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Financial Dependencies and Conflict Resolution: The Role of Militarised Mediators in Modern Insurgencies

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ABSTRACT

In modern conflicts, 'militarised mediators' - external actors who fund rebel groups and mediate the conflict - pose a paradox for conflict dynamics. This study examines their impact in Africa using the UCDP External Support Dataset and African Peace Processes Database. fixed effect regression assesses whether external funding of rebels enhances mediator leverage in brokering peace agreements, while Cox hazard models evaluate peace durability post-agreement. Findings suggest external funding hastens settlements but reduces peace longevity. The dual role of militarised mediators introduces conflicting interests, undermining implementation. The study contributes to rebel finance and peacebuilding literatures by linking funding to mediation effectiveness.

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Introduction

Negotiated settlement, often mediated by an impartial and non-coercive third party, remains the ideal pathway to ending intra-state conflict according to international norms and conflict policy (Piccolino 2023). Nonetheless, contemporary peace processes increasingly rely on third parties that occupy multiple and often contradictory roles within conflicts. Alongside mediation efforts, external actors now frequently provide military, financial, or political support to belligerents, and in some cases become direct participants in the conflict itself. While such complex forms of intervention are not new, their implications for conflict management, negotiated settlement, and post-conflict stability remain underexplored within both policy and academic debates. This is particularly significant given broader disciplinary discussions surrounding the effectiveness, impartiality, and legitimacy of mediation in civil wars, where

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assumptions of mediator neutrality have long shaped both theory and practice. Understanding the relationship between rebel financing and mediation is therefore essential for explaining not only whether peace agreements are reached, but also the kinds of peace they produce.

Increasingly, mediation strategies in intra-state violent conflicts have moved away from ideal-type conceptions of mediation as a purely facilitative and non-coercive process towards forms of intervention in which mediators possess substantial strategic stakes in the conflict's outcome. These developments challenge conventional distinctions between mediation, patronage, and intervention, raising important questions about how leverage, coercion, and material dependency shape bargaining dynamics and compliance incentives. For policymakers, this evolution presents a dilemma: actors with the greatest leverage over armed groups may also possess interests that complicate the pursuit of durable peace. The conflict in Syria illustrates these dynamics clearly. Turkey, for example, funded and supported the Free Syrian Army–later the Syrian National Army–while simultaneously participating in multilateral peace initiatives led by Russia and the United Nations. Such cases demonstrate how the role of external actors in civil wars has evolved (Howard and Stark 2017, Terpstra 2020), with many now functioning as 'militarised mediators' – entities that engage in war-making while simultaneously mediating the conflict.

Research into the impact of unconventional mediator-types, such as those that have an explicit bias towards a belligerent or utilise coercive measures to elicit agreements, reveals that characteristics traditionally considered unideal for impartial and effective mediation are perhaps conducive to the successful brokering of peace agreements and have a variable impact on the durability of peace (Dixon 1996, Kydd 2003, Beardsley *et al*. 2006, Svensson 2007b, 2009, Duursma *et al*. 2025). Most of these studies conceptualise bias towards belligerents and power by observing an aggregate of financial, military, and technical support to belligerents or the peace process. As well as biased mediation, these studies often instrumentalise the typology of 'power mediators', third parties that utilise coercion, material incentives, and/or ideational clout to elicit agreements among conflict actors (Kleiboer 2002). The contours of these typologies are broad and describe the various manifestations of power and biased mediation, not easily lending themselves to granular analysis of mediation behaviours and outcomes. While several studies have emerged focusing on the specific impacts of coercive mediation – the use of military force and mediation practices simultaneously – on conflict resolution (Touval 1996, Duursma *et al*. 2025, Hellmüller and Salaymeh 2025), there is an analytical gap related to the impact of mediators that fund rebel groups on conflict resolution, which this study seeks to address. Recent studies on rebel financing have concentrated on the dynamics of rebel economies, the implications of resource-rich rebel groups, and the strategies employed by rebel leaders to garner support (Kubota 2020, Revkin 2020, Thaler 2022).

Our contribution bridges the existing literature by highlighting the nuanced impact of rebels' financial dependencies on conflict resolution. Specifically, we focus on third-party financial support to rebel groups, examining how actors who simultaneously fund conflict actors and mediate conflicts – what we term 'militarised mediators' – affect both the likelihood of reaching peace agreements and their subsequent durability. In this study we assess the impact of this mediator type, specifically focusing on third-parties that finance rebel groups. Our work highlights a unique paradox in the role of external funding for insurgent groups during mediation: while such funding can increase the likelihood of reaching peace agreements, it simultaneously reduces agreement longevity. This is because mediators that fund specific rebel groups have an interest in securing their stake in the conflict, contributing to the negotiation or imposition of inorganic settlements. When the mediator disengages because 'their work is done' – an agreement has been successfully negotiated – implementation ultimately relies on costly guarantorship and conflict actors' concessions. Because the mediator typically relies on the information provided by a limited group of conflict actors, those that it supports, the agreement may not satisfy all conflict actors and the perceived costs of implementing an imposed or heavily externally influenced agreement mount. Consequently, the agreement becomes fragile, increasing the likelihood of conflict recidivism.

This dual impact of external funding is a central contribution of our research, shedding light on the complex relationship between financial support and conflict resolution over time. This phenomenon underscores the pivotal role that militarised mediators can play in shaping the trajectory of peace, as they may expedite the signing of agreements where conflicts may otherwise become protracted. However, the involvement of such actors introduces further questions regarding the sustainability of these agreements. The results of this study suggest that peace deals brokered by militarised mediators are slightly more susceptible to failure, raising concerns about the durability of peace in contexts where financial interests intertwine with mediation efforts.

This study seeks to make a significant contribution to the existing literature by rigorously examining the intricate relationship between militarised mediation, rebel financing, and the durability of peace agreements in internal conflicts. Specifically, this study analyses the impact of mediation undertaken by third parties that also fund rebels' efforts to wage war. To achieve this, we employ fixed effects panel linear regression to assess the likelihood of agreement signing contingent upon the presence of a third-party militarised mediator. Furthermore, a Cox Proportional Hazard analysis is implemented to evaluate the durability and longevity of peace agreements facilitated by these militarised mediators. In terms of scope, this article seeks to understand this dynamic in the African context due to the availability of mediation data. Moreover, the continent's complex conflict landscape, often marked by ethnic dimensions, protractedness, and frequent regional interventions, offers a compelling case for examining the impact of militarised mediation on peace processes (DeRouen and Sobek 2004, Duursma and Tamm 2021). This research aims to explain the conditions under which these mediators either succeed or fail in fostering enduring peace.

The work is organised as follows: the literature will be reviewed to explore applied theories related to biased and manipulative mediation – particularly towards intra-state conflict – rebel financing and principal-agent dynamics, and the likelihood of peace durability. Next, the hypotheses will be introduced, followed by a description of the data and methodology, culminating in the presentation of the results. The findings will then be discussed alongside robustness measures; the use of an extended vignette drawn from the data, namely that of Chad's support for the Justice and Equality Movement in Sudan, illustrates these dynamics. This is followed by concluding remarks on the implications of the study and suggestions for future research on the role of rebel financing in peacebuilding processes.

The Militarised Mediation Paradox: Financing Rebellion, Facilitating Peace

Policymakers and practitioners frequently advocate mediation as an ideal tool for conflict resolution. The ideal form of mediation is thought to consist of impartial and inclusive facilitation of dialogue between conflict parties by a third entity without recourse to coercion. This type of mediation is highlighted by the United Nations' Guidance for Effective Mediation (2012) as a blueprint. However, global conflicts are not homogeneous, and their evolving contexts reorder not only the priorities and concerns of the international community but also the pathway to durable peace and, consequently, prevailing understandings of best practice in peace mediation (Cho and Landau 2023). Recently, academic and policy communities have placed greater emphasis on mediation efforts by third parties that are directly or indirectly involved in the waging of the same conflict, something we term *militarised mediation*.

This study examines the impact of actions taken by militarised mediators that specifically finance the military activities of rebel groups. The concept of militarised mediation, while fitting into the broader typologies of biased and power mediation, is specific in that it does not assume that third parties that finance a local belligerent's military cause are deliberately doing so to steer belligerents towards a resolution. This departs from prevailing understandings of biased, manipulative, coercive, or power mediation, which view external support as geared specifically towards bringing the negotiating parties closer to an agreement – often one that aligns with the mediator's interests (Svensson 2007a, 2007b, 2009, Ruhe and Volg 2021). In these definitions, sticks and carrots are leveraged with the specific intent of manipulating the conflict parties' cost–benefit calculations to bring them to the negotiating table or accept particular terms of an agreement.

Here, we develop the theoretical framework using concepts from the extant literature on international interventions in conflict, principal–agent relations, rebel financing, and mediation to generate our hypotheses. This study assesses the impact of militarised mediation in favour of rebel groups on the successful negotiation of peace agreements and the duration of peace, defined here as the absence of battle-related deaths after the signing of a peace agreement. By measuring the impact of such mediation on the duration of peace, we seek to understand the dynamics at play when third parties that have material stakes in rebel groups are involved in the conflict's mediation. In assessing the extant literature on: the impact of biased and manipulative mediation on peace processes and peace durability; the effects of external financial support for rebel groups; and the principal–agent dynamics shaping incentive structures and constraints on rebel and government behaviour during peace processes, we highlight and fill a theoretical gap in the literature relating to the impact of militarised mediation undertaken by third parties that also finance rebel groups on conflict termination and peace durability.

Our work contributes to this literature by showing how militarised mediators, given their biases and ability to constrain actors, incentivise the signing of peace agreements but also impact post-agreement dynamics towards conflict recidivism. By integrating the impact of militarised mediation into the broader framework of peace agreement dynamics, our study sheds new light on the role of external actors in peace processes by highlighting the tension between mediation efforts intended to reduce conflict and activities that may inadvertently compromise the long-term viability of brokered peace settlements.

What is a Militarised Mediator?

Building on works such as Kyle Beardsley *et al*. (2006), Kydd (2003), and Svensson (2007a, 2007b, 2009), this study de-romanticises mediation as an idealised form of conflict resolution by examining the short- and long-term effects of unconventional mediation practices. In particular, it focuses on the presence of mediators that are biased and, at times, manipulative, and who concurrently engage in other conflict activities that seek to bolster belligerents' ability to prosecute war. In this case, we look specifically at the effect of mediators' financing of rebel groups within the conflict environment on peace outcomes.

The concept of the *militarised mediator* fits within the broader category of biased mediation, in which mediators provide financial, military, or political support to belligerents. However, it specifies a distinct form of bias: the financing of belligerents' military activities. Because of this interest in the victory of a particular belligerent, militarised mediators tend to be state actors rather than inter-government financial bodies, like the World Bank or International Monetary Fund. There are also important distinctions and conceptual similarities between militarised mediators and external intervenors in that they may both be involved in the militarisation and escalation of the conflict, but only militarised mediators are concurrently mediating the conflict in which they are providing support towards the waging of war.

Militarised mediation differs in important ways from established typologies of *manipulative, power, or coercive mediation*. These forms of mediation typically involve third parties leveraging their economic, military, or political capabilities to steer conflict parties towards a preferred outcome, using inducements or pressure to secure compliance and advance the mediator's interests (Kleiboer 2002). Such strategies are commonly intended to 'ripen' conflicts by convincing belligerents of the futility of continued fighting and encouraging negotiated settlements (Zartman 1995). As a result, these mediators are not merely brokers but active participants in the bargaining process, blurring the distinction between mediators, conflict actors, and veto players (Nathan 2025).

Coercive mediation, in particular, emphasises the third party's use of force or the threat of force to influence negotiations. It can be defined as mediation that relies on the mediator's coercive capacity to bring parties to the table or to compel them to sign an agreement (Svensson 2007b, Kuperman 2022). Examples include Russia's integrated military–diplomatic intervention in Syria and US-led NATO mediation in Bosnia and Herzegovina leading to the Dayton Agreement. Allard Duursma *et al*. (2025) show that coercive mediation is associated with a higher likelihood of peace agreements, but also with agreements that tend to collapse more quickly. However, there remains an analytical gap concerning the effects of mediation by third parties that finance a belligerent – particularly rebel groups – on both the incidence and durability of peace agreements.

To address this gap, we distinguish militarised mediation from power and coercive mediation. We define it as a form of mediation in which third parties finance the military activities of a conflict actor while simultaneously engaging in mediation, without explicitly utilising their financial capacity to coerce parties towards negotiations or agreement. The financing of rebels and mediation are part of the third party's bargaining in the conflict. Militarised mediators thus enhance a belligerent's military capabilities while participating in the peace process. Crucially, this support differs from that associated with power or coercive mediation in two respects. First, financial backing is not necessarily intended to induce a negotiated settlement. Rather than using support instrumentally to compel compromise, mediators may finance a belligerent to hedge between the prospect of military victory and a preferred negotiated outcome. Financial support is therefore not always a deliberate tool of manipulation, even though it may have such effects. Second, mediation and military financing may pursue contradictory objectives: mediation aims to reduce violence, while financial support may intensify it. In this sense, the mediator may contribute to the militarisation of the dispute without actively seeking to coerce parties into agreement. Nonetheless, such biased support inevitably constrains and incentivises belligerent behaviour. Illustrative examples include Qatar's mediation of the conflict in Gaza while funding Hamas and Turkey's financing of the Free Syrian Army while acting as a mediating guarantor in the Astana peace process.

Despite militarised mediation involving a variety of characteristics and behaviours that involve simultaneous mediation of the conflict and contributions to the conflict's militarisation, we focus, specifically, here, on direct financing towards rebels' war efforts as a core component of our dependent variable because it provides a clear and revealing indicator of both mediator bias and militarisation. Financial support is a tangible and overt form of backing that signals a third party's commitment to the conflict and its confidence in the supported actor. Financing entails the willingness to bear reputational and strategic costs and to entrust resources with relatively limited constraints, reflecting a strong alignment with the actor's military success. This makes financing particularly useful for capturing what it means for a mediator to be simultaneously biased and militarised. By contrast, military interventions–especially those not accompanied by financial support–may be undertaken nominally on behalf of a local actor while primarily serving the strategic interests of the intervening third party. Isolating external financing does not imply it is a group's only revenue stream, as armed groups typically pursue several extraction strategies at once (Fawcett Weiner 2026, this Special Issue).

Militarised Mediation and the Path to Peace Agreements: Financial Constraints as Bargaining Leverage

The type of mediation that is associated with a greater likelihood of signing peace agreements is debated. Dixon (1996) argues that pure mediation, albeit in inter-state conflict, which is non-coercive, impartial, and consensual, is associated with a greater likelihood of a peace agreement and non-escalation in violence. This impact of third-party mediation is also observed, if not more frequently, in studies assessing the effect of mediation that involve material or coercive incentives or constraints on belligerents locked in internal conflict (Svensson 2007a). Contrary to the study by Cunningham (2006), which demonstrated a correlation between the protractedness of internal conflict and the number of veto players involved in the conflict, several studies show that the presence of coercive or manipulative mediators increases the likelihood of conflict management measures or peace agreements, often terminating the conflict, even if temporarily. This is because mediators wield material and coercive leverage over belligerents to constrain their behaviour resulting in the increased likelihood of a quickly negotiated settlement (Reid 2015).

Biased mediation in internal conflict is also associated with a greater incidence of signed peace agreements. Such mediation is seen to be more credible by belligerents, even by the side for whom the mediator is not a supporter (Kydd 2003). This is because a biased mediator is thought to have and convey accurate information about the opposition, even if this results in concessions that go against their own preferences. This means the biased mediator is better able to identify the range in which bargaining can occur and deliver on promises due to their increased leverage over their preferred side (Menninga 2024). They help weaker conflict actors overcome their commitment issues to a negotiated settlement by acting as guarantors against spoiler activity (Fearon 1998, Zartman and Touval 2001, Walter 2002, Svensson 2007b). In this way, opposing sides are better convinced of the biased mediator's ability to guarantee the agreement by ensuring that they are either protected, if they are the preferred belligerent, or have the ability to ensure the opponent delivers on the agreement, in the case of the opposing belligerents. In this regard, in internal conflict, where governments stand to lose the greatest during a negotiated settlement, Svensson (2007b) argues that mediators that are biased towards the government are more successful in brokering negotiated settlements. Biased mediators are better able to allay the concerns of governments and incentivise rebels to overcome their commitment issues, as they seek to demonstrate their trustworthiness in the bargaining process. While Svensson (2007b) did not associate bias towards rebels with the same outcome, noting that rebels face greater challenges when committing to peace as the expectation is that they will disarm while governments will remain armed, our study shows that when bias is expressed through rebel financing, there is a similar effect. Elizabeth J. Menninga (2024) finds that where biased mediation is balanced in a civil war, there is a greater probability of reaching an agreement.

It is not to say that mediation is generally associated with a more durable peace, however (Quinn *et al.* 2013). Manipulative methods of mediation are best at securing peace agreements and crisis abatement, rather than a long-term sustainable political resolution. Much like these studies, we expect that militarised mediation – through the wielding of leverage to influence the bargaining process, and the simultaneous facilitation of dialogue, formulation of solutions, or manipulation of belligerents – induces a principal–agent relationship with rebel groups. This imposes constraints on belligerent behaviour, reduces commitment issues, and builds incentive structures for combatants to commit to peace agreements (See also: Bercovitch 1992, Fearon 1995, Zartman 1995, Powell 1999). Because of this, the militarised mediation type can be considered best at achieving short-term, rather than long-term, peace goals (Beardsley *et al*. 2006, Reid 2015).

Building on these insights about mediation effectiveness, we examine how external financing specifically shapes rebel behaviour and conflict dynamics. Our theoretical contribution integrates these insights on the mechanisms of unconventional forms of mediation with the dynamics of rebel financing to examine how third-party mediators who also finance rebel groups constrain those groups' behaviour pre- and post-peace agreement.

The Principal-Agent Dynamics of Financial Support

Studies suggest that rebel financing by third parties generally inhibits, rather than facilitates, a negotiated resolution to internal conflict. Hoekstra (2019) argues that external state support towards rebel groups enhances their operational capacity against the incumbent regime, thereby increasing pressure on the government. However, this support is often short-lived or insufficient to enable decisive victory due to opposition against the sponsoring government, leading to conflict termination that is unfavourable towards rebels. Paradoxically, external financing of rebels has been associated with both a limited impact on the escalation to civil war and a higher likelihood of conflict outbreak or intensification (Rubin and Malone 2024). When rebel groups receive funding from external states, the (belligerent) government may anticipate a surge in rebel strength and pre-emptively initiate conflict (Salehyan 2010). Similarly, Sawyer *et al*. (2017) argue that highly fungible support to rebel groups makes it less likely that the rival government will agree to a peace deal. Furthermore, because continued funding is contingent on the rebels' ability to actively pursue their cause through armed struggle, negotiation may be perceived by both supporters and constituents as capitulation or collaboration with the enemy. Support for rebels has also been linked to the internationalisation of intra-state conflicts. In particular, states aiming to shape political developments within rival states finance rebel groups rather than directly intervening militarily (Salehyan 2010). This pattern is especially evident in the African context, where mutual involvement in internal conflicts is a recurring feature among rival states contributing to their protractedness (Duursma and Tamm 2021).

Despite the negative impact of financial rebel support on peace agreement and its durability, according to these studies, the present study investigates how conflict outcomes are shaped when a rebel funder *also undertakes mediation* in the same conflict. While prior work has shown that external intervention and an increase in the number of veto players often lead to conflict escalation and prolongation (Cunningham 2006), other research suggests that the financing of rebel groups may simultaneously constrain their conduct during war. For example, Virginia Page Fortna *et al*. (2018) find that domestic financing of rebel groups reduces their likelihood of enacting acts of terror, and that international financing has a similar – albeit weaker – effect. This dynamic may stem from the rebels' concern for legitimacy or a fear of undermining their standing among both domestic and international audiences. In a similar vein, Stein (2022) demonstrates that overt material support from external actors disincentivises rebels from targeting civilians. This is because visible support increases third-party oversight, and to maintain funding, rebel groups moderate their behaviour. Comparable legitimacy considerations shape the conduct of groups financed through illicit economies (Serwat and Bird 2026, this Special Issue).

So how might this dynamic shift if the donor is also serving as a mediator? One possible explanation for the paradoxical effects of external support is that such support may constrain rebel behaviour. The constraining effects of external financing on rebel behaviour can be understood more systematically through principal–agent theory. When a third party finances a rebel group, they establish a principal–agent relationship in which the financier acts as the principal providing resources and the rebel group serves as the agent carrying out actions on the ground (Shapiro 2013). This relationship is characterised by inherent information asymmetries: the financier cannot perfectly observe how resources are used or monitor all rebel activities in real-time (Salehyan 2010). To maintain the flow of funding, rebel groups must signal their compliance with the financier's preferences and demonstrate that they remain worthy recipients of support (Carter 2012).

This principal–agent dynamic creates structural constraints on rebel behaviour that go beyond simple material dependence. Even when funding is not explicitly conditional, rebels understand that their actions are being monitored and that future support depends on their perceived trustworthiness and effectiveness (Byman 2008). The need to maintain reputational capital with their financier incentivises rebels to moderate their tactics, avoid actions that might embarrass or compromise their patron, and demonstrate responsiveness to the financier's strategic guidance (Salehyan 2011). This dynamic is particularly salient when the financier also serves as a mediator. In such cases, rebels face dual pressures: they must signal their military capability and political resolve to strengthen their bargaining position, while simultaneously demonstrating their willingness to negotiate in good faith and accept mediated solutions (Nilsson 2006).

Thus, the principal–agent relationship provides the microfoundations for understanding why externally financed rebels may be more amenable to accepting peace agreements brokered by their financier. In this way, the financier-mediator possesses credible leverage over the rebel group through their control of resource flows, encouraging all sides to agree to negotiated settlements. Rebels' financial dependence on the mediator encourages their compliance with the third party's plan. Meanwhile, governments seek to cut their losses against a bolstered rebel front. Governments may also obtain guarantees from the third party to hold the rebels accountable to the terms of the agreement (Cetinyan 2002). Moreover, because the financier has invested material resources in the rebel cause, they have a vested interest in seeing the conflict resolved in a manner that validates their support and protects their investment (San-Akca 2016). This alignment of interests between financier and rebel – combined with the structural leverage inherent in the principal–agent relationship – creates conditions favourable to the negotiation and signing of peace agreements. This delegation logic is not uncontested: Sanjida Amin (2026, this Special Issue) argues that foreign sponsorship can consolidate insurgent leadership authority instead of constraining it, though our concern here is with the sponsor's leverage over a group's conduct in bargaining, not with authority within the organisation.

The Strategic Dynamics of Power Imbalances and Mediation

The type of actor that gains support in conflict matters. This is because the manner in which rebels and governments behave, their strategic calculations, and their room to bargain depends on their differing aims, capabilities, and characteristics. For example, governments do not need to seek the recognition of international and domestic audiences in the same manner as rebels do. In general, during intra-state conflict, governments have more to lose and rebels have more to gain from a negotiated settlement because incumbent governments tend to start from a position of power and are usually required to relinquish power to rebel forces under the terms of peace agreements. This asymmetry shapes the incentive structures of both actors, often making third-party mediation more acceptable to rebels than governments (Melin and Svensson 2009).

Much of the literature on external support to rebel groups suggests that such assistance prolongs and intensifies civil conflict by reducing incentives for compromise and enabling insurgent groups to continue fighting despite battlefield setbacks. However, these conclusions generally assume that the external sponsor operates independently of the diplomatic processes intended to resolve the conflict. When the same external actor simultaneously finances rebel groups and mediates negotiations between belligerents, the strategic implications change in important ways. In this scenario, the external actor is not merely a sponsor but also an institutional participant in the bargaining process, capable of shaping both the military balance and the negotiation environment.

The effect of this support asymmetry in tandem with the mediator's privileged and dominant position within the peace process is that the battle-weary government may perceive the benefit in cutting its losses. A negotiated settlement appears appealing when pitted against strong rebel groups and a mediator primed to support spoiler activity if resistance to its endeavours threatens a favourable deal. Empowered, although not omnipotent, rebel groups perceive the benefit in consolidating their territorial or political gains in a peace agreement brokered and backed by their financier. Militarised mediators that fund rebel groups' war efforts therefore possess three complementary tools: they can (1) increase support to rebel groups, thereby raising pressure on their opponents; (2) they can also perform the informational role characteristic of biased mediators by understanding and signalling the strategic capacities of their preferred side; and (3) they can incentivise agreement from both sides by eliciting compliance from supported rebel groups within the principal–agent dynamic, which, in turn, signals to the opponent the mediator's ability to elicit rebels' compliance within the bargaining process.

Based on a principal–agent dynamic, we argue that the presence of militarised mediators – specifically those that provide direct financial support to rebel groups – can constrain the rebels' ability to act as spoilers and reshape the incentive structures for both sides to pursue a negotiated settlement. The financial relationship between mediator and rebel group creates a principal–agent structure in which the mediator, as principal, retains leverage over the supported rebels, who function as the agent. Because the mediator provides critical resources necessary for sustaining the rebellion, it can exert influence over the rebels' strategic behaviour, including their willingness to enter negotiations and agree to mediated outcomes. This relationship allows the mediator not only to strengthen the supported actor militarily but also to discipline that actor during bargaining, reducing the risk that the rebel group undermines negotiations through opportunistic behaviour.

Our theory is built upon three interconnected dynamics: (1) the balance of power between belligerents shaped, in part, by the mediator's biased financial support; (2) conflict actors' responses to the incentive structures created by these imbalances and the mediation process; and (3) belligerents' responses to the evolving strategic environment following a negotiated agreement. These dynamics collectively generate conditions that address one of the central obstacles to negotiated settlements in civil wars: the credible commitment problem. Peace agreements are elusive and frequently fail because belligerents cannot trust that their opponents will adhere to the terms of the settlement once incentive structures shift (Fearon 1995, 2004). In the context of militarised mediation by a sponsor, however, the bargaining process is shaped by a dual structure of compliance: the mediator retains leverage over the supported rebels through continued financial and logistical assistance, while the strengthened rebel group maintains the capacity to retaliate should the government reject negotiations. In this way, the credibility of negotiated commitments reduces incentives for opportunistic defection, which incentivises agreement, but may not necessarily incentivise adherence to its terms.

The interplay between this principal–agent dynamic and inter-belligerent support and power imbalances is reflected in rebels' relative strength, enhancing their capacity to bargain, apply pressure to opposing sides, and influence recourse to mediation. Govinda Clayton (2013) contends that stronger rebel groups are better equipped to overcome challenges to strategic bargaining. By presenting a credible military challenge to the government due, at least in part, to the financial support of the mediator, relatively stronger rebel contingents are better able to threaten the survival of incumbent regimes. This raises the stakes of the conflict and increases the likelihood that governments view negotiation and mediation as preferable to continued warfare. Furthermore, strong rebel movements possess greater leverage within negotiation processes, which can translate into the inclusion of more robust enforcement mechanisms within peace agreements. Strong rebel groups, particularly those with external backers, are better positioned to respond should the government renege on the terms of an agreement (Gent 2011).

Our theory builds on three interconnected dynamics: (1) the balance of power between belligerents, shaped in part by the mediator's biased financial support; (2) conflict actors' responses to the incentive structures created by these imbalances and the mediation process; and (3) belligerents' responses to the evolving strategic environment following a negotiated agreement. These dynamics collectively address a central obstacle to civil war settlement: the credible commitment problem. Peace agreements frequently fail because belligerents cannot trust that opponents will adhere to terms once incentives shift (Fearon 1995, 2004). When a sponsor simultaneously finances rebels and mediates the conflict, however, it introduces a dual enforcement structure: the mediator retains leverage over the supported rebels through continued financial and logistical assistance, while the strengthened rebels can retaliate if the government rejects negotiations, enhancing the credibility of negotiated commitments and reducing incentives for opportunistic defection. This principal–agent dynamic interacts with inter-belligerent support – and even power – asymmetries, reflected in rebels' relative strength, which enhances their capacity to bargain, pressure opponents, and influence recourse to mediation.

As Clayton (2013) observes, stronger rebel groups are better able to overcome challenges to strategic bargaining. By presenting a credible military threat, bolstered in part by the mediator's support, strong rebels can raise the stakes of conflict, making negotiation and mediation more attractive to governments. In addition, powerful rebel movements wield greater leverage in negotiations, which can be used to secure robust enforcement mechanisms within peace agreements, and those with external backers are especially capable of responding effectively if the government reneges on agreed terms (Gent 2011). In addition to strengthening rebels materially, militarised mediators also benefit from informational advantages associated with biased mediation (Kydd 2003). Because the mediator maintains close ties with its supported client, it possesses superior knowledge of the rebel group's capabilities, intentions, and constraints. This information enables the mediator to credibly signal the strength and resolve of the supported rebels to the government, thereby shaping expectations about the likely trajectory of the conflict. Such signalling can reduce uncertainty during negotiations and increase the credibility of threats and promises made during bargaining.

Taken together, these dynamics can accelerate the emergence of the conditions identified by I. William Zartman (1995) as a 'mutually hurting stalemate'. While stalemates are often treated as endogenous products of battlefield developments, militarised mediators may actively contribute to their emergence by strengthening rebel groups and increasing the costs of continued conflict for governments. As government leaders confront the prospect of mounting losses or prolonged warfare against a strengthened opponent backed by a committed external supporter, negotiation may appear increasingly attractive relative to continued fighting.

Finally, the dual role of financier and mediator may also reduce the risks posed by spoilers and fragmentation within rebel movements. External support often fuels internal divisions among insurgent organisations, creating factions with incentives to undermine negotiations (Cunningham 2011, pp. -879–882, Bakke *et al*. 2012, pp. 268–271, Tamm 2016, pp. 603–605). However, when the provider of support also acts as mediator, it possesses both: (1) the leverage to discipline potential spoilers by conditioning continued assistance on participation in negotiations and compliance with mediated agreements; and (2) the capacity and will to support rebels' spoiler activity against their opponents to pressure them intoparticipation and compliance. In addition, militarised mediators may face reputational and strategic incentives to ensure that belligerents come to an agreement, as the failure of negotiations involving their clients may undermine their influence and diminish the value of their investment in the conflict. These reputational stakes further motivate militarised mediators to broker negotiated outcomes.

Post-Agreement Dynamics: When Incentives Fade and Constraints Dissolve

While we expect that militarised mediation will be associated with a greater likelihood of peace agreements, like other forms of unconventional mediation, extant studies debate the longer-term impact of third-party mediation. Third-party interventions in internal and internationalised internal conflicts, such as third-party mediation and peacekeeping, can provide the necessary leverage to ensure compliance with agreements and foster a conducive environment for peace; it has been positively correlated with long-lasting post-settlement peace (Bercovitch and DeRouen 2004, Regan and Aydin 2006, Beardsley 2008, Beber 2012, Campbell and Salvatore 2024). This may be associated with the nature of peace agreements in which third parties have been involved. Provisions for territorial autonomy and military integration are associated with longer standing peace agreements, while political power-sharing is negatively correlated, if not insignificant DeRouen *et al*. (2009). The same study links power mediation to greater provisions towards military pacts associated with a more durable peace. According to Svensson (2009), biased mediation in internal conflict, especially towards rebels, is associated with an increased likelihood of power-sharing pacts and third-party security guarantees, often associated with durable peace plans. This is because third parties seek to secure the interests of their chosen rebel group, synonymous with their stake in the conflict, and are more inclined to oversee the provision of the institutional guarantees of power-sharing and democracy, third-party security guarantees, and justice mechanisms. Meanwhile, pure mediation towards internal conflicts tends to result in a greater number of political and territorial power sharing stipulations (Svensson 2007a). This type of mediation, which relies on non-material persuasive and credibility leverage, has been associated with fostering a more durable peace in internal conflict contexts by Reid (2015). Also, the timing of mediation impacts its effectiveness. Mediation when violence in internal conflict is subsiding or prior to escalation can be more fruitful in bringing about a durable peace (Beardsley 2008).

Despite this, when external powers push belligerents in internal conflicts or civil wars to sign agreements that do not reflect the balance of power between combatants, peace is less durable (Werner and Yuen 2005). Toft (2010) also found that negotiated settlements to civil wars mediated by third parties, who used economic incentives and good offices to elicit a settlement, did not result in a more durable peace. Perhaps counterintuitively given international governments' emphasis on mediation and negotiated resolution, her study found that military victory on the side of the rebels tended to offer a more sustained peace, as this outcome was associated the persistence of a robust security sector and, therefore, the incoming government's ability to maintain order. However, the categorisation of civil war termination as either rebel/government victory or negotiated settlement does not account for nuanced and more complex civil war termination contexts or third-party action towards conflict termination.

Militarised mediators, in the cases explored in the present study, support rebel groups – perhaps hedging for their military victory – and they are engaged in the negotiated settlement of the conflict. Furthermore, military victories in internal conflict settings, especially at the local level, are often enshrined in negotiated agreements to secure military and political gains (Sosonowski 2023). As such, peace agreements are often instrumentalised to secure the interests of conflict actors and interested third parties, with consequences for the distribution of power, resources, and territory. Therefore, the configuration of these factors will impact the durability of peace in the post-agreement phase. Hence, this article asks what kind of impact the involvement of third parties that both support rebel victory and negotiated settlements have on conflict termination and the durability of peace.

The Dissolution of Principal-Agent Relations and the Return to Violence

While militarised mediators may facilitate the signing of peace agreements, such agreements are often unlikely to endure. In the short term, mediation can help identify mutually acceptable solutions for conflict actors and help actors overcome their commitment issues. Over time, however, mediation – especially of a biased kind – inflates the mediator’s influence, embedding agreements within behavioural constraints that depend on the mediator’s continued capacity and willingness to leverage costs, monitor compliance, and enforce commitments over all involved belligerents. As this capacity declines – due to gradual power transfer, the diminishing threat of resource withdrawal from rebel groups, and reduced capacity and desire by the third party to expend resources – the costs of compliance for combatants increase as do the potential returns from continued conflict (Beardsley 2008). As mediator influence wanes, so too do incentives to adhere to prior commitments, leading to shifting demands and increasingly fragile settlements (Toft 2010). The erosion of these constraints enables renewed efforts by parties to maximise their gains, often resulting in conflict recurrence. This fragility is compounded by the fact that peace agreements typically reflect a momentary balance of power rather than the full range of actors’ ambitions, particularly excluding those without third-party backing. Moreover, rebel strength is often contingent on continued external financial support. When external backers withdraw support after consolidating gains through an agreement, rebel groups’ relative strength and institutional capacity may erode. Actors disadvantaged by the settlement may then seek to revise the post-agreement status quo once mediator influence and rebel capacity decline, undermining peace durability.

These dynamics can be understood through a principal–agent framework, in which the constraints shaping rebel behaviour during conflict and negotiation undergo a fundamental transformation in the post-agreement period, creating conditions conducive to conflict recidivism. Once a peace agreement is signed, the principal–agent relationship between the militarised mediator and the rebel group either dissolves entirely or shifts into a qualitatively different form (Fortna 2004b). During conflict, this relationship is oriented towards prosecuting the war while remaining open to negotiation. Post-agreement, the mission that justified this relationship is ostensibly complete, and the militarised mediator's role shifts from active support to monitoring and enforcement – requiring greater impartiality and typically having fewer resources dedicated to this cause (Walter 2002).

This transition substantially weakens the structural constraints that previously moderated rebel behaviour. First, monitoring becomes more limited and less intensive in the post-agreement environment (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003). Whereas during active conflict the militarised mediator maintained close operational ties with rebel groups and possessed detailed, albeit potentially skewed and subjective, information about battlefield conditions and strategic decision-making, post-agreement monitoring is typically sporadic and focused narrowly on formal compliance with specific provisions rather than ongoing coordination (Fortna 2008). These changes significantly widen information asymmetries, reducing the principal's ability to detect and respond to agent defection (Hopmann 1996). Second, enforcement mechanisms weaken considerably. During negotiations, the threat of withdrawing support carried substantial leverage because it would have immediately undermined the rebel group's military capacity and bargaining position. After an agreement is signed, this threat loses much of its force: if funding has already been reduced or terminated as part of the transition to peace, there is little left to withdraw; if funding continues in support of post-conflict reconstruction or political integration, threatening its withdrawal may be perceived as jeopardising the peace process itself (Doyle and Sambanis 2006).

Most critically, rebel incentive structures are fundamentally altered in the post-agreement period. During conflict, demonstrating military effectiveness and political reasonableness helped secure continued financial backing, enhancing organisational capacity and bargaining power (Staniland 2012). Post-agreement, however, financial support is often reduced or withdrawn once the mediator's objectives are deemed fulfilled, leaving financially dependent rebel groups confronting severe resource constraints. This, in turn, undermines their organisational coherence and (re)distributive and governance capacities (Weinstein 2007). This post-agreement resource crisis incentivises alternative revenue streams or defection from the agreement in order to reassert territorial control or engage in extractive activities (Ross 2004).

In this context, the moral hazard inherent in principal–agent relationships becomes particularly acute (Kydd 2006). If rebel groups anticipate that financial support will be withdrawn regardless of their compliance – simply because the signing of the agreement marks the end of the financier's mission – they face weak incentives to bear the costs of faithful implementation. Defection, while risky, may appear more attractive than compliance with an agreement that leaves the group politically marginalised and materially weakened (Toft 2010). This dynamic is exacerbated by the fact that peace agreements frequently fail to address underlying grievances or long-term ambitions, instead reflecting a contingent balance of power at a specific moment in time (Kreutz 2010). Rebel groups that perceive themselves as shortchanged may interpret the withdrawal of financial backing as abandonment by their erstwhile patron, further eroding their commitment to peaceful compliance and increasing the likelihood of renewed conflict (Stedman 1997). Governments that perceive a weakened opponent may act opportunistically to rebalance control through violence.

The Withdrawal of Financial Support and Incentives for Recidivism

This dynamic is particularly pronounced in our cases because rebel groups benefiting from external funding by the mediator may find themselves at a crossroads once the mediator's role concludes and a peace agreement is signed. We expect that because rebel groups in these cases have benefited from external funding by the mediator, once the mediator's job is done, and a peace agreement has been signed, the motives for the militarised mediator's funding will diminish. We predict that this will incentivise rebel groups, that are used to increased external funding, to return to violent conflict to increase their lot post-agreement. As Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2004) highlight, rebel grievances and greed are closely related. Especially in the post-agreement phase, rebels draw upon conflict-induced grievances to increase their lot, drawing upon external support, usually from the diaspora, to restart conflict. This phenomenon explains the general tendency towards recidivism. However, we expect this dynamic to be more pronounced in our cases due to the prior relationship with the militarised mediator and the sudden withdrawal of financial support.

Furthermore, reflecting the paradoxical role militarised mediators play, those that tend to support rebel forces often have either kinship ties or political affiliation and may themselves seek to support rebels in increasing their power or access to resources post-agreement through further military or financial support. This dynamic is particularly prevalent in the African context, which is the focus of this study, where mutual interventions by state actors in neighbouring countries are often used as a substitute for direct interstate conflict with rival governments (Duursma and Tamm 2021). Because of the mediator's original biased support, we anticipate that the conflict actor is heavily reliant on the militarised mediator. In this way, this effect is even more pronounced within this type of mediator-belligerent relationship when the mediator's role shifts to one of monitoring and enforcement of the peace agreement, which requires a degree of impartiality. Therefore, their constraining capacity over rebel groups diminishes.

Hypotheses

While the literature on biased and power mediation reviewed above has primarily examined third-party economic, military, or political leverage used to coerce or incentivise peace agreements, these definitions often remain broad and encompass various forms of support. Our focus on direct financial support to rebel groups (in intrastate conflict) represents a specific and particularly revealing form of militarised mediation that warrants distinct theoretical consideration. Direct financing differs from other forms of support (e.g., military training, diplomatic backing, or provision of equipment) in several important ways. First, financial support is fungible; it can be allocated flexibly by rebel groups according to their most pressing needs, whether military, political, or social. Second, it represents a sustained commitment that creates ongoing dependencies and expectations between the mediator and the rebel group. Third, the flow of funds can be more easily monitored, adjusted, or withdrawn than other forms of support, giving the militarised mediator particularly strong leverage over rebel behaviour. Fourth, despite the ease with which this form of support can be withdrawn or altered, direct financing can signal deeper trust and alignment than other forms of support, as it entails fewer controls over how resources are ultimately used and requires the mediator to absorb potentially significant reputational costs if funds are misused.

This specificity matters for our theoretical predictions. The fungibility and sustainability of financial support mean that rebel groups develop operational dependencies that shape their strategic calculations differently than if they received, say, one-time military equipment transfers or sporadic diplomatic backing. The ease with which financial flows can be adjusted or terminated also gives militarised mediators more immediate and continuous leverage during negotiations. Conversely, when this financial support is withdrawn or reduced post-agreement, the shock to rebel group capacity and autonomy may be more severe than the withdrawal of other forms of support, potentially creating stronger incentives for recidivism. Furthermore, because financial support often comes with fewer explicit conditions than military training programs or peacekeeping deployments, its withdrawal leaves rebel groups with greater autonomy, but also greater desperation, to pursue their objectives through renewed violence if the post-agreement settlement proves unsatisfactory.

Therefore, our hypotheses specifically address the dynamics created by mediators who provide direct financial support to rebel groups, recognising that this particular form of militarised mediation may produce effects that are both more pronounced and more volatile than other forms of biased or power mediation examined in the existing literature.

These expectations are reflected in a dual hypothesis accounting for not only the ability of militarised mediators to incentivise agreement, but also continuous adherence to the terms of the peace agreement and non-violence. In this way, we try to address the reductionist equation of peace with a peace agreement, as so often peace agreements do not signal a decline in violence or the eradication of the causes of conflict. Based on the theoretical framework developed above, we predict that:

Hypothesis 1: Mediators that also function as external financial supporters for rebel groups will be more likely to broker peace agreements.

We expect that, in order to secure the continued support of the militarised mediator, rebel groups will be inclined to agree to a peace agreement brokered by such a mediator. We expect that militarised mediation both enhances the negotiating power of supported rebel groups and constrains them to accept the proposals of the mediator. Therefore, militarised mediators remove some of the commitment issues that rebel groups experience, making them more amenable to reaching agreements and thereby facilitating the peace process. As such, the dual role of mediators as both negotiators and supporters can create a more persuasive environment for the signing of peace agreements.

However, when it comes to the duration of post-agreement peace, we expect that as the mediator's leverage and utility decline, so too will the incentive structures to adhere to the terms of the agreement, resulting in conflict recidivism. The conflicting priorities of the mediators, who may have vested interests in the continuation of certain dynamics within the conflict, can lead to agreements that are more susceptible to breakdown. Furthermore, the reliance on external funding may create dependencies that limit the incentive structures for local parties to adhere to the terms of the agreement after mediation, ultimately jeopardising the durability of peace efforts.

Therefore, we expect that:

Hypothesis 2: The presence of militarised mediators in peace processes results in less durable agreements.

This hypothesis suggests that while militarised mediators may initially facilitate the signing of peace agreements, the inherent financial interests tied to their involvement and the erosion of the principal–agent dynamics can undermine the long-term sustainability of these agreements. Figure 1 presents a directed acyclic graph (DAG) summarising our theoretical framework, illustrating how militarised mediators influence both peace agreement formation and durability through the mechanisms of principal–agent constraints and their subsequent dissolution.

These hypotheses will not only test for the short-term impact of militarised mediation on conflict resolution, in the form of peace agreements, but also the long-term durability of peace in these contexts. Our study provides a greater insight into the contours of successful and unsuccessful mediator-types and mediation strategies and the implications for the durability of peace. The methods and data used to test these hypotheses will be detailed in the following section.

Empirical Strategy

This study aims to evaluate how external financial support impacts peace agreements in conflict mediation efforts, employing two primary analytical models: a fixed effect Panel Linear Regression model and a Cox Proportional Hazard survival model. Our data covers 27 intra-state conflicts, drawing on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) classification, and spans from 1989 to 2019 (Meier *et al*. 2022).

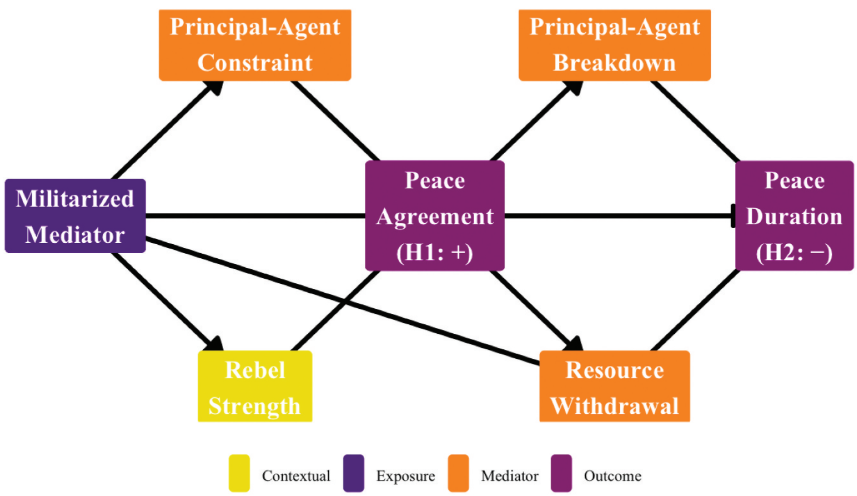

Figure 1. Expected Theoretical Pathway. This figure indicates the expected relationship between the main variables of interest.

The data is structured in panel format, with the unit of analysis being the government-rebel dyad-year. The raw data captures triadic relationships between governments, rebel groups, and mediating third parties within mediation events. Our analysis aggregates third-party support to the dyad-year level, allowing us to examine how external financial support affects conflict outcomes for each government-rebel pair, while accounting for dyad-specific characteristics through fixed effects.

Fixed Effect Model

The fixed effect model assesses the relationship between external financial support to rebels and the number of peace agreements signed within each dyad-year. The data is organised in a dyad-year panel structure covering the years 1989 to 2019, enabling longitudinal fixed effect analysis. The dependent variable is the *count of peace agreements signed*, while the primary predictor of interest is the *number of unique financial supporters* (who are also mediators in the conflict) to rebels in a given conflict-year.

All agreements in our analysis are signed by belligerents, specifically by governments and rebel groups matched on dyad ID and brokered by at least one exogenous third party. We intentionally include all types of peace agreements, including ceasefires, partial agreements, and comprehensive settlements, because our theoretical framework suggests that militarised mediators increase the likelihood of *any* signed agreement, not just comprehensive ones.

We argue that even 'short-term' agreements such as ceasefires are theoretically and practically important. A ceasefire can halt violence even when no comprehensive political settlement follows, and such agreements may create 'frozen conflicts' or 'negative peace' that endure over time. This is consistent with our theoretical mechanism: militarised mediators may expedite agreement signing by constraining rebel behaviour and leveraging their support, but these same factors may produce agreements that address immediate violence without resolving underlying grievances. Hence our Hypothesis 2 about reduced durability.

We use a count measure rather than a binary indicator because conflict dyads can experience multiple agreement attempts within a year, and militarised mediation may facilitate iterative agreement-making. The count captures the intensity of peace-making activity, which reflects our theoretical interest in how external support accelerates conflict management efforts. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all key variables used in our analysis.

This table presents descriptive statistics for all key variables used in the analysis. Data reflects raw values prior to model-specific transformations.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for key variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Agreements Signed (H_1, count)	1.12	1.71	0.00	20.00
Financial Support (H_1, binary)	0.08	0.28	0.00	1.00
Militarised Mediator (H_2, binary)	0.10	0.30	0.00	1.00
GDP per Capita (2011 Est., logged)	7.24	0.46	6.77	8.46
Ethnic Fractionalisation	0.77	0.08	0.23	0.89
Peace Duration (days)	5809.24	3647.84	19.00	13230.00
Polyarchy Score	0.13	0.04	0.07	0.22
Incompatibility*	1.96	0.21	1.00	2.00
Intensity Level*	1.21	0.40	1.00	2.00

*For categorical variables, numeric codes indicate: Incompatibility (1 = territory, 2 = government); Intensity Level (1 = 25+ battle deaths, 2 = 1000+ battle deaths).

The model is specified in Equation 1:

$$\text{Agreements Signed}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Financial Support}_{i,t} + \sum_k \gamma_k \text{Control}_k + \alpha_i + \varepsilon_{i,t} \tag{1}$$

where $\text{Agreements Signed}_{i,t}$ represents the number of peace agreements signed in dyad *i* during year *t*, $\text{Financial Support}_{i,t}$ is a binary indicator of whether militarised mediators provide funding to rebels in dyad *i* during year *t*, and α_i captures the fixed effects for each dyad to control for unobserved time-invariant characteristics. $\varepsilon_{i,t}$ is the error term. This model is estimated using the plm package in R, enabling robust fixed effect and accounting for the panel nature of the data (Croissant and Millo 2008).

Data for this model is sourced from the UCDP External Support Dataset (ESD), which captures external support to rebel groups, aggregated to the dyad-year level for our analysis. Our primary predictor, *Financial Support*, is a binary indicator of whether militarised mediators provide funding (destined to fund waging the armed conflict) to rebel groups in a given dyad-year. We construct this variable by identifying third-party actors who appear in both the UCDP ESD (as funders) and the African Peace Processes Database (as mediators). A dyad-year receives a value of 1 if at least one such militarised mediator provides funding to the rebel group, and 0 otherwise. This operationalises our concept of 'militarised mediators' by focusing specifically on financial support from actors who also engage in mediation efforts.

The UCDP defines funding as the provision of military loans, grants or aid with a direct link to the conflict, the transfer of money or financial assets to non-state groups, and the financing of weapons transfers (Meier *et al*. 2022). This excludes humanitarian aid, development assistance, and general security sector support. Our binary operationalisation captures the presence of financial dependency relationships rather than monetary volume.

Our control variables are selected based on theoretical importance in conflict mediation literature, empirical significance demonstrated through Random Forest variable importance analysis (Appendix 5), and acceptable multicollinearity levels. We include *Conflict Intensity Level* (25+ vs. 1000+ battle deaths) to control for conflict severity, which affects both external support patterns and settlement prospects (Regan 2002, Walter 2002); *Incompatibility Type* (territorial vs. governmental) to distinguish conflicts with systematically different mediation dynamics (Cunningham 2010); Religious Polarisation to capture social cleavages that complicate negotiations (Svensson 2007a); Population (logged) to proxy for state capacity and conflict complexity (Fearon and Laitin 2003); and Unified Democracy Score to account for regime type effects on credible commitment (Hegre *et al*. 2001). Variables exhibiting high correlations ($r > 0.7$) with these predictors–including GDP per capita, ethnic polarisation, and disaggregated external support types–are excluded to prevent multicollinearity and ensure model parsimony (see Appendix 5, Table 2). All control variables are drawn from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset version 24.1 (Gleditsch *et al*. 2002) and R's peacesciencer package (Miller 2022). The dependent variable is the number of peace agreements signed in a given dyad-year, as documented by the African Peace Processes (APP) Dataset (Duursma and Gamez 2022).

Cox Proportional Hazards Survival Model

To evaluate the durability of peace agreements mediated by external actors, a Cox Proportional Hazards model is employed. The data structure for the survival analysis remains dyad-year based but captures the length of time in days from each peace agreement to its failure, if applicable. The first peace agreement instance is in 1989. This survival analysis model estimates the hazard, or likelihood, that a peace agreement will fail (i.e., conflict resumes) at any given time, conditioned on the level of financial support and mediator characteristics. The hazard function for dyad i at time t is estimated in Equation 2:

$$h(t|X_i) = h_0(t)\exp\left(\beta_1 \text{External Support}_i + \sum_k \gamma_k \text{Control}_k\right) \tag{2}$$

Table 2. Survival analysis event summary.

Event Status			
Status	Description	N	%
0 (Censored)	Peace agreement remains in effect	412	59.03
1 (Failure)	Conflict resumed; peace agreement failed	286	40.97
Total Peace Agreements		**698**	**100.00**

where $h(t|X_i)$ is the hazard rate, $h_0(t)$ is the baseline hazard, and X_i represents covariates including whether there was a militarised mediator signing the peace agreement, and control variables. This model is implemented using the survival package in R, providing insight into how external support affects the longevity of peace agreements (Therneau 2024).

The outcome variable for this hazard model is the *duration of peace agreements*, defined as the number of days until the resumption of conflict. This duration is calculated using data from the African Peace Processes (APP) Dataset, which records the dates of peace agreement signings and is linked with the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) PRIO dataset to identify conflict start dates by dyad and conflict IDs (Duursma and Gamez 2022, Meier *et al*. 2022). Table 2 summarises the event status distribution in our survival analysis, showing that 286 peace agreements (40.97 per cent) failed during the observation period, while 412 (59.03 per cent) remained censored. The main predictor in this model is the presence of a *Militarised Mediator* involved in the negotiation at the time of the peace agreement event.

The survival model controls are selected to capture key determinants of peace agreement durability while maintaining parsimony. Based on Random Forest variable importance analysis (Appendix 4) and prior research on post-conflict peace, we include *Incompatibility Type* to account for whether territorial versus governmental conflicts exhibit different failure patterns (Walter 1997, Toft 2010); Intensity Level to capture whether high-casualty conflicts create conditions promoting durable settlements or leaving grievances unresolved (Fortna 2004a); Polyarchy Score and Unified Democracy Score to measure regime openness affecting implementation capacity (Hartzell *et al*. 2001); *Ethnic Fractionalization* and *Religious Fractionalization* to capture social heterogeneity complicating power-sharing (Hoddie and Hartzell 2003); and Domestic Product Surplus as a proxy for economic resources available for peace implementation (Walter 2004). Variables with high intercorrelation ($r > 0.7$) are excluded to avoid multicollinearity (Appendix 4, Table 3). We acknowledge that our model does not include certain post-agreement implementation factors (guarantor commitments, specific provisions, oversight mechanisms) due to data limitations in the African Peace Processes Database–a recognised constraint in existing peace agreement datasets (Joshi and Quinn 2017). This limitation is discussed further in the robustness section.

This table presents the distribution of event status in the Cox Proportional Hazards survival analysis. Censored observations (0) indicate peace agreements that did not fail during the observation period. Failure events (1) indicate peace agreements where conflict resumed. The model includes 286 failure events out of 698 total peace agreements.

Table 3. Cox proportional hazards model results.

Variable	Coefficient
Military Mediation	0.256.
	(0.149)
Polyarchy	-1.374
	(9.235)
Domestic Product Surplus	0.048
	(0.037)
Ethnic Fractionalisation	3.329
	(3.212)
Unified Democracy Score	-0.043
	(0.210)
Incompatibility	-0.744^{*}
	(0.362)
Intensity Level	0.618^{**}
	(0.227)
Number of Events	286
Total Observations	698
Concordance	0.554 (se = 0.022)
Likelihood Ratio Test	34.43 (df = 7,$p = 1e - 05$)
Wald Test	21.32 (df = 7,$p = 0.003$)
Score (Logrank) Test	33.35 (df = 7,$p = 2e - 05$)
Robust Score Test	20.29 ($p = 0.005$)

This table presents the results of the Cox proportional hazards model with significance levels indicated as $p < 0.1$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$. Military Mediation is not statistically significant.

Results

The results of this study indicate that 'Militarised Mediators' in negotiations lead to a higher likelihood of peace agreements being signed; however, this increased frequency is accompanied by a higher likelihood of failure of these agreements. These preliminary insights suggest that financial dependencies can influence both the quantity and durability of mediated agreements.

Hypothesis 1

To examine the impact of financial support from militarised mediators on the number of peace agreements, a fixed effects panel linear regression model is employed, the results of which are summarised in Table 4. The coefficient for *Financial Support*, which captures whether militarised mediators provide funding to rebel groups, is highly significant and positive (Coefficient = 0.71, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that external support is strongly associated with a higher number of peace agreements being reached, suggesting that external involvement plays a substantial role in facilitating peace processes.

Analysis of the control variables reveals that *Population* size is positively associated with the number of peace agreements (Coefficient = 0.77, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that larger populations may have more resources or institutional capacity to facilitate peace negotiations. *Intensity Level* shows

Table 4. Fixed effects model results.

Variable	Coefficient
Militarised Mediators	0.71***
(Financial Support)	(0.16)
Intensity	−3.29
	(2.76)
Religious Polarisation	−0.17
	(0.13)
Population (logged)	0.77***
	(0.06)
Unified Democracy Score	0.10
	(0.14)
Observations	212
R^2	0.707
Adjusted R^2	0.471
F Statistic	56.36*** (df = 5; 117)

This table presents the results of the fixed effects model with significance levels indicated as *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01.

a negative but non-significant association (Coefficient = −3.29, $p = 0.23$), and *Religious Polarization* also shows a negative but non-significant effect (Coefficient = −0.17, $p = 0.20$). *Unified Democracy Score* is positive but not significant (Coefficient = 0.10, $p = 0.48$).

The fixed effects model demonstrates a strong fit, as indicated by the R^2 value of 0.707, which suggests that approximately 71 per cent of the variance in the number of peace agreements is explained by the independent variables included in the model. This R^2 value indicates that the model effectively captures the underlying relationships within the data. The F statistic of 56.36, with a significance level of $p < 0.001$, further reinforces this fit by demonstrating that the model as a whole is statistically significant, suggesting that the predictors reliably contribute to the explanation of peace agreement outcomes.

Hypothesis 2

Next, this work explores the duration of peace agreements using a Cox proportional hazards model, the results of which are presented in Table 2. The model reveals that if there is a 'Militarised Mediation' involved in the peace agreement, there a positive coefficient (0.256), but that this is only statistically significant that the $p > 0.1$ level. This indicates that while there is some evidence suggesting that militarised mediation correlates with longer-lasting peace, the strength of this relationship is not as strong as that of other predictors.

In contrast, the variable representing *Incompatibility* is significant and negative (Coefficient = –0.744, $p < 0.05$), indicating if the incompatibility is related to changes in the government, the agreement is likely to survive.

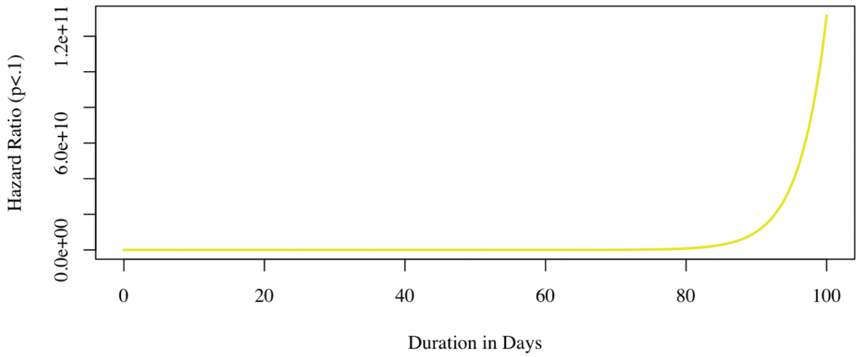

Figure 2. Hazard ratio: militarised mediator. This figure shows the hazard curve drawn from the coefficient in the survival model (ratio: 1.2918). The likelihood of conflict failing increases significantly after approximately 85 days if a militarised mediator supported the initial peace agreement.

Conversely, *Intensity Level* shows a significant positive correlation with peace duration (Coefficient = 0.618, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that more intense conflicts are likely to experience shorter peace durations.

The overall fit of the Cox model is strong, with a concordance statistic of 0.554 and significant results from the likelihood ratio and Wald tests, indicating that the model is well-specified.

To visualise the impact of key variables on the likelihood of peace agreement failures, the following hazard curves are generated for the statistically meaningful features of the models. Figure 2 illustrates the hazard ratio associated with militarised mediation. The hazard curve indicates that, for the first 80 days post-agreement, the likelihood of peace remains relatively stable. However, after approximately 85 days, there is a marked increase in the likelihood of conflict resuming when militarised mediation is involved, suggesting that external involvement with rebels may be harmful to the sustainability of peace over time.

Figure 3 depicts the hazard curve related to incompatibility due to government changes. The analysis shows that if an agreement holds during the early days following its signing, there is a strong likelihood that peace will endure, as indicated by the curve (ratio: 0.4751). This finding underscores the importance of early stability in peace agreements, particularly in conflicts characterised by significant governmental incompatibility.

Lastly, Figure 4 illustrates the hazard curve for intensity levels defined by conflicts with over 1,000 battle deaths. The results indicate that following a peace agreement, the likelihood of conflict restarting significantly spikes within the first hundred days when the prior conflict had a high intensity level (ratio: 1.8549). This finding suggests that high-intensity conflicts may have enduring legacies that make subsequent agreements more fragile.

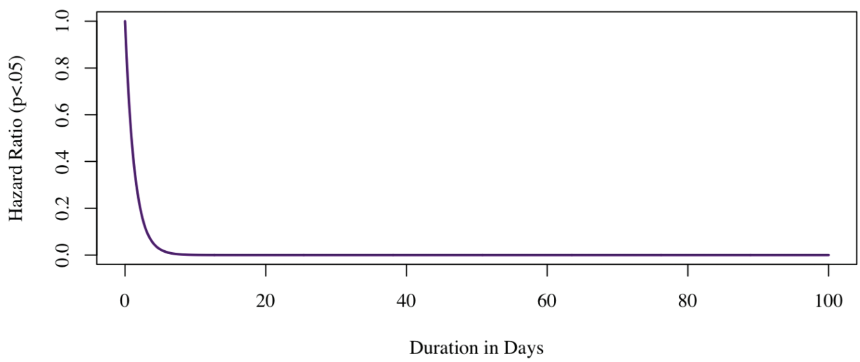

Figure 3. Incompatibility (over government). This figure shows the hazard curve drawn from the coefficient in the survival model (ratio: 0.4751). The early stability of agreements related to government changes significantly increases the likelihood of sustained peace.

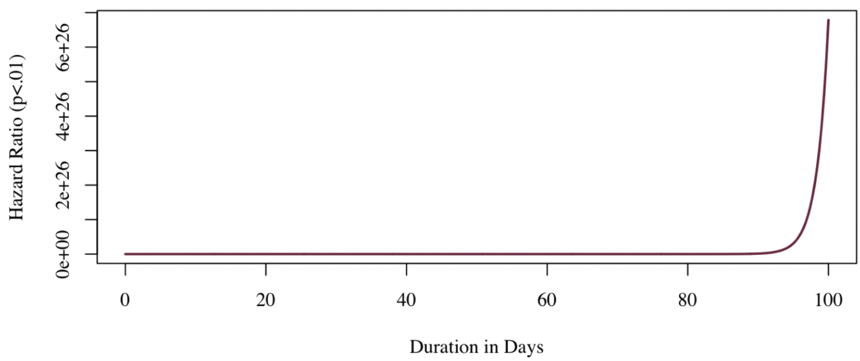

Figure 4. Intensity (1000+ battle deaths). This figure shows the hazard curve drawn from the coefficient in the survival model (ratio: 1.8549). High levels of fatalities in prior conflicts significantly increase the likelihood of conflict restarting within the first hundred days after a peace agreement.

In summary, the findings from this study shed light on the complexities of peace agreements in the context of external support to rebels and militarised mediation. While the presence of militarised mediators appears to increase the number of agreements, this comes at the cost of greater fragility, suggesting that such interventions may not always lead to durable peace. The results from both the fixed effects model and the Cox proportional hazards model highlight the importance of contextual factors, such as population size and conflict intensity, in shaping both the quantity and longevity of peace agreements.

These insights underscore the need for a new understanding of how external influences can affect peace processes, as well as a theoretical reconsideration of the goals of mediation, emphasising the distinction between conflict management and conflict resolution. This work should serve as a valuable contribution for future research aimed at improving the sustainability of peace in conflict-affected regions.

Robustness

To ensure the reliability of the findings, robustness checks were conducted informing variable selection and model choice for both hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 Robustness

Variable selection for Hypothesis 1 was informed by Random Forest variable importance analysis and multicollinearity checks (see Appendix 5). Variables exhibiting high correlations ($r > 0.7$) were excluded to prevent multicollinearity. Additionally, Hausman Test results indicated a preference for fixed effects over Random Effects models (see Appendix 2).

External Support Operationalisation

Given that external actors may provide multiple types of support to rebel groups–including troops, weapons, training, materiel, funding, intelligence, and territorial access–we conducted additional robustness checks to examine whether our focus on financial support specifically is justified. The UCDP External Support Dataset codes eleven distinct types of support provision. While our main models employ a measure of financial support from militarised mediators, we tested alternative operationalisations to ensure our results are not sensitive to this choice.

Table 4 (see Appendix 2) presents five model specifications: (1) our original model using the sum of all support types, (2) all eleven support types entered separately, (3) financial support only, (4) financial support plus other types aggregated, and (5) financial support plus military support (weapons, troops, materiel).

The disaggregated model (Column 2) reveals important heterogeneity in how different support types affect peace agreement likelihood. Financial support exhibits the strongest positive effect (coefficient = 40.58, $p < 0.001$), substantially larger than any other support type. Notably, several forms of support show negative associations with peace agreements: weapons support (coefficient = − 49.21, $p < 0.001$) and training support (coefficient = − 19.88, $p < 0.05$) are associated with fewer agreements, suggesting these support types may prolong conflict rather than facilitate settlement. Other support types show weaker or inconsistent effects.

These results provide strong empirical justification for our theoretical focus on financial support specifically. Financial support appears to operate through distinct mechanisms compared to military or logistical support: while weapons and training may enhance rebel military capacity and incentivise continued fighting, financial support signals third-party commitment and creates dependency relationships that constrain rebel behaviour during negotiations. The fact that financial support remains highly significant even when controlling for all other support types (Column 2) confirms that its effects are not merely capturing general external involvement.

Our main specification, using financial support from militarised mediators, thus isolates the theoretically relevant mechanism while avoiding the noise introduced by aggregating support types with opposing effects. The robustness checks demonstrate that this operationalisation yields the clearest and most theoretically interpretable results.

As an additional robustness check, we re-estimate the Hypothesis 1 model using a binary dependent variable (any agreement vs. no agreement) and a conditional logit specification on an expanded panel that includes conflict dyad-years without agreements. The positive effect of external support on the likelihood of agreement is consistent across both specifications (see Appendix 3).

Hypothesis 2 Robustness

Variable selection for Hypothesis 2 followed similar procedures, with Random Forest analysis and correlation checks informing the exclusion of highly correlated variables (see Appendix 4). This ensures results are not unduly influenced by multicollinearity.

Variable Importance of Militarised Mediators

Additionally, the robustness measures from the random forest analysis highlight the significance of the main variables of interest related to 'Militarised Mediators' in the outcomes of peace agreement signing and the duration of peace (see Figures 6 and 7, respectively). Among the 68 predictors, financial support from external actors emerges as the *most* important variable influencing the signing of peace agreements. Furthermore, the presence of Militarised Mediators ranks as the fifth most important variable affecting the duration of peace, based on 45 predictors.

While this study provides robust evidence for the dual effect of militarised mediation on conflict outcomes, several limitations merit acknowledgement. First, unobserved selection bias may influence which mediators choose to financially support specific rebel groups and subsequently engage in mediation efforts. However, our fixed effect specification helps mitigate this concern by controlling for time-invariant dyad-specific characteristics that might drive both external support decisions and mediation outcomes. Second, endogeneity between external funding and mediation opportunities could affect our estimates, though the temporal structure of our data suggests funding relationships typically precede formal mediation processes. Third, our focus on African conflicts may limit generalisability to other regions with different intervention patterns. Nevertheless, we believe our results remain robust for several reasons: our random forest variable importance analysis consistently identifies militarised mediation variables as key predictors across multiple model specifications; the theoretical mechanisms we identify (constraint effects during negotiations followed by weakened leverage post-agreement) are generalisable beyond the African context; and our findings align with established literature on biased mediation while extending it in meaningful ways. Additionally, the substantial effect sizes we observe, combined with consistency across both agreement formation and durability models, suggest that remaining bias is unlikely to fully explain our core findings.

Overall, these robustness checks, including insights from random forest variable importance analysis, provide confidence in the variable selection and model choices. The random forest results underscore the relevance of our main variables of interest, enhancing the credibility of the findings regarding the impacts of external influences on peace processes.

Discussion

Our results show that where militarised mediators were present, peace agreements were more likely to be reached but were also significantly less durable. The theoretical implications of these findings can be understood through a principal–agent framework that captures how mediators with material stakes in rebel groups exercise leverage during negotiations while simultaneously generating post-agreement vulnerabilities. Militarised mediators act as principals that delegate resources to rebel agents, thereby constraining rebel behaviour and indirectly altering the strategic calculations of governments during bargaining, increasing the likelihood of agreement. However, due to the very nature of this relationship between militarised mediators and rebels, these same delegation relationships weaken or dissolve as a consequence of realising their main goal of a favourable end to the conflict (via a peace agreement), undermining long-term compliance and peace durability.

We contribute to theoretical debates on third-party mediation by demonstrating how the conflicting incentives embedded in militarised mediation produce short-term success but long-term fragility. Financially dependent rebel groups face strong incentives to comply with mediator preferences during negotiations in order to secure continued support, reducing commitment problems and facilitating agreement signing. Yet once an agreement is reached and the mediator's objectives are consolidated, the principal–agent relationship shifts or erodes. Mediators may reduce or withdraw costly financial support, while their capacity or willingness to monitor and enforce compliance diminishes. This alters incentive structures for rebel groups, who may return to violence to compensate for lost resources or to renegotiate the post-agreement balance of power. These findings align with existing research on unconventional and biased mediation, which highlights the effectiveness of material leverage in securing agreements but questions its capacity to sustain peace (see Wilkenfeld *et al*. 2003, Svensson 2007a, DeRouen *et al*. 2009, Reid 2015). They also resonate with Cunningham (2006), insofar as actors with material and military stakes in the conflict may be poorly positioned to guarantee post-agreement stability once their leverage over local agents declines. Overall, the results underscore the dual and contingent role of militarised mediators as both facilitators of agreement and inadvertent contributors to conflict recidivism.

While we expect these dynamics to operate beyond any single region, the African context provides a particularly compelling illustration due to the prevalence of cross-border interventions, kinship ties, and enduring rivalries between state and non-state actors. Arbitrary colonial borders and post-independence political fragmentation have encouraged neighbouring states to finance and support rebel movements as a form of proxy interstate competition or tit-for-tat retaliation (Salehyan 2010). As Duursma and Tamm (2021) show, African governments frequently engage in such indirect interventions to shape political outcomes in rival states while avoiding direct military confrontation. Our study builds on this insight by showing that when these same actors also mediate the conflicts in which they finance rebels, they establish principal–agent relationships that increase the likelihood of agreement but weaken the durability of peace. Consequently, Africa offers a critical context for examining how neighbouring states – often linked through kinship networks and political affiliations – mediate conflicts in adjacent countries, and for assessing how financially induced leverage during negotiations translates into fragile post-agreement outcomes.

We explore the substantive implications of these dynamics through an examination of intra-state conflict in Sudan, a case characterised by extensive external financing of rebel groups and repeated mediation efforts (see Figure 5). Specifically, we analyse the triadic relationship between the Sudanese government, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), and Chad as a militarised mediator, illustrating how principal–agent constraints facilitate agreement while their subsequent dissolution contributes to renewed instability.

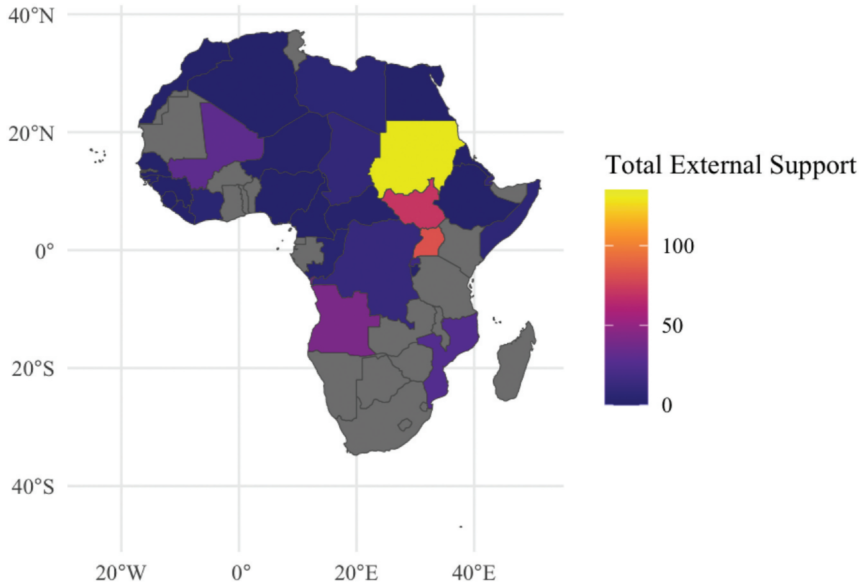

Figure 5. Total external support by conflict country. This figure shows a map of the conflicts in this analysis. The colour scale represents the count of external support by conflict country. This data comes from the UCDP ESD Database (Meier *et al*. 2022).

Sudan-JEM-Chad Triad

Chad's militarised mediation in Darfur, Sudan, during the 2000s illustrates how principal–agent leverage exercised by mediators that finance rebel groups facilitates agreement formation while simultaneously undermining post-agreement peace. Chad's dual role as both patron of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and mediator of the conflict structured bargaining dynamics in ways that increased the likelihood of negotiation and agreement, but generated vulnerabilities once the underlying principal–agent relationship weakened. As part of a broader proxy rivalry with Sudan, key factions within the Chadian political and security elite financed and facilitated the JEM from its emergence in 2003 until its expulsion from Chadian territory in 2010, when N'Djamena sought rapprochement with Khartoum (Tubiana 2008). This support enabled the JEM to operate as a credible military challenger to Khartoum in the region while advancing N'Djamena's strategic objective of pressuring the Sudanese regime.

Chad's mediation strategy was embedded in a complex bilateral relationship with the Sudanese government under Omar al-Bashir. While formal diplomatic relations persisted, the two states engaged in sustained rivalry through reciprocal support for insurgent movements operating across their shared border (Tubiana 2011, Duursma and Tamm 2021). Within this context, mediation served as a signalling mechanism through which Chad sought to demonstrate its capacity to influence and constrain key rebel actors in Darfur, thereby leveraging its patronage of the JEM to influence and terminate the conflict in a way that would extract concessions from the Sudanese government and reduce cross-border instability. By simultaneously providing financial resources, sanctuary, and logistical support, Chad's patronage contributed to the conditioning of the JEM's participation in negotiations, demonstrating how delegated leverage over a rebel agent can be instrumental in overcoming bargaining obstacles.

The principal–agent relationship between Chad and the JEM was reinforced by ethnic and political ties. JEM leaders maintained close connections to Chad's ruling elite through the Kobe clan of the Zaghawa ethnic group, which spans eastern Chad and western Sudan (The New Humanitarian 2004). These ties facilitated privileged access to Chadian territory and state resources, embedding the JEM within Chad's regional security strategy. Chad effectively delegated coercive leverage against Sudan to the JEM, financing and sustaining the group – largely through oil revenues – in return for advancing Chadian geopolitical interests (Tamm and Duursma 2022). While this delegation enhanced Chad's regional influence and bargaining position, it also entrenched the JEM's dependence on external support, raising the expected payoffs of continued armed mobilisation and increasing the costs of post-agreement compliance once support became uncertain (Tubiana 2008).

This principal–agent configuration directly shaped Chad's role as a militarised mediator. N'Djamena entered mediation not as a neutral broker, but as a patron with material leverage over one of the conflict's principal rebel actors with the aim of influencing the conflict and its resolution in a way that benefited itself through its agent. Chad's geographic proximity, exposure to cross-border violence and refugee flows, rivalry with the Sudanese government, and ethnic and political linkages to the JEM explain its simultaneous engagement in rebel sponsorship and diplomacy and the constraints on its own strategy towards the conflict (Magara 2022). Chad became the first formal mediator in the Darfur conflict, brokering the 8 April 2004 humanitarian ceasefire between the JEM and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) on one side and the Sudanese government on the other (Youngs 2004). Chad's ability to deliver the JEM to the negotiating table reflected its position as principal: its financial support – which was highly fungible, sustained, yet easily retractable – induced rebel participation and signalled conditional compliance to Khartoum. Facing escalating violence, international pressure, and limited control over its own proxy militias, the Sudanese government sought to contain the conflict through a negotiated ceasefire (Berg 2008).

However, the same principal-agent dynamics that facilitated agreement formation undermined peace durability. Chad's leverage was actor-specific and asymmetrical; it could place constraints on its own agent during negotiations, but lacked the authority or credibility to enforce reciprocal compliance across the broader conflict system. Although the ceasefire agreement established an internationally represented ceasefire commission, necessary information sharing to implement the agreement and, most importantly, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms–particularly those addressing pro-government Janjaweed militias–were weak or absent (de Waal 2007). While hostilities by Sudanese government forces declined immediately after the ceasefire was announced, violations also began immediately, most notably by the Janjaweed, who frequently operated beyond Khartoum's effective control (Youngs 2004). Chad's visible partiality further undermined its legitimacy as a guarantor, limiting its ability to protect the JEM from continued attacks or to compel sustained rebel compliance with an agreement that failed to address grievances and disincentivise greed on both sides. As violations accumulated, the constraining effects of the principal–agent relationship weakened, rapidly eroding the direct and indirect incentives for the belligerents to comply.

As with many Sudanese peace initiatives, the ceasefire ultimately failed. This was due to the deliberate under-specification of enforcement provisions and its avoidance of contentious political arrangements designed to secure rapid agreement but exacerbating the persistent incentives for conflict, which remained unaddressed by the biased mediation effort and the absence of robust, inclusive implementation and enforcement mechanisms. Limited political measures, such as prisoner exchanges, restrictions on government support for militias, and landmine bans, were included, but far-reaching power-sharing, territorial, or resource arrangements were absent (The New Humanitarian 2004, Human Rights Watch 2004). Consequently, core drivers of violence – struggles over political authority, resource control, and societal fracture – remained unresolved by the mediated agreement. These shortcomings were exacerbated by the Sudanese government's reliance on semi-autonomous Janjaweed militias, which continuously violated the agreement. Once the agreement had been signed, the principal–agent leverage underpinning militarised mediation, which had incentivised the initial agreement, weakened. As uncertainty on all sides increased, the belligerents – particularly the Janjaweed – exploited the weak peace process, reverting to armed contestation driven by unresolved grievances and opportunistic rent-seeking (Flint and de Waal 2005, pp. 118–122, Prunier 2005, pp. 114–115).

Conclusion

This study has explored the relationship between external rebel group support, militarised mediation, and the dynamics of conflict resolution and peace longevity in internal conflict contexts. By employing a fixed effect regression model and a Cox proportional hazards model, this work uncovers a paradoxical role played by militarised mediators. While this form of third-party mediation may expedite the signing of peace agreements, it does not consistently secure the provisions for durable peace.

Our findings suggest that financial dependencies imposed by external supporters can contribute to the development of a principal–agent relationship that can constrain the strategic options available to rebel groups and rival governments. This can lead to a quicker resolution of conflicts, but it may also result in less durable peace settlements. As the mediatory role of the principal concludes, its leverage over its agent and the agent's rival diminishes. The case of Chad's militarised mediation in Sudan uncovers that the incentive structures required to promote a durable peace, such as deep political, economic and social reform, are not readily implemented by the militarised mediator. This is due to their bias, the need to balance between belligerents, and a lacking capacity or willingness to invest more in addressing the mismatch between expected and actual conflict termination outcomes for belligerents. The dual role of militarised mediators as both funders and brokers can introduce conflicting interests that may hinder the implementation of peace agreements.

This research contributes to the broader understanding of conflict dynamics and peacebuilding by highlighting the complexity between financial incentives, mediation strategies, and the durability of peace. This indicates that third-party financing of military efforts can be used as a key strategic node of third-party intervention, including mediation, in conflicts, Mediators, however, should be wary about the utility of this kind of mediation strategy, as it may be effective in incentivising conflict actors to sign peace agreements, but is unlikely to maintain its effectiveness in preventing conflict recidivism. By recognising the limitations and potential pitfalls of militarised mediation, policymakers and practitioners can adopt long-term approaches to conflict resolution that counter the paradox highlighted here. Policies should ensure that the peace-limiting effects of militarised mediation are mitigated through other forms of post-agreement peacebuilding and by securing stipulations that address the root causes of the dispute and implementation mechanisms through mutually acceptable peace agreements.

This study evidences that militarised mediators can facilitate the successful negotiation of peace agreements, particularly by leveraging principal–agent dynamics, though such agreements do not necessarily produce durable peace. In doing so, it advances understanding of how rebel financing shapes not only conflict dynamics, but also the leverage, strategies, and constraints of external actors engaged in mediation. These findings complement the broader contributions of this special issue by underscoring the centrality of the political economy of rebellion in explaining patterns of conflict termination and post-conflict trajectories (see Yahmi and Bandula-Irwin, 2026; Fawcett Weiner, 2026; Serwat and Bird, 2026; Malejacq and Isar, 2026; Amin, 2026; Ayalew et al., 2026). Although agreements supported by militarised mediators may struggle to secure lasting peace, they illuminate the complex trade-offs between conflict management and conflict resolution, as well as the growing significance of external patronage networks in contemporary civil wars. More broadly, this article highlights how the increasingly blurred boundary between patronage and mediation shapes incentives for negotiation, compliance, and renewed violence. As interest in the role of multi-role third parties in conflict continues to grow, these insights hold important implications for both scholars and practitioners navigating the evolving landscape of peacemaking.

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Data and Code Availability Statement

All raw data, data merging and cleaning processes, final data, as well as the code for models and figures, will be made available on the corresponding author's https://github.com/elisadamicoGitHub repository upon finalisation of the empirical analysis. Data is also publicly available from the https://peaceobservatory.org/Peace Observatory, the https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/index.html#externalsupportUCDP External Support Dataset (ESD), and the https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/index.html#armedconflictUCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Gleditsch *et al*. 2002, Duursma and Gamez 2022, Meier *et al*. 2022).

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Appendix

Hypothesis 1 Variable Selection

This appendix provides detailed information on the variable selection process for Hypothesis 1, including the results from the random forest variable importance analysis and correlation checks for collinearity among selected predictors. Figure A1 illustrates the importance of various variables, while the subsequent tables present correlation data that informed the decision to drop certain variables from the main models.

Because of the high correlation of some variables derived from the random forest variable importance calculation, several variables are dropped from the main models, including *GDP per Capita (2011 Est.)*, *External Support Funding*, *External Support Weapons*, and *Ethnic Polarisation*. See Table A1:

Hypothesis 1 Model Selection

Table A2 presents the results of the Hausman test, which is used to determine the suitability of fixed effects versus Random Effects models for our analysis. This test assesses whether the unique errors (unobserved effects) are correlated with the regressors, guiding us in selecting the most appropriate model for the variables identified in the Random Forest variable importance and correlation checks. It finds that the fixed effects model is most suitable, which explains its inclusion in the main text.

External Support Robustness Checks

Table A3 presents alternative operationalisations of external support in the fixed effects models testing Hypothesis 1. All models use dyad-year panel data with dyad fixed effects and the same control variables.

Logit Robustness Check: Probability of Any Agreement

As a robustness check on the fixed effects results for Hypothesis 1 (Table A3), we re-estimate the model using a binary dependent variable and a conditional logit specification. Rather than modelling the *count* of agreements per dyad-year, we estimate the *probability of any agreement occurring* in a given conflict-year.

We use a conditional logit model, which is the logistic analogue of the linear fixed effects model. Conditional logit stratifies by dyad, effectively conditioning out all time-invariant dyad-level heterogeneity (equivalent to the 'within' estimator in Table A3). Dyads with no within-group variation in the dependent variable (i.e., those that *always* or *never* have agreements) are automatically dropped, as they contribute no identifying information to the conditional likelihood. Standard errors are clustered by dyad using sandwich estimators. Note that *Incompatibility* is absorbed by the dyad fixed effects (it does not vary within dyads over time) and is therefore excluded from the conditional logit estimates.

Table A4 presents the conditional logit estimates alongside the main fixed effects results from Table A3 for comparison.

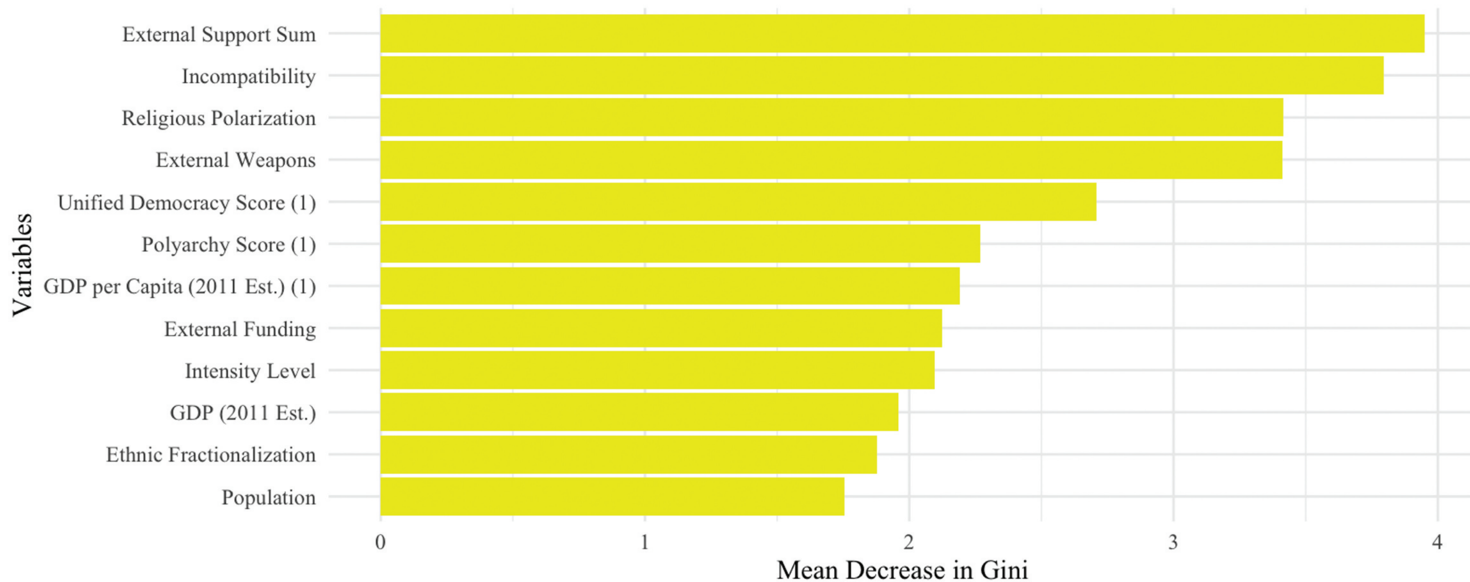

Figure A1. Random forest variable importance. This figure shows the levels of variable importance in terms of the 'Mean decrease in the Gini coefficient'. This shows the top 12 out of 68 total variables.

Table A1. Hypothesis 1 correlation table.

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation
External Support Sum	External Support Weapons	0.80
External Support Sum	External Support Funding	0.74
Religious Polarisation	GDP per Capita (2011 Est.)	−0.81
Religious Polarisation	Ethnic Polarisation (1)	−0.78
Unified Democracy Score	GDP per Capita (2011 Est.)	−0.70
GDP per Capita (2011 Est.)	Ethnic Polarisation (1)	0.80
GDP per Capita (2011 Est.)	Ethnic Polarisation (1)	0.74

This table shows the correlations among selected variables with a correlation coefficient of 0.7 or higher.

Table A2. Hausman test results.

Statistic	Value
Chisq	103.37
Degrees of Freedom	5
p-value	$<$ 2.2e-16
Preferred Model	fixed effects

These results compare the fixed effects and Random Effects Models using the same variables as specified by Random Forest variable importance and collinearity checks.

The key finding is that the positive effect of external support on agreement likelihood is consistent across both specifications. In the fixed effects model, each additional unit of external support is associated with 0.71 more agreements (p 0.001). In the conditional logit, each additional unit is associated with a 6.7 per cent increase in the odds of any agreement (odds ratio = 1.067, 95 per cent CI: [1.023, 1.114]).

The conditional logit estimate is marginally significant with clustered standard errors ($p = 0.084$), compared to highly significant in the linear FE model (p 0.001). This attenuation in significance is expected: the conditional logit restricts the sample to the 50 dyads with within-group variation in the binary outcome. Despite this power reduction, the positive direction of the effect is preserved, and the model-based (non-clustered) standard errors yield $p = 0.003$, confirming that the reduced significance reflects conservative variance estimation rather than a substantively different relationship.

Hypothesis 2 Variable Selection

This appendix details the variable selection for Hypothesis 2, including another round of random forest variable importance analysis and correlation checks. Figure A2 and Table A4 serve to illustrate the relationships among selected variables, further guiding the modelling choices in the same way as specified in Appendix 5.

Because of high correlation following the random forest variable importance calculation, several variables are dropped from the main models including *GDP per Capita (2011 Est.)*, *Ethnic Polarisation*, *Religious Polarisation*, *Ethnic Fractionalisation*, and *Population*. See Table A5:

Table A3. Robustness check: external support operationalisations.

	(1)	(2)
	Aggregate	Disaggregated
External Support (Sum)	0.71***	
	(0.16)	
Funding		40.58***
		(7.98)
Troops		11.41·
		(5.96)
Weapons		−49.21***
		(8.52)
Materiel		17.87**
		(5.59)
Training		−19.88*
		(8.64)
Territory Access		14.33*
		(5.86)
Infrastructure		−26.69
		(16.32)
Intelligence		12.41
		(11.09)
Other Support		24.27*
		(11.82)
Intensity Level (1000+ deaths)	−3.29	−10.53**
	(2.76)	(3.27)
Religious Polarisation	−0.17	−0.43*
	(0.13)	(0.18)
Population (logged)	0.77***	0.84***
	(0.06)	(0.08)
Unified Democracy Score	0.10	−0.40·
	(0.14)	(0.20)
Observations	212	120
R^2	0.71	0.92
Adj. R^2	0.47	0.78

***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.1$; ·$p < 0.15$.
Standard errors in parentheses.

Table A4. Robustness check: conditional logit vs. fixed effects (hypothesis 1).

	(1)	(2)
	fixed effects (Table 4) agreement_sum	Conditional Logit agreement_binary
External Support (Sum)	0.71***	0.065$^{\cdot}$
	(0.16)	(0.038)
		OR = 1.067
Incompatibility	—	(absorbed by FE)
Intensity Level (1000+ deaths)	−3.29	−0.248
	(2.76)	(0.180)
Religious Polarisation	−0.17	0.080**
	(0.13)	(0.033)
Unified Democracy Score	0.10	0.234**
	(0.14)	(0.097)
Population (logged)	0.77***	−0.095**
	(0.06)	(0.038)
Dyad fixed effects	Yes	Yes (strata)
Observations	212	294
Dyads	—	50
R^2 / Pseudo-R^2	0.71	0.35
Log Likelihood	—	− 169.85
LR Test	—	125.21*** (df = 5)

$^{***}p < 0.01$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}<0.1$; $p < 0.15$.

Column (1) reproduces the fixed effects estimates from Table A3 (linear, DV = agreement count). Column (2) reports conditional logit estimates (DV = binary indicator for any agreement). Standard errors in parentheses, clustered by dyad. OR =odds ratio. The conditional logit drops dyads without within-group variation in the dependent variable (all-zero or all-one), yielding a smaller effective sample.

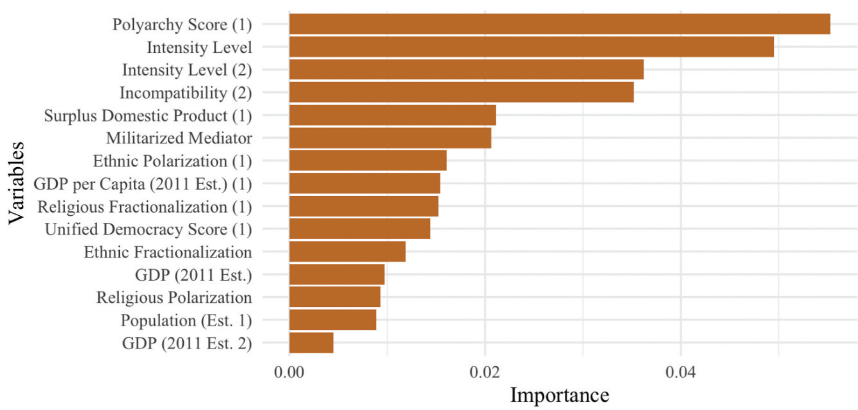

Figure A2. Random forest variable importance. This figure shows the levels of variable importance following Random forest analysis of the Cox proportional hazard model. This shows the top 15 out of 45 total variables.

Table A5. Hypothesis 2 correlation table.

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation
GDP per Capita (2011 Est.)	Religious Fractionalisation	−0.95
Ethnic Polarisation	Religious Fractionalisation	−0.85
Surplus Domestic Product	Religious Fractionalisation	−0.78
Ethnic Polarisation	GDP per Capita (2011 Est.)	0.87
Surplus Domestic Product	GDP per Capita (2011 Est.)	0.87
Surplus Domestic Product	Ethnic Polarisation	0.70
Ethnic Fractionalisation	Ethnic Polarisation	−0.95
GDP per Capita (2011 Est.)	Ethnic Fractionalisation	−0.88
Religious Fractionalisation	Ethnic Fractionalisation	0.89
Religious Fractionalisation	GDP per Capita (2011 Est.)	−0.77
Ethnic Fractionalisation	Religious Fractionalisation	0.88
Ethnic Fractionalisation	Religious Fractionalisation	0.85
GDP per Capita (2011 Est.)	Religious Fractionalisation	−0.92
Ethnic Polarisation	Religious Fractionalisation	−0.92

This table shows the correlations among selected variables with a correlation coefficient of 0.7 or higher.