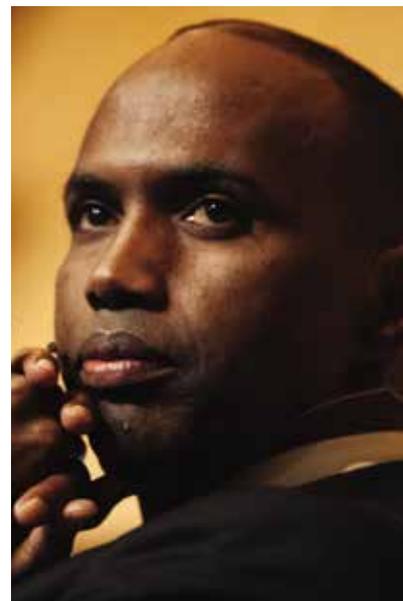
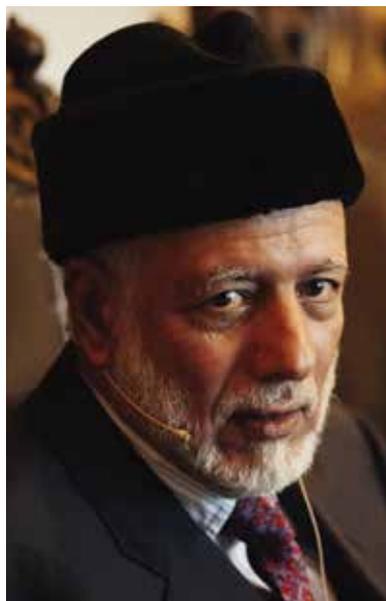


# OSLOFORUM2018

## The End of the Big Peace? Opportunities for mediation



Authored by Christina Buchhold, Jonathan Harlander,  
Sabrina Quamber and Øyvind Ege

Meeting  
**report**

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Norwegian Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs

## Improving the mediation of armed conflict

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The Oslo Forum is widely acknowledged as the leading international network of conflict mediation practitioners. Co-hosted by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Oslo Forum regularly convenes conflict mediators, high-level decision-makers and key peace process actors in a series of informal and discreet retreats.

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Participation is by invitation only. Sessions take the form of closed-door discussions, and adhere to the Chatham House Rule of non-attribution. Sessions are designed to stimulate informed exchanges with provocative inputs from a range of different speakers, including conflict party representatives, war correspondents, outstanding analysts, thinkers and experts on specific issues.

Participants have included **Jimmy Carter**, former President of the United States; **Federica Mogherini**, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; **Juan Manuel Santos**, former President of Colombia; **António Guterres**, Secretary-General of the United Nations; **Kofi Annan**, former Secretary-General of the United Nations; **Fatou Bensouda**, Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court; **Catherine Samba-Panza**, former President of the Central African Republic; **Martti Ahtisaari**, former President of Finland; **Thabo Mbeki**, former President of South Africa and **John Kerry**, former Secretary of State of the United States of America. The Oslo Forum is proud to have hosted several Nobel Peace Prize laureates.

The retreats refrain from making public recommendations, aiming instead to advance the practice of conflict mediation.

# The End of the Big Peace?

## Opportunities for mediation



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The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) is a private diplomacy organisation founded on the principles of humanity, impartiality and independence. Its mission is to help prevent, mitigate, and resolve armed conflict through dialogue and mediation.

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*Jeffrey Feltman and Mina Al-Oraibi*

## The Oslo Forum 2018: an overview

The sixteenth Oslo Forum brought together more than one hundred of the world's leading peacemakers, decision-makers, conflict actors and academics, gathering people with forty-seven nationalities. The participants included António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations; Hassan Ali Khaire, Prime Minister of Somalia; Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs of Oman; Rosemary A. DiCarlo, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs; Abdelkader Messahel, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria; Thomas Greminger, Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe; U Kyaw Tint Swe, Union Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor of Myanmar; Pierre Buyoya, former President of Burundi; Augustine Mahiga, Minister of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation of Tanzania; and Ine Eriksen Søreide, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway.

This year's overarching theme was **The end of the Big Peace? Opportunities for mediation**. Given increasingly atomised and internationalised conflicts in places such as Syria, Yemen and Libya, participants reflected on whether we are seeing the end of the comprehensive peace and power-sharing agreements of the 1990s, and what opportunities and challenges this poses for peacemakers. This theme resonated throughout the two days of intensive discussions, with participants emphasising the urgent need to link mediation tracks through more effective co-ordination. Track 1.5, 2 and 3 are more important than ever because formal mechanisms are struggling to produce results. Creating co-ordinated synergies between peace process actors might well be the most appropriate response to today's fragmented conflicts.

In line with the theme of the event, participants reflected on how **local agreements**, such as ceasefires and humanitarian deals, can be deployed most effectively to promote nationwide stability. They also examined the risks of, and alternatives to, such agree-

ments. Participants cited positive cases, including those from Libya and South Africa, as well as more contentious cases from Syria. Nonetheless, most participants agreed that, given growing fragmentation in conflicts, local agreements will continue to emerge in the coming years and that close scrutiny of their function and viability will continue to be needed.

Participants also discussed the **prospects for peace on the Korean Peninsula** and the historic June 2018 summit between President Trump and Chairman Kim in Singapore. Participants commended both leaders for their political willingness and for choosing negotiations over military confrontation, but noted that the journey to achieving peace on the Peninsula would take long-term commitments from all sides.

In a separate session, participants examined how the fragmented and multi-faceted nature of the conflict in **Libya** poses challenges to traditional UN mediation approaches. Participants agreed that the conflict in Libya is primarily a struggle for resources and identified a need for the UN to increase its capacity to address economic issues. Despite a myriad of challenges on the ground, there was palpable optimism among the participants due to ongoing efforts by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to engage with all actors in Libya, especially those excluded from previous efforts.

As the war in **Syria** enters its next stages, participants reflected on the situation of the Syrian Kurds who currently govern significant territory in the northeast of the country. Consensus emerged among the participants that these Syrian Kurdish groups, the Syrian Government and regional actors, need to prioritise negotiations to reach a peaceful settlement.

Participants also explored the factors which have contributed to the signing of the Final Agreement in **Colombia** – such as the highly inclusive nature of the process or the support of the international

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A mediator's success can sometimes be limited to ensuring that conflicts don't escalate, rather than resolving them.

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*Ali Akbar Salehi, Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah and Ine Eriksen Søreide*

importance of building trust among the conflict parties to revive the peace process. Looking at the wider region, participants in a session on the **Red Sea region** reflected on how tensions within the GCC, as well as the recent rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, have affected regional stability. They noted that without developing a growing regional identity and co-operation in this area, there will be no longer-term solutions.

In a session on the **impact of counter-terrorism legislation on mediation**, participants noted a growing concern that counter-terrorism laws are increasing the legal risk for mediators and could progressively shrink the space for mediation.

Participants at this year's Oslo Forum also reflected on **creative entry points** for reviving or reinvigorating stalled peace processes. Those in the session discussed if and how small initiatives based on confidence-building measures can create momentum for achieving a more comprehensive settlement of the conflict. In another session, **former armed group negotiators** reflected on their experiences of mediation and the challenges associated with sitting opposite their long-time adversaries at the negotiation table.

Another exchange questioned whether a **dialogue with Jihadist groups in Mali** is possible and, if so, how such a dialogue should be conducted. A separate session considered the role of regional actors in stabilising the **Great Lakes region**. In other discussions, participants addressed the **role of religious actors** in mediation, the challenge of framer-grazer conflicts for **Nigeria, Myanmar's** path to peace and reconciliation, and the role of mediation in **Iraq's** transition.

As the complexity of conflicts is increasing, including through the multiplication of proxy conflicts, a mediator's success can sometimes be limited to ensuring that conflicts don't escalate, rather than resolving them. It is clear from the 2018 Oslo Forum that, from creative entry points to local agreements, peacemakers have a range of options at their disposal to achieve sustainable peace, even in the most difficult circumstances.

community – which have made the agreement particularly resilient to setbacks. Discussions also considered the weaknesses of the process, such as the failed referendum or the lack of progress on truth and justice. Participants agreed that the implementation of the agreement will constitute the most important challenge for Colombia for the foreseeable future.

As **Yemen** is struggling with a deep humanitarian and economic crisis, participants described the situation in the port of Hodeidah – through which 90% of the country's imports are processed – as a humanitarian priority for the negotiations. They stressed the

## Farewell to the Big Peace: are local agreements all we have left?

With mediators in Libya, Syria and Yemen struggling with the multiplicity of armed actors in national processes, some have begun to see local agreements – such as ceasefires, governance arrangements and resource-sharing agreements – as the only viable option for reducing violence and working towards peace. The participants in this session examined how local agreements can be deployed most effectively to promote nationwide stability. They also examined the risks of, and alternatives to, such agreements.

Participants were generally sceptical of the distinction between top-down and bottom-up agreements, or the similar distinction between national and local agreements. They noted that local agreements often require the support, or at least acquiescence, of national actors, and conversely that national deals are sometimes the culmination of a series of local agreements or that they are otherwise made possible by such agreements. Local conflict dynamics, while unique and complex, are largely informed and affected by national developments, and so it is close to impossible

to disentangle one from the other. Some participants also noted how people, weapons and ideas can easily cross from one community to another. Such spillovers make it even more difficult to distinguish one local agreement from another, as well as local agreements from national agreements.

Local agreements can have various functions, with the most striking examples being ceasefires and humanitarian deals. However, they may also have wider, strategic importance. For example, a series of local agreements in South Africa helped insulate the peace process from ongoing violence. Similarly, in Libya, local reconciliation helped establish common negotiation positions among formerly fragmented groups. Such positions were then used as a springboard for more national discussions. One participant argued that Yemen could have benefited from a sequence of local agreements to enable a process at the national level.

But some local agreements are controversial. This is particularly the case in Syria, where ceasefires or surrender agreements often



*Dag Halvor Nylander and Pierre Buyoya; Matthew Kukah and Ngozi Amu; Koiti Emmily, Kristin Lund and Mohamed Abdullahi Omar; and Véronique Dudouet (bottom left to right)*

reflect the imbalance of power between a fragmented opposition and a comparatively strong central government. Participants noted how such agreements are often a way to assert hegemony, or legitimise human rights violations (such as forced displacement). One participant also noted how such politicisation extends to the classification of the conflict itself. The Syrian Government, he said, continues to claim that conflict in Syria is but a patchwork of local, illegitimate rebellions without an overarching national logic.

Regardless of their ultimate purpose, local agreements can be as difficult to reach as national ones and therefore they do not represent a trouble-free alternative to national-level deals. The granularity and variety of local positions, groups, factions and concerns make up a dense mass of intricate problems that an outsider will find difficult to penetrate. This situation may be exacerbated by interference from international or national actors seeking to tilt the outcome in their favour. In addition, local

agreements often relate to areas which are isolated either by geography or war, making logistics extremely difficult.

All in all, the concept of local agreements covers a wide range of deals. Some of these advance the prospect for a political settlement; others stabilise the status quo or result in a temporary end to hostilities. Out of this patchwork of agreements, a more comprehensive national settlement may sometimes be established, but not always. Often, the impact of such agreements is limited to their immediate area, and sometimes they may prepare the ground for further escalation or abuses. In the end, therefore, local agreements cannot be categorised as intrinsically good or bad, but they are a part of a wider, evolving situation in which all elements of a conflict are inexorably connected with each other. Despite this complexity, most participants agreed that, given the growing fragmentation of conflict, local agreements will continue to emerge in the future and that close scrutiny of their function and viability is warranted.



## Picking up the pieces? Reinvigorating the Libyan peace process

Seven years after the toppling of Muammar Qaddafi, and after numerous efforts to establish peace, Libya remains a broken and divided country. In the east, the House of Representatives is backing one government and the so-called Libyan National Army of Khalifa Haftar, while in the west the internationally-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) is attempting to control the fragmented security landscape and recognised state institutions. In the middle lies the Oil Crescent – a series of lucrative hydrocarbon facilities from which Libya exports over half its output.

During this session, it was noted that the conflict in Libya is primarily a struggle for resources. The vast amount of oil and the extensive network of pipelines in the country means that a constant stream of money is flowing through the territory into the national treasury. The problem is the distribution of these revenues, and control over state resources is consequently at the centre of the conflict. The current situation involves a network of state-funded patrons and their clients, paid for by Libya's oil wealth. Together, these patrons wield substantial political and military power, and continue to jockey for a greater share of the resources and the revenues of their exploitation. Whether they are friends, adversaries, competitors or sworn enemies, members of this rentier class fight hard to resist those who seek to bring an end to their privileges.

The conflict in Libya is also fuelled by external factors. For example, participants noted the free movement of arms, people and drugs over the southern borders; the return of foreign fighters; the continuing flow of migrants from the south; and the involvement of foreign powers in both lawful and illicit activities on Libyan soil. In addition, the fierce competition for resources makes the collision of these issues particularly explosive. For example, an unchecked flow of people over the southern border

combined with vested economic interests and weak governance contributes to the emergence of markets for mercenaries and cheap labour.

The fragmented and multi-faceted nature of the conflict poses challenges for the traditional UN mediation approach. Some participants wished the UN had reached out earlier to ordinary people and criticised its previous policy of refusing to speak with certain constituencies. Others highlighted the UN's lack of expertise in relation to economic issues and inexperience in dealing with an oil-fuelled struggle for resources.

In addition, they identified a lack of integration between mediation and development strategies in the country. Some also spoke of an apparent disconnect between a UN-led high-level process of elite consultations and UN-led bottom-up engagement with popular assemblies across Libya.

Nonetheless, there was palpable optimism among participants due to ongoing efforts by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) to engage with all actors in Libya – especially those excluded from previous efforts – and address these root causes. Similarly, a significant part of that effort is to build operational partnerships with international non-governmental organisations to broaden the scope of the UN's mediation efforts, amplify its work through local engagement, or potentially focus on more technical subjects such as economic corruption. As for the National Conference Process, a key pillar of the UN Action Plan for Libya intended for all key Libyan actors to contribute to the political process, it is maintaining momentum and represents a unique opportunity for Libyans to express themselves and develop real solutions to the problems the country is facing.

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The conflict in Libya  
is primarily a struggle  
for resources.”

*Tine Mørch Smith, Pernille Kardel, Idun Tvedt and Tone Allers (top left)*

*Grace Forrest (top right)*

*Jeffrey Feltman (centre right)*

*Hanna Tetteh (bottom right)*

*Xu Jinghu and Brian Shukan (left)*



## Prospects for peace on the Korean Peninsula?

The June 2018 summit in Singapore between Chairman Kim Jong-un and President Donald Trump was a historic event. Yet, participants at the Oslo Forum noted that the agreement emerging from the summit was short and substantively light. A bigger breakthrough actually took place in the press conference following the summit, when President Trump declared that the joint military exercises between the US and the Republic of Korea would be cancelled for 2018.

In terms of missed opportunities, participants noted that the summit's outcome document could have recognised the stopping of nuclear and missile tests by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Another possible achievement would have been to grant the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspectors access to previously-declared sites. A third and critical step could have been for the DPRK to declare all sites related to its nuclear and missile programmes – one of the main roadblocks in the negotiations.

Participants also discussed how the US could demonstrate its long-term commitment to the process. They noted that the steps demanded of the DPRK were mostly irreversible in the short-term, such as the dismantling of their nuclear programme, whereas offers from the US side, such as the establishment of political liaison offices, were easily revocable. It is therefore necessary to demonstrate to the DPRK that the process is considered irreversible by the US. Participants agreed that a detailed roadmap for the denuclearisation of the Peninsula with concrete steps was urgently required.

Discussing the commitment of the DPRK to the process, participants highlighted that the summit and the willingness of Chairman Kim to meet with President Trump was not due to a sudden change-

of-heart, but constituted the culmination of a long-term strategy that was set in motion several years ago. This strategy was conveyed through signals, such as Chairman Kim's 2017 statement that he would not change the country's nuclear path unless the US ended its hostile policy towards the DPRK. This was followed by the April 2018 Panmunjom Declaration in which Chairman Kim and President Moon confirmed their joint commitment to the complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.

Similarly, the announcement of the "New Strategic Line", combined with strategic promotions to its Politburo, shifted the DPRK's focus and budget towards its economy, and marked an important pivot in the country's strategy. Participants highlighted that this momentum towards economic development should be supported by other countries in order to generate a high opportunity cost for the DPRK in case the country were to consider backtracking from the peace process.

Participants also discussed the possible repercussions of the DPRK's isolation. Some commentators opined that increasing exposure to the outside world for the DPRK's extremely isolated populace may pose one of the greatest dangers to the future of the regime. Some also questioned whether the progress of negotiations could be affected by blind spots in

Pyongyang's vision of the outside world. However, one commentator noted that while the DPRK's society was extremely isolated, negotiators and decision-makers in Pyongyang were not – they follow external news sources and observe the outside world extensively. Approaching them with pre-conceived notions about their isolation would therefore be a disservice to the process.

President Trump's role in the peace process was also discussed. Despite his initial use of hostile rhetoric, his willingness to engage

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The steps demanded of the DPRK are mostly irreversible in the short-term, whereas offers from the US side are easily revocable.

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*Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, Mohamed Abdullahi Omar and Jemma Nunu Kumba (left)*

*Michael Vatikiotis and Joseph Yun (top centre)*

*Pernille KardeL (top right)*

*David Harland and Augustine Mahiga (bottom right)*



with the DPRK sets him apart from his immediate predecessors. However, problems may arise in the future if there are no concrete developments on the path to denuclearisation for him to showcase to the American public. Some participants maintained that these problems could be avoided as long as the DPRK continues to co-operate minimally.

Participants agreed that the gains made in 2018 would not have been possible without the combined political willingness of President Moon, Chairman Kim and President Trump. However, the road ahead is long, and the continued political willingness of all parties must be sustained for many years to achieve peace on the Korean Peninsula.

## Creative entry points for stalled peace processes

When conflicts seem impervious to classic mediation efforts, mediators have often sought innovative ‘entry points’ to achieve focused technical objectives, and potentially kick-start or revive more comprehensive processes. One option can be for conflict parties to negotiate a different role for the facilitator as part of an amended process and new approach. Another option would be to bring other international or national organisations to undertake Track 2 activities outside the formal process. Such activities would not necessarily have to be substantive or connected to core issues of the conflict. They may be able to achieve quick successes for example, thus allowing mediators to show conflict parties that dialogue can be effective. Through their informal and behind the scenes approach, Track 2 processes may be able to come up with creative ideas which may be injected into Track 1 processes.

Participants also felt that mediators should not limit themselves to initiatives that require a formal agreement by the parties in conflict. Often the parties are not able to agree on undertaking

any activities with each other due to the risk of legitimising the opposition and being viewed as weak by their own constituencies. Official mediators can, however, either rely on actors outside the formal process to engage with the parties on issues that don’t require official agreement, or deal with those actors unilaterally to shift the focus of the dialogue process. For the parties, this eliminates the risks associated with engaging officially with their opponents.

Participants also outlined some other entry points available to mediators for increasing trust and confidence between conflict parties. These included focusing on the design of the peace process and roadmaps, scenario-building or strategically involving civil society. The crucial point of these initiatives is that they can build up the scale of the peace process and keep the parties engaged in it.

An important question is whether the increase in trust and confidence generated by these creative measures can also open up political space and allow the parties to engage in a process to tackle the core issues of the conflict. Participants noted that there are risks



*Mary Kaldor; Afework Kassu Gizaw; Said Djinnit and Kenny Gluck; Jane Arraf; and Ali Akbar Salehi (bottom left to right)*

that such initiatives simply divert attention, reinforce the status quo, or reduce the mediator's credibility if they don't bring success. In addition, there are conflicts where a status quo might be preferable to either success or failure for the parties, and the participants noted that the situations in Cyprus, Kashmir, Moldova, Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh, all have some elements of this. Therefore, in some cases, if the alternative is violence and war, it can be acceptable for the facilitator to favour a status quo. However, as one participant observed, mediators should seriously consider what to do when it becomes clear that the mediator and the process are being used to keep both success and failure at bay. The danger facing any mediator is that anger and cynicism generated by the failure of a peace process can be greater than the anger and cynicism that would exist in the absence of a process.

Participants also discussed the relationship between Track 1 and Track 2 processes. Track 1 actors can easily become concerned

that Track 2 initiatives are going too far, complicating official processes, or legitimising groups. On the other hand, Track 2 processes have more space to ensure a sense of ownership, inclusivity and sustainability. Facilitators therefore also need to recognise the value of establishing an unofficial and discreet engagement with other stakeholders associated with the peace process. Their input can then either be fed directly into the official process or passed on to the media and constituencies to generate a response by Track 1 actors. In either case, this should be done with the understanding that any initiatives with Track 2 actors will eventually be integrated into the official peace process to generate some type of official ratification for their efforts.

Despite the many challenges associated with finding new ways to invigorate stalled or failing peace processes, this session showed that mediators have a plethora of creative options for generating both opportunities and willingness for meaningful peacemaking.



## Colombia: when peace agreements meet reality

With the ratification of the Final Agreement in late November 2016, the conflict between the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) and the Colombian state finally came to an end. The Agreement, one of the most comprehensive and multifaceted ever signed, included a variety of provisions to tackle issues from transitional justice to rural development.

Many factors have directly contributed to the signing of the Agreement. One such factor was the structure of the negotiation teams: by including prominent representatives of the military, police and political establishment, the government fostered a broad sense of ownership and respect for the process in critical institutions. Not only did this secure acceptance from traditionally sceptical actors, it also enabled two-way communication between the negotiating table and the corridors of power. The FARC's gradual inclusion of field commanders to attend the negotiations also helped ensure internal cohesion and acceptance for the peace process on the armed group's side.

In addition, the parties insisted on direct negotiations and clear national ownership of the process, but enlisted the support – when needed – of the international community to facilitate the negotiations. The parties also accepted to engage with a wide range of representatives and initiatives at an appropriate stage, including women, indigenous groups and victims. Support for these groups is also firmly enshrined in the Agreement itself and the institutions it has created. Taking this so-called transversal approach, has made the Agreement surprisingly resilient despite setbacks, particularly in rural areas.

While there is organised opposition to it, the implementation of the Agreement has already produced some successes. The

disarmament of the FARC, for example, is largely perceived to have been successful, and constitutional amendments which are needed to implement the majority of the Agreement have been passed. The Agreement also has credible support among large parts of the population.

Yet, there were also a number of weaknesses in the process and the Final Agreement. The outward signs of this include the failed referendum of October 2016, the initial lack of progress on truth and justice, a growing number of FARC dissidents, and the faltering reintegration of former FARC members. How could this

have been avoided? Those at the session asked whether judges should have been invited to participate in the talks in Havana and whether a more detailed timeline for implementation should have been part of the Final Agreement.

Some participants also indicated that the government could have adapted key institutions more effectively for them to support both the agreement and its implementation. They also noted that efforts to foster support for the Agreement were too focused on rural areas to the detriment of cities, and that the Special Jurisdiction for Peace in Colombia

should have been established much earlier.

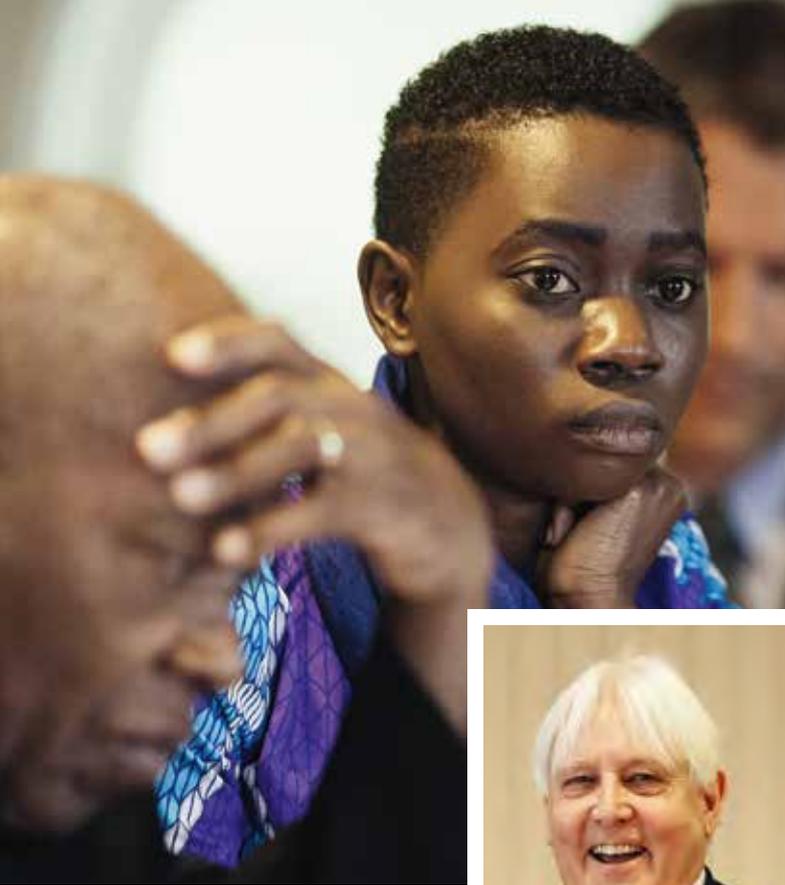
What is clear, however, is that funding to ensure the completion of reintegration programmes and agrarian reforms, the impartiality of justice mechanisms, as well as a potential deal with the ELN are now in jeopardy following the election of Iván Duque, a strong opponent of the peace agreement with the FARC. Nonetheless, some participants expressed hope that President Duque's allegiance to a more moderate constituency as a result of the election may force him to stick to the deal. Whether the long-awaited and hard-fought peace will hold in the forthcoming years, therefore, remains to be seen.

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This transversal  
approach has made  
the Agreement  
surprisingly resilient.

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*Koiti Emmily (top left)*

*Martin Griffiths (centre)*

*Roxaneh Bazergan (bottom right)*

*Staffan de Mistura (bottom left)*



## South Sudan: what next?

Since civil war broke out in South Sudan in December 2013, there have been many attempts at resolving the conflict in the country. The latest attempt by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) was the establishment of a High Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) in June 2017. Yet, as the Oslo Forum gathered in June 2018, fighting was continuing and there had been no consequences for those violating the cessation of hostilities agreement signed in December 2017. The political talks eventually resulted in the signing of a new agreement between Salva Kiir and Riek Machar in Khartoum in September 2018. However, many of the issues which were discussed in this session, including power-sharing, sovereignty, and the role of women in the peace process, continue to resonate even as the events on the ground have evolved.

During discussions about the peace process, one participant expressed doubts about the ability of parties to resolve their differences while one of the parties remains in power. In addition, any resulting agreement might not resolve the conflict and could perpetuate the exclusive nature of previous agreements, something which the parties themselves admit in private. While it was argued that the leaders who have been responsible for the conflict should not necessarily be responsible for leading the country forward, most recognised that peace would not be possible without Salva Kiir and Riek Machar. This remains a challenge not addressed in the new iteration of the peace agreement.

There were disagreements with regards to the role the international community should play in South Sudan. While one participant stated that South Sudan needs a neutral outside entity to stabilise the security situation in the country, another underlined that nobody in South Sudan would accept such an intervention

and that the African Union charter defends the sovereignty of its Member States. It was also noted that the international community and regional actors should play a neutral role, rather than supporting one side or another in the conflict.

Women have a particularly important role to play in identifying solutions to the ongoing conflict in South Sudan. Yet, one participant, quoting John Garang, noted that women in the country are the “marginalised of the marginalised.” This is, in part, due to a culture of male domination in the country and in political parties. To tackle this culture, and partly as a result of pressure by

women’s representatives, a provision allowing for a quota of women for executive appointments (35%) had been included in the latest draft peace agreement. Participants also emphasised that the international community, and the mediators in particular, should make the participation and contribution of women a condition for the process.

To make the agreement sustainable, it was suggested that the security apparatus in South Sudan should not be controlled by a single party and that a clear separation from the party in power should exist. While there was

a consensus that the agreement would need to be enforceable – with obligations for the parties to respect it – it was not clear what leverage existed to force the parties to respect their commitments. Finally, at the time of the session, many participants insisted that it would be essential for any agreement to be inclusive, particularly in relation to involving small armed groups who have the ability to prevent insecurity from re-emerging in the country.

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**There was a consensus  
that the agreement  
would need to be  
enforceable.**

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*Victoria Sandino and Gerry Kelly  
(top centre)*

*Abdelkader Messahel (top right)*

*Elisabeth Schwabe-Hansen (bottom right)*

*Speciosa Wandira-Kazibwe and  
Soad Shalaby (left)*



## Political inclusion in Syria in a post-ISIL environment

Despite being at the forefront of the military campaign that ended most of ISIL's territorial control in Syria, and governing significant territory in the northeast of the country, Syria's Kurds are still striving for political inclusion. Six years on, they are not part of the United Nations-led peace process for Syria. The United Nations' approach to the constitutional process in Syria splits participants into three categories: government; opposition; and civil society and others. Participants noted that many Syrian Kurds object that they do not fit into any of these categories, and maintain that their exclusion results from the reluctance of other parties to include them.

The Kurds governing territory in the north east of Syria have also been unable to reach an agreement with the Syrian Government regarding their political and military status in the country. Despite reassurances from the central government that it was ready to negotiate directly with them, actual talks had not taken place at the time of the Oslo Forum, in June 2018. Nonetheless, one participant noted that Syrian Kurds remain committed to the territorial unity of Syria, as well as the return of state institutions to all territories and are seeking a secular, pluralistic and decentralised state for all Syrians, enshrined through a constitutional process.

Some participants stated that connections to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK – which is listed as a terrorist organisation by, among others, Turkey and the United States) have a negative impact on the efforts of the Syrian Kurds to gain political recognition. Unless the Syrian Kurds are able to demonstrate their independence from the PKK, they will continue to be viewed with mistrust. Others responded that, while the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Democratic Union Party (PYD) have traditional and familial relations with the PKK, they

are home-grown organisations that emerged to defend Syrians within Syria. They are thus independent and domestically-focused.

Participants observed that while the threat of ISIL had loomed large, the Syrian Kurds received extensive international support, most significantly in the form of military assistance from the United States. This contributed to their effectiveness in almost eliminating ISIL's territorial control. Now that the threat from ISIL has receded, so has Western interest. While ISIL's territorial ambitions have been nearly quashed, some participants warned that their ideological and political influence linger in Syria.

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**Syrian political and military actors must demonstrate their willingness to negotiate.**

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With this constellation of forces in place, participants discussed how to move towards an inclusive process in Syria. While dialogue between the Syrian Kurds and the Syrian government is important, some participants highlighted the need to also prioritise negotiations with regional actors. They noted that although the United States and other Western actors may be important, they are transient in the Syrian conflict, hence the need for the Syrian Kurds to reach a political agreement with regional actors.

Most importantly, participants stressed that Syrian political and military actors must demonstrate their willingness to negotiate. The perfect outcome should not become the enemy of a good outcome, and concessions are needed. Unfortunately, the window for finding a negotiated settlement of their political claims may shrink faster than expected as the conflict enters its next stages.

*Yacoub El Hillo, Khawla Mattar, Bent Skjærstad and Kenny Gluck (top left)  
Véronique Dudouet, Mutlaq bin Majed Al Qahtani and Naz Modirzadeh (top right)  
Ferdinand von Habsburg-Lothringen, Precious Omuku and  
Meredith Preston McGhie (centre)*



## Yemen: mission possible?

After the Houthis captured Yemen's capital Sana'a in 2014, and a Saudi Arabia-led coalition was launched to stop their progress, Yemen now struggles with a deep humanitarian and economic crisis. Millions of Yemenis face famine and cholera, three-quarters depend on aid, and Yemen's already weak economy has sustained considerable further damage. In addition, civilian casualties resulting from coalition airstrikes have been the focus of concern from the international community, while missiles have been launched from Yemen into Saudi Arabia, thereby spreading the conflict's geographical scope further.

The port and city of Hodeidah, through which 90% of Yemen's imports are processed, and which are currently controlled by the Houthis, was an important focus of the session. It was described as the humanitarian priority for the negotiations. An imminent coalition attack was expected on the port at the time of the Oslo Forum and participants noted some level of consensus within the international community on the need to prevent this attack. One suggested option was for the UN to operate the port of Hodeidah, thus securing what was described as a 'humanitarian pipeline', and preventing the humanitarian catastrophe from worsening. In addition, an agreement on Hodeidah, including a withdrawal of Houthi troops from the city, could be a first step in the peace process.

The situation in the south of Yemen was also discussed during the session. One participant underlined that, while the south should be represented in the negotiations, issues which are specific to the south (such as separatist demands) could not be resolved at this stage, although they should be prioritised during any transitional period. Developing Track 2 processes in the south was suggested as one possible way to identify individuals with the level of legitimacy required to represent the south in negotiations. One participant, however, noted a possible parallel with the

conditions which led to the current crisis involving the Houthis: postponing discussions on the south could eventually lead to a much worse situation. Another participant agreed, indicating that the demands of separatists in the south would need to be dealt with in order to contribute to making a possible peace agreement sustainable, and prevent the emergence of a new conflict in Yemen.

The issue of terrorism was also discussed, with participants noting that if a transitional government was agreed and groups were to be disarmed, it could benefit terrorist groups. One participant noted for example, that al Qaeda had gained some legitimacy by providing services which state institutions in Yemen are unable to deliver.

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**There is a need to generate trust between the two main parties to the conflict.**

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With regards to the peace process, the participants emphasised the importance of prioritising the issues to be discussed. Those in the session discussed the idea that parallel or consecutive rounds of negotiation focusing on specific aspects of the conflict could be organised. One set of negotiations could focus on security and military issues, while another could concentrate on political issues, such as the role of the Houthis in the future of Yemen.

There is a need to generate trust between the two main parties to the conflict – Saudi Arabia and the Houthis – and both should develop a relationship which is respectful and not based on military threat. One participant noted the importance of identifying influencers (respected personalities who might not be directly involved in the negotiations but can convince those who are) who can advise whether any agreement reached is good or not. In addition, some felt that using existing traditional mediation mechanisms at the local level, in co-ordination with the Special Envoy's office, could be another important component of the peace process. However, most agreed that the priority in Yemen was to stop the war, rather than building peace, and that solving the country's problems would take years.



*António Guterres and Ine Eriksen Søreide (top left)  
Maha Yahya (top right)*

*Jesus Dureza, Abdulla Camlian, Gerry Kelly and  
Bjørn Staurset Jahnsen (bottom)*



## Armed groups on mediation

Former negotiators from armed groups were invited to the 2018 Oslo Forum to reflect on their experiences of mediation and the challenges associated with sitting opposite their long-time adversaries at the negotiation table.

The participants in this session highlighted that one of the biggest challenges for those involved in armed conflict was the transition from a military mindset to a civilian one. Months, years, even decades of war and pain have often entrenched the foundations of armed struggle and alienated those involved from the idea of political engagement. The greatest challenge is therefore to convince leaders and their constituencies to lay down their arms and transition from a military position to negotiating their return to civilian life.

Another challenge faced by the leaders and negotiators of armed groups is the need to maintain internal cohesion and unity through-

out the ups and downs and give and take of negotiations. The participants maintained that these internal negotiations were not only of great importance, but also much tougher than expected.

Armed members of conflict parties and their civilian supporters all need to be included in the peace process, either directly or through internal consultations and debates. Among other options for fostering their inclusion, the participants recalled the broad participation of social movements in the peace process, the deliberate invitation of key personnel to attend negotiations, and regular consultations with important factions or interest groups within the armed organisation.

However, ultimately the way internal cohesion was achieved was unique to each armed group: it varied depending on the group's constitution, its history, and the wider cultural milieu of which it forms a part.



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One of the biggest challenges was the transition from a military mindset to a civilian one.

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What then is the role of the mediator? The participants emphasised that a mediator needs to be impartial and able to generate trust among the conflict parties. In addition, a keen awareness of the issues and positions enables mediators to guide the parties out of impasses during negotiations. The mediator must also be flexible, potentially moving from being a facilitator working discreetly behind the scenes, to taking on a more active role to shepherd the parties through a crisis. The distinction between mediator and facilitator consequently depends on the needs of the parties. For specific issues, such as disarmament or decom-

*Melanne Verveer; Meredith Preston McGhie; Idun Tvedt; and Jamila Rajaa (bottom left to right)*

missioning of weapons, the mediator may even hand over the process to a third party such as an international body who may be in a unique position to act as a broker.

Mediators can positively influence a process by convening experts and former peace process actors to attend negotiations. This gives the parties access to a wide variety of knowledge about past and present peace processes and the lessons that can be learnt from them. Participants recalled how meeting delegations from past peace processes not only inspired them, but also helped them understand their own process better. The discussion consequently concluded that, long after they have abandoned their military struggle, former members of armed groups can contribute to peacemaking by sharing their experiences.



## Red Sea region: troubling undercurrents?

The Red Sea separates two volatile regions from each other: to the east and north lie the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent, rich in oil but politically turbulent; to the west and south lies the Horn of Africa, where disputes over the headwaters of the Nile, along with ethnic and religious strife, threaten political stability. Geographic proximity has tethered these two regions together for centuries, for better or for worse.

With the recent split in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), relations have entered a new era. The combined strength of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is now pitted against Qatar and Turkey, with each side vying for power and influence. The question then arises: how do these tensions affect the Horn of Africa and the wider Red Sea region?

Many participants agreed that GCC competition could foster positive economic and political interdependencies. As examples, some drew attention to the GCC's dependency on the Horn for food, which could lead to more foreign investment and incentives to preserve stability; others pointed to commercial joint ventures and their potential to spur economic development in the region. Such economic interdependencies could form a safety net against open conflict.

Nonetheless, participants were generally apprehensive. By supporting opposing local leaders, the two sides of the GCC split could exacerbate existing rivalries in an already volatile region. These local rivalries would also feature in the larger web of geopolitical intrigue, greatly increasing the risk of a war by proxy. One participant also warned that, since local leaders are autocratic patrons, short-term GCC rivalries could cripple nascent democratisation processes in the Horn of Africa.

The natural institutional bulwark against such volatility is IGAD. Yet, participants observed that IGAD has been severely weakened, partly because of the split between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and partly because of the virtual absence of an institutional structure within IGAD as evidenced by the lack of a neutral Secretariat. Some also expressed concern about Ethiopia's virtual control over IGAD. In this regard, the rapprochement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, as well as the reformist spirit emanating from Addis Ababa, may be good signs for the future of IGAD. However, the immediate reality is a weakened IGAD, leading

participants to reflect on possible alternatives: should a new regional institution be created? Should the African Union or the United Nations supplant IGAD? Participants were sceptical, and generally felt that existing frameworks should be built on and used more effectively, rather than substituted.

A number of participants highlighted that Ethiopia is the regional centre of gravity and that whatever happens in that country will have repercussions throughout the region. Its recent democratic transition and friendly overtures to Eritrea could be a beacon of hope in the region, signaling the way from autocracy

and clientelism toward a more stable and prosperous future. The elections in Somalia in 2020 could also be a watershed moment for the region in its transition to greater resilience against conflict.

Participants agreed that, given the complexity of dynamics in the region, there is no silver bullet. The hard work of resolving conflicts must proceed, both at a regional, and at a more local level. But in the long run, the region's own internal capacities must be strengthened in order to insulate it against external interventions. Without developing a growing regional identity and co-operation, there will be no longer-term solutions.

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**The region's own  
internal capacities must  
be strengthened in order  
to insulate it against  
external interventions.**

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*Ghassan Salamé and David Harland (left)*

*Vitaly Naumkin (top right)*

*Speciosa Wandira-Kazibwe (centre right)*

*Rached Ghannouchi (bottom right)*



# Oslo Forum 2018 agenda

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Tuesday  
June 2018

09.30 – 11.00	<i>Opening plenary</i> The end of the Big Peace? Opportunities for mediation		
11.30 – 12.45	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Three parallel sessions:	Picking up the pieces: reinvigorating the Libyan peace process	Farmer-grazer conflicts: Nigeria’s next big security challenge?	<i>Mediation Laboratory</i> – Creative entry points for stalled processes
13.30 – 14.15	Lunchtime conversation Women and peacemaking		
14.30 – 15.45	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Three parallel sessions:	Mali: talking to jihadists?	Prospects for peace on the Korean Peninsula?	<i>Mediation Laboratory</i> – Farewell to the big peace: are local agreements all we have left?
16.15 – 17.30	Option 1	Option 2	
Two parallel sessions:	The Red Sea region: troubling undercurrents?	Myanmar’s path to peace and reconciliation	
18.00 – 19.30	The Mediator’s Studio		

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## Wednesday June 2018

09.00 – 10.30

Option 1

Option 2

Option 3

Three parallel sessions:

*Mediation Laboratory* –  
Armed groups on mediation

Turning the page:  
a new Iraq?

Stabilising the Great Lakes  
region: the role of regional  
actors

11.00 – 12.30

Option 1

Option 2

Option 3

Three parallel sessions:

Political inclusion in Syria  
in a post-ISIL environment

South Sudan: what next?

*Mediation Laboratory* –  
Divine diplomacy? Religious  
actors and mediation

13.15 – 14.15

Lunchtime lecture  
Mediating new wars

14.30 – 16.00

Option 1

Option 2

Option 3

Three parallel sessions:

Colombia: when peace  
meets reality

Yemen: mission possible?

*Mediation Laboratory* –  
Counter-terrorism and  
mediation

16.30 – 17.45

*Closing plenary*

Deal, ordeal: the Middle East in the face of multilateral tremors

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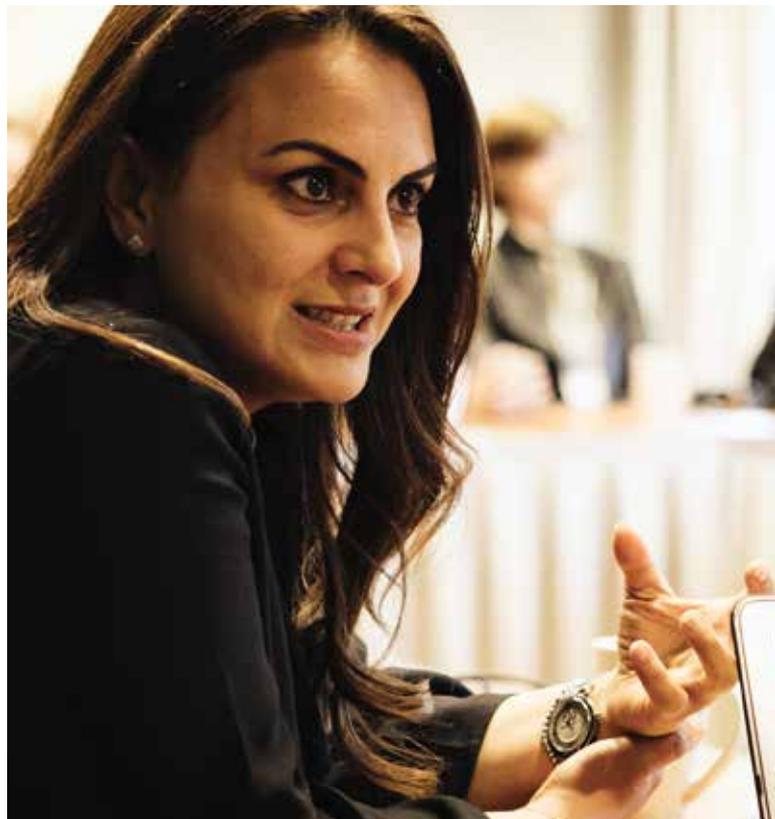
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