

The changing nature of peacemaking

- We are seeing a shift in *how* mediation is undertaken. Efforts tend to be less connected, focus on issues that can be resolved more quickly, and often lack the ability to bring multiple strands of talks into a coherent whole.
- Peacemaking is increasingly shaped by crowded and competitive mediation environments, in which multiple third-party actors operate through parallel initiatives rather than coordinated multilateral frameworks. This proliferation enables conflict parties to forum-shop across competing processes.
- Issue-specific mediation is proliferating, focusing on ceasefires, humanitarian access, prisoner or hostage exchanges, and technical arrangements. These efforts often compensate for stalled comprehensive peace processes, with regional, small, and medium powers playing prominent roles as facilitators, particularly within their immediate neighbourhoods.
- In parallel, conflicts are becoming more internationalised and interconnected, with third-party involvement frequently spanning multiple conflicts. Several actors now shift between roles as mediator, security guarantor, and conflict party or sponsor.
- As a result, influence in peacemaking increasingly derives not only from direct mediation between belligerents, but from mediation-related activities, including third-party coordination, process design, and facilitation across parallel initiatives.
- Many contemporary mediation outcomes are informal or unwritten, emerging from ad hoc negotiations and backchannels rather than structured peace processes and comprehensive agreements.

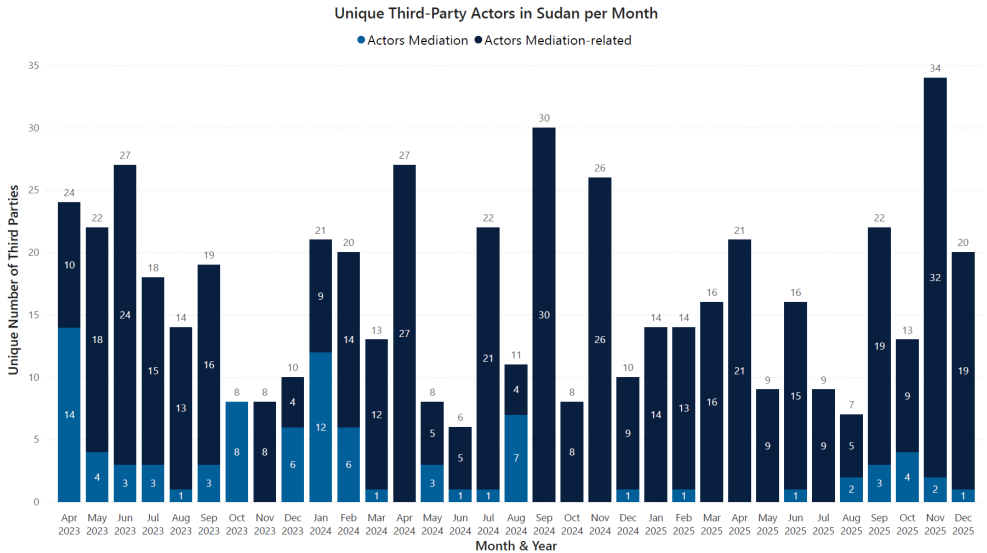
Key MEND terms

Mediation (M). Non-coercive facilitation of communication or negotiation between disputing parties to help them reach a mutually acceptable agreement or resolution to their conflict by an external third-party. Mediation always involves at least two (local) conflict stakeholders, at least one of them needing to be a belligerent.

Mediation-related (MR) activities. Non-coercive measures to facilitate the mediation. These measures are aimed at (1) encouraging a conflict party or parties to come to/continue with the negotiation; (2) expanding the range of actors directly or indirectly included in the mediation; (3) coordinating among third-parties; (4) monitoring and advising on implementation as part of formal follow-up mechanisms.

Congestion of actors

We are seeing a **congestion of mediators in geopoliticised environments**. More actors now possess the capacity to influence conflict management than at any point in the past, including states, international organisations, NGOs, and private actors. This congestion of actors both reflects and reinforces the declining role of multilateral coordination mechanisms. As coordination bodies are sidelined, states face stronger incentives to pursue unilateral initiatives or form ad hoc coalitions.



Mediation in Sudan has seen multiple third-party actors active simultaneously since 2023.

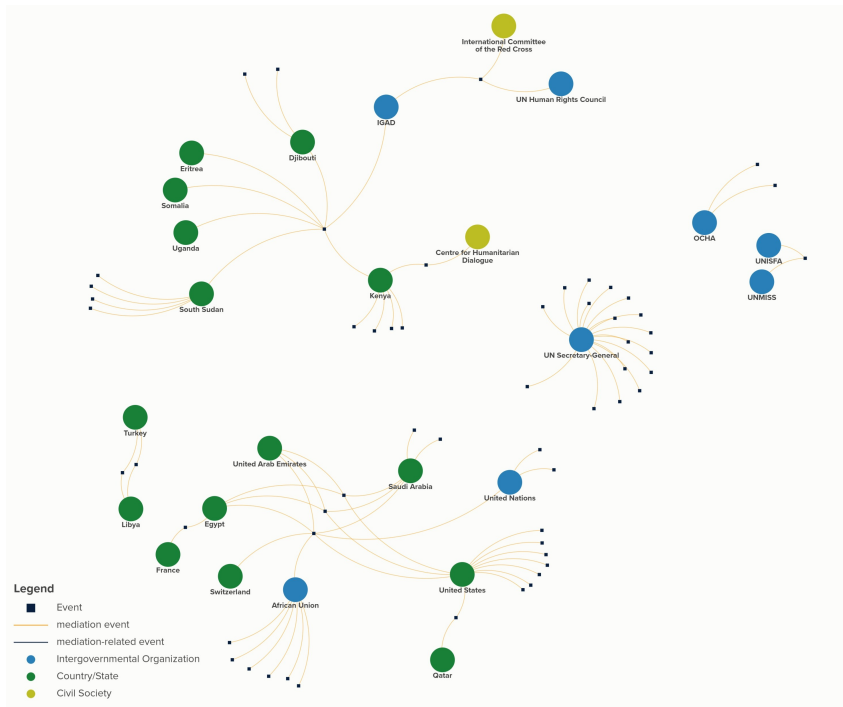
Importance of regional powers and neighbours

Regional powers have always been important peace actors, but states such as Egypt, Kenya, Qatar, Türkiye, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates have become increasingly prominent mediators over the past decade, particularly in issue-specific and neighbourhood-based efforts. Evidence from MEND shows that neighbouring countries are consistently among the most active mediators across conflicts. In 2024 alone, Egypt was involved in agreements in all its neighbours (Libya, Israel, Sudan), underscoring the central — yet frequently overlooked — role of regional powers in contemporary peacemaking.

Parallelisation of initiatives

The growing **parallelisation of initiatives** signals a structural shift in which peace efforts increasingly serve as arenas for geopolitical competition among third parties rather than vehicles for collective problem-solving. Mediation landscape today often involves ad hoc coalitions operating alongside processes convened by international organisations, with parallel initiatives increasingly designed to compete with or undermine alternative efforts. Instead of converging around a single framework, external actors sponsor competing processes that **enable conflict parties to forum-shop**. Such initiatives may produce limited gains but their competitive logic results in a pattern of repeated interruptions and continual stop-start dynamics.

Sudan mediation clusters (2024–25)



In Sudan 2024–25, mediation efforts have involved multiple, sometimes overlapping, networks of actors.

Issue-specific mediation and role of small and medium powers

Issue-specific mediation is on the rise, with focused initiatives addressing discrete problems such as partial ceasefires, hostage exchanges, or humanitarian access. These efforts function as stopgaps that compensate for the paralysis of comprehensive negotiations. They also create spaces for experimentation and allow small and medium powers to cultivate and project their identities as peacemakers.

Case-specific examples

Ukraine: While US diplomacy has attracted most attention, several concrete mediation outcomes have been delivered by smaller and regional actors. Türkiye, working with the UN, played a central role in negotiating the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which enabled the export of Ukrainian grain and mitigated wider food security risks. The United Arab Emirates has acted as a trusted intermediary in multiple prisoner-of-war exchanges between Russia and Ukraine.

Yemen: Amid stalled political talks, Oman has played a key facilitative role in enabling prisoner-of-war exchanges between the parties.

Israel–Gaza: Alongside high-profile efforts led by the US, Qatar and Egypt, smaller states have delivered narrow, issue-specific agreements. In February 2024, Norway facilitated a temporary financial arrangement allowing the transfer of Palestinian clearance revenues, helping to avert a fiscal collapse of the Palestinian Authority. In March 2024, Cyprus led negotiations to establish a maritime humanitarian corridor, enabling sea-based delivery of aid to Gaza.

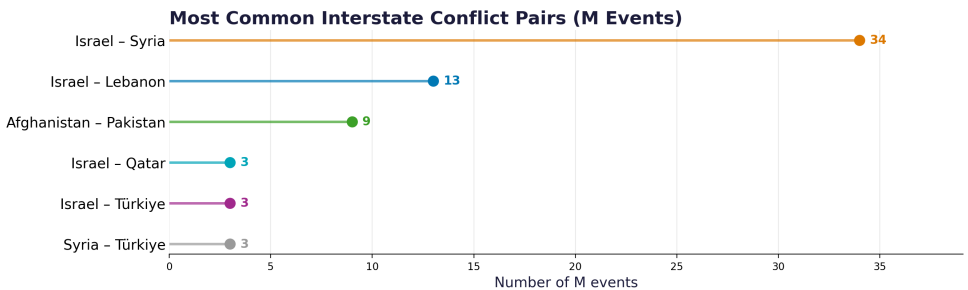
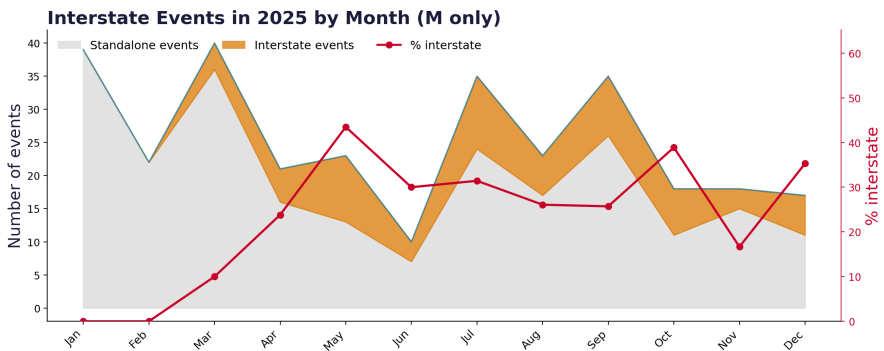
Post-Assad Syria: From April 2025, Azerbaijan emerged as an intermediary in efforts to deconflict Israeli and Turkish military activity in Syria, later extending its role to mediation between Israel and Syria.

Afghanistan: During 2025, Qatar acted as a principal intermediary between Taliban authorities and Western governments, including the UK, US, and Canada. Through sustained facilitation, Qatar enabled a series of agreements leading to the release of Western detainees held by the Taliban, underscoring its role as a trusted go-between in the absence of formal diplomatic relations.

Mediation in interstate and internationalised conflicts

Mediation in interstate conflicts is on the rise. Although MEND primarily follows intrastate conflicts—due to case selection being based on the UN Security Council agenda—the frequency with which mediation efforts became entangled with interstate disputes points to an extraordinarily high degree of internationalisation of conflicts.

As seen in the chart below, between May and October 2025, a **third of all mediation events pertained to interstate disputes.** While MEND has recorded such dynamics in previous years, 2025 marked a notable departure from earlier patterns, with interstate mediation appearing far more frequently as an overlay on complex, multi-actor wars rather than as a distinct diplomatic track.



Implication

Internationalised conflict systems have consequences for mediation processes. International actors involved in mediation often become active in multiple conflicts, and some actors are both conflict and mediation parties. By reframing mediation strategies around interconnected conflict systems rather than discrete conflicts, policymakers should support mediation architectures capable of operating across conflict boundaries, including regional spillovers and interstate overlays. This involves reframing support from “peace processes” to mediation systems.

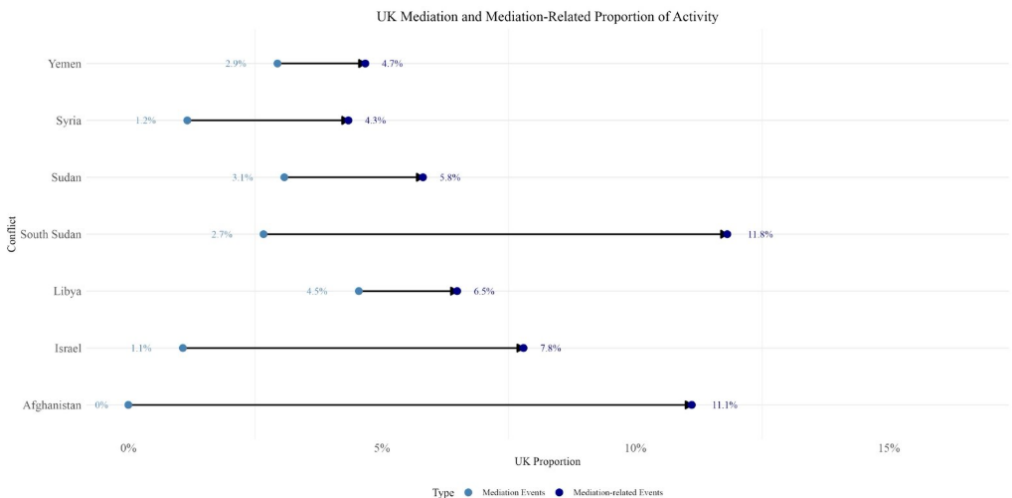
Importance of mediation-related activities

What matters within the mediation landscape is changing. As mediation environments become more crowded and competitive, and conflicts increasingly merge into interconnected conflict complexes, **mediation-related activities are becoming more important for understanding why some initiatives succeed while others fail.** Direct mediation between belligerents still matters. However, it is now equally important how and when third parties can be brought to coordinate rather than compete, how local participation can be broadened, and how links across multiple conflicts can be managed. Focusing on these mediation-related activities rather than direct mediation increasingly offers a pathway for actors concerned with sustainable peace to define and exercise a constructive role.

This finding also underscores the need for broader and more systematic data. Sustained support for **high-resolution, event-level datasets capable of capturing the full spectrum of mediation activities** and cross-conflict connections — such as MEND — is essential for tracking contemporary mediation dynamics, assessing effectiveness, identifying emerging mediators, and informing timely policy decisions.

The UK as a mediator

The UK has developed a particular comparative advantage in facilitative activities, notably participation in coordination efforts and initiatives aimed at broadening participation. Across all conflicts tracked in MEND, the UK appears far more frequently in mediation-related events than as a direct mediator, reflecting its new emphasis on supporting processes rather than leading negotiations.

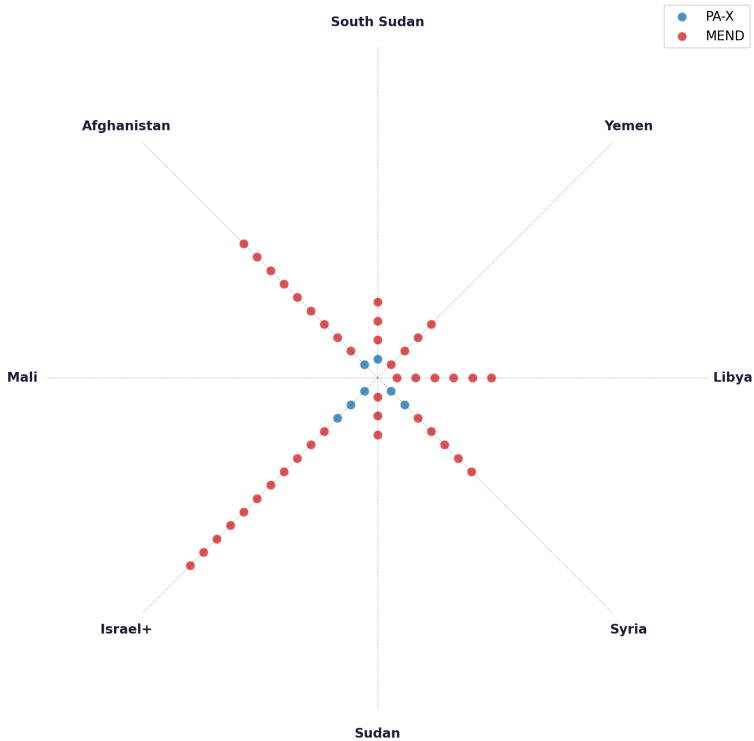


Percentage of all mediation and all mediation-related (MR) events with UK involvement across conflicts (MEND 2023–2025).

The changing nature of agreements

A significant portion of agreements achieved through mediation are informal or unwritten. Rather than emerging from structured peace processes, they often result from ad hoc negotiations, backchannel diplomacy, or humanitarian necessity. This reflects a broader trend in contemporary conflict mediation, where formal legal agreements are increasingly rare, and pragmatic, short-term arrangements dominate the landscape.

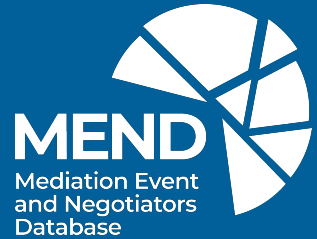
Agreements in PA-X vs MEND, 2025



The blue dots represent agreements identified in MEND that are also included in the PA-X Peace Agreements Database, while the red dots represent agreements recorded through MEND events only. PA-X collects formal, written, and publicly available peace agreements, whereas MEND also captures informal or unwritten agreements, such as ceasefire announcements or prisoner and hostage exchanges. The chart shows that these informal agreements continue to make up the majority of agreements in 2025, consistent with patterns observed in recent years.



PeaceRep
Peace and Conflict
Resolution Evidence
Platform



MEND
Mediation Event
and Negotiators
Database

Mediation Event and Negotiators Database

The Mediation Event and Negotiators Database (MEND) is an evolving dataset by PeaceRep researchers at the University of St Andrews and the University of Edinburgh. MEND offers a comprehensive record of peacemaking efforts within major armed conflicts, systematically tracking all mediation and mediation-related events involving external third-party actors — regardless of whether these efforts result in formal peace agreements.

Suggested citation

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PeaceRep

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