

Review of: "The Failure of Diplomatic Mediations in the Syrian Conflict – A Comparative Analysis"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

An excellent, in-depth, comparative examination of the mediation efforts in the catastrophic and hyper-complex Syrian civil war. (I'd like to give 4.5 stars.) The factors of mission & mandate, impartiality & inclusivity, entry & consent, strategy, and leverage provided a sound framework for the analysis and comparison. The analysis revealed some fatal flaws in the mediation efforts, including lack of impartiality (although I believe this was also explored in the Zartman paper on which this one builds) and some intriguing other factors such as strategy (top-down versus bottom up, and directive versus facilitative) and missed opportunities for leverage. The author usefully draws on a forthcoming work by Chennoufi that apparently is a rich source of information on this topic.

My main critique is that the abstract (and to some extent the conclusion) does not fully match the body of the paper. The point that mediators did not address "root causes and psychological drivers" was never sufficiently developed in the body and should probably be dropped--there is enough good analytical material without it. Also, I don't understand what is meant by "the neutralization of the opposition from regional funding," but it may be relevant to the analytical factors and thus may merit more explanation in the body of the paper.

My remaining critiques and suggestions are minor:

- It may be worth a passing mention that the United States and perhaps the West more broadly was, by 2012 or so, souring on regime-change military interventions. This is related to the Syrian opposition's disappointed hopes that the West would intervene militarily.
- On the dilemma of ceasefire first or later, consider citing Mahieu, S. (2007). When Should Mediators Interrupt a Civil War? The Best Timing for a Ceasefire. *International Negotiation*, 12(2), 207-228.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/138234007X223285>
- On p. 13 the author notes, "international powers that had interests in the conflict and an influence on the UN, preferred to outsource mediation to the organization without giving the mediators the authority, backing, or resources to be effective", citing Crocker. This point about outsourcing should be either developed or dropped; I'd favor dropping unless it can be connected to the analytical factors.
- P. 15--consider "disingenuousness" for "ingenuity" which I believe is a malapropism here.

Thank you for the contribution to the mediation literature as well as the search for lessons learned from this devastating conflict.

