Conflict Mediation* (London, Hurst, 2024), pp. 41–51.

[45] Wennmann, "Peace mediation".

[46] William D Hartung, "Promoting stability or fueling conflict? The impact of U.S. arms sales on national and global security", Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, 11 January 2024. Available at https://quincyinst.org/research/promoting-stability-or-fueling-conflict-the-impact-of-u-s-arms-sales-on-national-and-global-security/#recommendations (accessed on 30 November 2025).

diplomacy actors could be more direct in highlighting to governments that the exclusive reliance on security instruments for peace, stability and security is ill-suited to an era of polycrisis in which threats are diffuse and emerge in many different forms – from pandemics or heatwaves to power politics that make use of new weaponry or technology.[47]

The sector can also draw confidence from its existing strategic assets. The first set of assets consists of relationships and access to political spaces that are crucial for conflict resolution and crisis management. Actors in Geneva's peace, humanitarian and private sectors, for instance, have at least a second-degree relationship to any armed actor anywhere in the world. Another asset is the competency to moderate relations between a global order based on state sovereignty and "contexts of limited statehood".[48] Trusted relationships and political access in these contexts are usually maintained by specific individuals, often developed over decades of work within a particular region or with a specific group. As a result, such individuals frequently have a unique understanding of specific contexts, underscoring the significance of human resources as an essential asset within the sector. Yet another asset is a unique aptitude to work within contexts of limited statehood, from remote borderlands to ganglands.[49] This is especially valuable when the economic opportunities within these orders need to reach regional or global markets. Moderating the interface between non-state orders and regional or global markets represents a significant opportunity for the sector. As a starting point for adaptation, therefore, it is essential to appreciate the strategic value of this specialized human capital within the sector or within specific institutions in an era in which much of the zeitgeist is about war and power politics.

A unique characteristic of the sector is that it brings together excellent technical knowledge relevant to conflict resolution and peacebuilding in specific locations. However, these capacities are often scattered or reserved for proprietary purposes. For the technical competency to translate into a stronger sectoral asset, peace diplomacy actors may wish to envisage a global inventory of technical competency. Such an inventory could be ordered along brain trusts that "creatively pool and harness the unique strengths of local 'go-between' leaders to bridge national and community-level processes of dialogue, peacebuilding and transition".[50] Members of a brain trust might be chosen not just for their expertise, personal integrity and quality of network relationships, but also because they know how to apply their competencies in specific conflict situations or political transitions. Key also is that their thinking is not framed by specific institutional or partisan interests or approaches.[51] In a sense, the UN Mediation Support Unit's Standby Team might represent such a brain trust,

[47] Polycrises occur when multiple crises that grow from the clash of trigger events and slow-moving stresses are happening at once. See Matthew Lawrence and others, "Global polycrisis: the causal mechanisms of crisis entanglement", *Global Sustainability*, vol. 7 (2024), e6.

[48] Contexts of limited statehood exist where state authorities lack the capacity to implement and enforce central decisions or to uphold a monopoly over the means of violence. These areas are not necessarily ungoverned or ungovernable; rather, governance is carried out by a variety of actors, including non-state entities, international organizations and local authorities. See Tanja Draude, A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Governance and Limited Statehood* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018).

[49] Achim Wennmann, "Negotiated exits from organized crime? Building peace in conflict and crime-affected contexts", *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 30, No. 3 (2014), pp. 255–273.

[50] Institute for Integrated Transitions, "Country brain trusts". Available at https://ifit-transitions.org/country-brain-trusts/ (accessed on 21 August 2025).

[51] Phil Clark and Mark Freeman, "Building peace from the middle: the critical work of national brain trusts", *Peace Science Digest*, vol. 4 (March 2020), pp. 6–8.

as could the network of peace and development advisors jointly managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the DPPA. Outside the UN, the Consensus Building Institute's Global Network demonstrates the value of a strong mediator network with significant private-sector expertise, particularly in managing large-scale investments.[52] In sum, organizing and systematizing the tremendous knowledge, competencies and skills into more operational brain trusts might take three decades of professionalization to the next level.

The peace diplomacy sector may also help navigate increasingly complex information environments. Targeted disinformation campaigns and AI-boosted propaganda by war-fighting states make it increasingly difficult for politicians and local leaders to assess local conflict dynamics. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project observes that "there are a lot of inconvenient truths about conflict that come from solid evidence that's investigated in transparent ways, and the conclusions often substantially differ from what dominant online discourse would have us believe".[53] Peace diplomacy actors could play a special role in navigating complex information environments if they have a relationship to local conflict stakeholders, such as direct access to unfiltered information about specific events or perceptions of warring parties. In academia, for instance, terrorism is studied primarily indirectly – through media reports, second-hand sources or theoretical essays – rather than through direct engagement. This reliance creates an "echo chamber repeating what others have said", rather than producing empirical insights.[54] Peace mediation actors with direct access to armed groups may therefore play a more significant role in demystifying echo chambers in conflict contexts. Such work is currently done primarily behind the scenes, but a more ambitious role for the sector may be possible – and necessary – in a world facing weapons of mass disinformation – the new WMDs.[55]

More tailored roles may also exist in the context of stalled multilateral processes dealing with collective challenges. Peace diplomacy tends to be at its best when traditional channels of diplomacy have been exhausted. This is currently the case in several multilateral processes related to climate change, public health and technology governance. With problems growing more rapidly than solutions, the agility of peace diplomacy could stimulate progress at regional or local levels, even though progress has stalled globally.[56] Gabriel Gomes Couto has called the application of this more hybrid form of diplomacy to climate action "Earth Diplomacy". He argues that "instead of focusing on making 200 parties agree to a global multilateral treaty, Earth Diplomacy can help devise and advance pragmatic solutions on

[52] Brian Ganson and Achim Wennmann, Business and Conflict in *Fragile States: The Case for Pragmatic Solutions* (London, Routledge, 2016).

[53] Clionadh Raleigh, "As conflict rates soar, misinformation is getting worse", Politico, 27 January 2025. Available at https://www.politico.eu/article/as-conflict-rates-soar-misinformation-is-getting-worse-gaza-ukraine-war/ (accessed on 30 November 2025).

[54] Emily Feldman and Malia Politzer, "Inside the dangerous mission to understand what makes extremists tick—and how to change their minds", Time, 2 September 2020. Available at https://time.com/5881567/extremism-violence-causes-research/ (accessed on 30 November 2025); Andrew Silke, "The devil you know: continuing problems with research on terrorism", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 13, No. 4 (December 2001), pp. 1–14.

[55] Jean-Marc Rickli, "Dealing with the new WMDs – weapons of mass disinformation", Geneva Policy Outlook, 20 January 2025. Available at https://www.genevapolicyoutlook.ch/dealing-with-the-new-wmds-weapons-of-mass-disinformation/ (accessed on 30 November 2025).

[56] David Harland, "Reversing the decline of diplomacy", Geneva Policy Outlook, 5 February 2024. Available at https://www.genevapolicyoutlook.ch/reversing-the-decline-of-diplomacy/ (accessed on 30 November 2025).

targeted issues".[57]

In addition, there is scope to explore peace diplomacy activities in a greater diversity of conflict types beyond super-power tensions, inter-state conflict or civil war. Amplifying efforts in urban peace mediation, for example, could unlock more resilient and context-tailored agreements, allowing societies to rebuild from the ground up in a way that aligns with local political economies and social realities. The "urban political settlement" lens underscores the fact that cities – especially those grappling with conflict, violence and institutional fragility – can form their own localized ordering dynamics, separate from – and where possible, linked to – national agreements. It is important to recognize, however, that cities usually have peace competencies at local levels, and outsiders should scale what already works. Overall, cities are not passive arenas for peacemaking but are sites of agency and innovation, where daily interactions and localized interests create unique opportunities for negotiated order, even when national frameworks fail.[58] This de facto agency for peace diplomacy in cities might even call for the establishment of a "mediation support network for mayors, community leaders, and the range of perpetrators of violence in specific urban conflict systems". Such a network could also help protect local facilitators or interrupters and enable "an expanded toolbox and political space to address urban violence through dialogue and negotiation".[59]

Conclusion: Towards a Global Peace Diplomacy Movement?

In its assessment of the peace diplomacy sector and how it can adapt to a changing strategic landscape, this chapter finds that the sector possesses all the necessary elements to play a significant role in shaping a more stable and peaceful world in the future. A variety of institutions command unique assets – including relationships, access and expertise – and maintain a network of individuals with unique skills and an understanding of specific contexts and situations. The sector also has strong institutional, legal and cultural foundations that have enabled it to adapt in previous moments of significant and rapid change. Looking ahead, the sector could enhance the organization of its peace support competencies through the construction of brain trusts, and it could play a strategic role in helping decipher ever more complex information environments. It could also apply its tested instruments and approaches to other types of conflict than inter-state and civil wars – especially at the city level – and to broader collective challenges that are blocked at the multilateral level.

However, some issues limit the sector's current operations. There are too many actors, leading to overcrowding. Limited investment in the sector fuels competition, which weakens operational agility and focus, leaving opportunities for conflict resolution and peace unexploited. It is a sector composed primarily of smaller "boutique" actors with larger entities running on annual budgets of $50 million and smaller ones on less than $10 million annually. Some are self-governing; others are subsidiaries of larger entities. Compared to other international sectors, these are relatively small budgets, but being small, agile and

[57] Gabriel Gomes Couto, "Discreetly tackling climate action through Earth Diplomacy", Geneva Policy Outlook, 30 January 2023. Available at https://www.genevapolicyoutlook.ch/discreetly-tackling-climate-action-through-earth-diplomacy/ (accessed on 30 November 2025).

[58] Emilian Berutti and Achim Wennmann, "Urban political settlements: a new lens for peacemaking in cities", *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 25, No. 2 (2024), pp. 157–183.

[59] Achim Wennmann, "Crossing the new frontier: peace mediation in the city", Oslo Forum Paper (Geneva, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2018).

action-focused has always been the sector's trademark.

In conclusion, the key question is: what strategic adjustment might be necessary for the sector to be "fit for purpose" in addressing the future of conflict resolution and peacebuilding?

One answer may be to start constructing a global peace diplomacy movement that builds momentum towards a stronger shared foundation of the vision, principles, approaches and means for peace diplomacy. A sector composed of so many small institutions is limited in its ability to scale peace diplomacy work across the diverse range of conflict settings. What is therefore needed is a scalable approach to peace diplomacy that acts like a software – principles and procedures applied in similarly different contexts – but that is adaptive enough to local contexts to avoid the trap of being a blueprint.[60]

Constructing a peace diplomacy movement could entail drafting a peace diplomacy declaration that sets out a unifying vision, the functional elements of third-party dispute resolution and the protection measures of the entities and individuals that conduct third-party dispute resolution. It could also entail strengthening peace capacities from the bottom up and from the top down. At the local level, this could entail nurturing peace diplomacy societies that gather knowledge and expertise for dispute resolution at both local and national levels. This effort could build on existing networks that support insider mediators, peace and development advisors or peace architectures. Much like scaling the humanitarian movement through national Red Cross or Red Crescent societies, the peace diplomacy movement could build on the foundation of national or city-wide societies that help facilitate access, understanding and monitoring of localized conflict dynamics. At the global level, these societies should benefit from a degree of federation. Like the International Federation of the Red Cross or Red Crescent, which coordinates and operates through 191 national societies, a peace diplomacy federation could assure sector-wide exchange, learning and professionalization, as well as pool essential competencies and resources – including through brain trusts – and ensure that these are available for localized peace diplomacy efforts.

The topic of movement building in the peace diplomacy sector clearly warrants additional research. There is much to explore, not just an entire literature on social movements, but also decades of lessons from the human rights, climate and global health movements. The bottom line for a peace diplomacy movement may be to offer the prospect of a more unified collective voice as well as a sense of belonging and direction for those working in the sector. A movement would bring the sector together to be stronger and more united to play its part in preventing the worst for people and the planet, and to construct the foundations for a peaceful, equitable and sustainable future.

[60] Cedric de Coning, Alo Muto and Rui Saraiva, *Adaptive Mediation and Conflict Resolution: Peace-making in Colombia, Mozambique, the Philippines and Syria* (Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).