

Ceasefire monitoring: Developments and complexities



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ABOUT THE REPORT

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Ceasefire monitoring: Developments and complexities

Ceasefire monitoring can make a crucial contribution to transitions from war to peace. Yet significant variation in the characteristics of ceasefires and monitoring approaches, and the differences across contexts in which they occur, limit attempts at comprehensive analysis and development of standardised guidance on ‘what works’. To support critical reflection, Conciliation Resources convened a set of four joint analysis workshops in October 2020, which brought together practitioners, policymakers, donors, conflict parties, civil society leaders and researchers to reflect on some of the challenges and recent developments in ceasefire monitoring.

This *Accord Spotlight* is not a definitive guide to ceasefires or monitoring missions, but a presentation of some of key reflections that emerged from the workshops, intended to inspire fresh thinking and further contemplation for those attempting to provide more effective support for ceasefire implementation processes.

Key considerations for effective ceasefire monitoring

- 1. Ceasefire monitoring can perform an important function in the transition from war to peace.**
Ceasefires that are monitored are significantly more durable than other arrangements – enhancing accountability, commitment, and confidence in the process. Planning and implementing monitoring mechanisms can help build trust between the parties and create structures to manage incidents that arise. Effective monitoring can help prevent the escalation of violence and protect civilians, providing breathing space for restarting or building political dialogue.
- 2. Conflict parties need to ‘own’ the ceasefire monitoring system.** Monitoring is more effective when it is implemented by the conflict parties. Often this requires that the conflict parties ‘own’ the design process, though international support can enhance national (and sub-national) ownership, for example by offering distinctive expertise and technical assistance with monitoring design and tools with technological advances. However, imposed or entirely internationally led ceasefire monitoring architecture can diminish the responsibility and ownership of conflict parties, reducing monitoring engagement, complicating implementation, and weakening the confidence-building potential of the monitoring activities.
- 3. Not all ceasefires can or should be monitored.** Ceasefire monitoring is costly and often time-consuming to deploy and maintain. It requires significant buy-in from the conflict parties, without which it is unlikely to be effective, and might even make things worse. Monitoring may also be less practicable when resources are scarce, or a peace process is in its infancy, though paradoxically monitoring is often most needed in those cases in which it is least operable.
- 4. Monitoring is better suited to building confidence and channels of communication than policing violations.** Monitoring tends to be more effective when it places greater emphasis on enhancing communication and confidence both between the conflict parties and between the conflict parties and the wider society, rather than punishing transgressions which can lead to excessive – and dangerous – defensiveness and commitment withdrawal.

- 5. Ceasefire agreements should clearly set out the specifications of a monitoring mission prior to implementation.** An agreement needs to contain unambiguous technical information to minimise space for signatories to contest it, including on what behaviour is prohibited, how monitoring mechanisms and other support structures should be organised, the planned sequencing of the mission's tasks, the composition of the monitoring group, and the tasks that it will undertake. At the same time, an agreement should seek to avoid being overloaded with overly complex requirements that can make a monitoring mission unimplementable.
- 6. Specialist training is essential for effective ceasefire monitoring.** A fighter or soldier or activist does not automatically make a good monitor. Contextualised training is vital for a monitor's understanding of how monitoring systems function, what their responsibilities are, how to appropriately handle violation complaints without causing further harm, when and how best to communicate with civilians, obligations under international law, and how to manage various challenges. Diversity in who provides such training is also a core consideration well within reach of international actors. Sharing experiences across different ceasefire processes and contexts can help to build knowledge and expertise.
- 7. Civilian and civil society involvement in implementing and monitoring ceasefires is an increasingly common phenomenon.** Civilians are those most directly affected by conflict, but until recently they were excluded from ceasefire processes. Building on a long history of human rights monitoring and accompaniment, civilians are increasingly involved in ceasefire monitoring, in part due to the growing reluctance of international actors to deploy to challenging and complex operational spaces. This development is opening new spaces and roles for the inclusion of overlooked or excluded groups and perspectives, in particular women, young people, religious communities, ethnic or tribal communities, as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs). It also involves an expansion of roles and relationships between conflict-affected communities and armed actors: involvement in local mediation, reconciliation, identifying and shaping measures to build confidence and trust between the parties and within communities, and context-specific ways to reduce violence. However, civilian monitoring is a concern to most conflict parties who resist broadening processes, fearing a loss of control. Civilian involvement also risks exposing local communities and individuals to intimidation and human rights abuses. International actors should be proactive in mitigating these risks where possible.
- 8. Technology is increasingly being used to support ceasefire implementation and monitoring.** Technological tools can include remote cameras at lines of control, smartphones and apps, videos and photos, acoustic sensors, drones, and tracking social media and satellite imagery using artificial intelligence. Technology promises to increase the speed and quantity of information, improve access to hard-to-reach territory, reduce human costs of monitoring, and offer new means of connecting monitoring instruments with the public. But it can undermine the confidence-building function of a ceasefire, produce mountains of data that are challenging to process, and lead to new forms of manipulation by conflict parties. Technology is best understood, then, as a complementary 'multiplier' rather than a replacement for human resources.
- 9. Ceasefire monitoring architecture must balance 'good practice' with contextual factors.** No monitoring model is appropriate in all cases. Monitoring arrangements must reflect specific contextual conditions, including: *armed actors* – number and type, cohesiveness of forces, command and control, level of buy-in to the ceasefire, relationships with communities; *civil society* – types of entities and level of mobilisation, influence on armed actors, degree of public support for a ceasefire, and protection for civilian activists; and *international involvement* – existence or lack of a formal international ceasefire mandate, preparedness to deploy monitors, or involvement in proxy warfare.

Introduction

Ceasefires are an important part of conflict resolution processes. Though ceasefires take many forms, they all have the same objective: to stop violence (temporarily or permanently).¹ Yet the underlying purpose varies, including functions such as: signalling intent, building trust, demonstrating commitment and control of forces, reducing civilian suffering, creating an environment conducive for negotiations, or preparing for post-peace agreement security arrangements.² Ceasefires do not attempt to resolve the underlying political, social or economic drivers around which a conflict is fought – which is the function of a peace agreement – but are often a necessary step in the transition from war to peace.

There is no universally accepted definition of a ceasefire, and the use of the term varies widely. Broadly speaking, a ceasefire is any arrangement in which a conflict party commits to a temporary or permanent suspension of violence. In this sense, ‘ceasefire’ is an umbrella term to cover a variety of related arrangements (e.g., truce, humanitarian pause, window of silence, cessation of hostilities) which are used to try and stop violence. Between 1989 and 2020, more than 2,200 of these broadly defined ceasefires were reported during civil conflict.³

Ceasefire mediation practitioners tend to adopt a more stringent definition, reserving the term ‘ceasefire’ for a more specific class of formal agreement between two or more conflict parties, in which the actors commit to a monitored or verified time-bound suspension of hostilities.⁴ Ceasefire monitoring and verification mandates typically observe, record, investigate and report on the implementation of a ceasefire. Monitored ceasefires are significantly more durable than other ceasefire arrangements in both inter- and intra-state conflict,⁵ and often a vital component of effective peace processes.

Yet there is a growing reluctance from Western states and international organisations to act as third-party ceasefire monitors. At the same time, contemporary monitoring models are being called into question by factors such as the plethora of armed actors created by the increasingly fragmented nature of armed conflict, complex proxy wars underpinned by polarised and stuck international politics, and the burgeoning focus on securing inclusion in peace processes.

Against this backdrop, there is now a greater interest in deeper consideration and analysis of how established and newer challenges are influencing monitoring and

where new developments and opportunities can be explored. With this aspiration, Conciliation Resources and the Political Settlements Research Programme organised four joint analysis workshops in late 2020. The workshops focused on innovations and complexities in ceasefire monitoring architecture and looked in depth at the ceasefire processes in Colombia, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Ukraine. The workshops were attended by more than 200 participants whose work focuses on ceasefire process support: including practitioners, policymakers, donors, conflict parties, civil society leaders, and researchers.

Speakers and participants at the workshops were unequivocal about the uniqueness of each conflict context, and the dangers of relying on fixed templates for negotiating, designing, or implementing ceasefires and monitoring architecture. Indeed, it was noted that the forthcoming United Nations guidance on ceasefire mediation deliberately refrains from even defining ceasefire because of the dangers of standardising.⁶ Yet the discussion also revealed core common concerns and points of guidance that would be useful to those attempting to navigate the ceasefire implementation process and provide more effective process support.

This *Accord Spotlight* summarises the main workshop themes and points of discussion, focusing on the purpose, the mandate, and the actors involved in ceasefire monitoring. Beyond offering a critical reflection on current practice, the report also highlights two key themes. Firstly, how the growing reluctance of international actors to take part in ceasefire monitoring and the need to develop more inclusive ceasefire processes has led to civilians and civil society contributing more to effective monitoring, how this has changed over time, and why the coming decade of ceasefire implementation is likely to have greater focus on civilian involvement. Secondly, we note the growing integration of technology (e.g., cameras, smartphones, videos, acoustic sensors, uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs or drones), social media, and satellite imagery) into monitoring and reflect on some of the positive impacts alongside some of the challenges. These tools can contribute to reducing some of the risks associated with human monitoring, provide additional information as a complement to other forms of monitoring, and provide quickly accessible information (often in abundance). Yet we also discuss how new technologies have not always been able to deliver on some of these promises, and how they also present new challenges and risks.

What is ceasefire monitoring and verification?

Ceasefire monitors are intended to be the eyes and ears on the ground, who observe and report back on incidents that take place following an agreement. Mandate-dependent, they are deployed within, and sometimes drawn from, local communities and populations. Their job is not to implement an agreement, or sanction the behaviour of conflict parties, which might undermine their impartiality and place monitors at risk.⁷ Instead, they perform an oversight role, observing efforts to implement an agreement, and reporting back their findings to the ceasefire oversight mechanism.⁸ Increasingly an emphasis on conflict resolution and proactive problem solving is emphasised in ceasefire design, including monitoring.

Ceasefire verification is a related, yet distinct, process whereby a verification body has additional powers to investigate, and in some cases sanction, alleged violations. Verification can also involve reviewing whether conflict parties have undertaken agreed activities (e.g., decommissioning of arms). It is possible to have monitoring without verification (e.g., the Philippines), and verification without monitoring (e.g., Northern Ireland), though commonly they occur together. While monitoring tends to involve relatively large numbers of people, verification can potentially be undertaken by a small team with relevant expertise on matters such as weapons, violations, terrain, languages, and the like.

Why monitor ceasefires?

Ultimately, effective monitoring is a vital element of violence reduction, trust-building and fostering conducive environments for negotiating peace by providing accurate, reliable, and timely information about ceasefire compliance. Workshop participants identified four primary purposes for ceasefire monitoring and verification:

Support efforts to de-escalate violence

Workshop participants noted the ubiquity of ceasefire violations. Monitoring was understood as a crucial process that generates trusted information to help conflict parties better manage breaches of the ceasefire and prevent escalations by proactively addressing potential triggers of violence or misunderstanding.⁹ Ceasefire monitoring and verification were also linked to efforts to protect civilians, through recording civilian complaints and investigating human rights violations.¹⁰

Monitors do not directly impose costs or sanctions on conflict parties, as the safety of monitors and their informants often depends upon them maintaining a sense of neutrality.¹¹ Monitors simply observe and report on incidents; the body tasked with overseeing the monitoring missions then determines whether or not any incidents constitute a violation, and if a response is necessary. A vibrant discussion debated the extent to which information provided by monitors can shift the decision calculus of the conflict parties. It was argued that the provision of accurate information on a party's non-compliance could be used to help hold the parties accountable for transgressions. If conflict parties do not wish to be labelled as the aggressor or be held responsible for the breakdown of an agreement, the information provided by monitors should help to increase compliance with an agreement. Yet in many cases, obtaining accurate reporting on violations is challenging and increasingly contorted by online 'fake news' and misinformation, and even a perfect flow of information will not necessarily shift the behaviour of disputants.

In the absence of an effective ceasefire oversight mechanism supporting accurate uptake of trustworthy information, parties can dig in and accuse each other of violations. In South Sudan, for example, the parties have shown a continual lack of commitment to their obligations, while the absence of any meaningful consequences for even serious violations means monitoring appears to have done little to impact patterns of violence.¹² The discussion highlighted that to shift the behaviour of conflict parties, information provided by monitors is often insufficient on its own and needs to translate into some political, economic, or reputational costs associated with non-compliance that outweigh any benefits that might be gained from violating a ceasefire.¹³

Build trust between the conflict parties

Several participants argued that ceasefire monitoring is a tool that can be used to create a structure for conflict parties to work together, jointly taking responsibility for responding to violations and managing incidents based on mutually agreed procedures. A jointly managed monitoring process can encourage conflict parties to work on more effective communications, address security issues, build trust and confidence in the process and in each other in various spheres of influence: privately, between themselves, and publicly, among wider society. As one participant suggested, monitoring is a vital part of the transitional security arrangements, which allows conflicting parties to consolidate progress at the negotiating table, and incrementally builds trust as the parties move towards a final agreement.¹⁴ To this end, some participants argued that ceasefire monitoring and verification should not be about meting out punishment. Rather, it should be focused on dialogue promotion, trust, and cooperation to manage and reduce violence and intimidation and strengthen the prospects for peace.

However, the collaborative potential of ceasefire monitoring is undermined by a paradox at its core: it is in precisely the complex and volatile environments where trust building through monitoring is most needed that it is least likely to function.¹⁵ Nevertheless, this does not mean that it should not remain a primary goal in the creation of monitoring architecture. Some participants reflected that it is common for parties to manage incidents on a case-by-case basis and independently between themselves.

Increase inclusion in security processes

Beyond these two core functions, monitoring can also provide a mechanism to enhance civilian engagement in the peace process. Civilians – who bear the most significant costs arising from conflict violence – have traditionally been excluded from parts of the process pertaining to security and military matters. As a result, ceasefire processes have often overlooked those issues that are important to the local population but not recognised or prioritised by armed groups or international actors. Ceasefire monitoring can here serve an important corrective function, providing forums to include citizens within the ceasefire process, either directly or as a parallel track, and increase engagement between civilian and armed groups and lay down positive pathways for security inputs to security sector reform at later stages. As we discuss in more depth below, this is becoming an ever more common function of ceasefire monitoring and presents new opportunities and challenges for peacemakers.

Conflict containment

Ceasefire monitoring is also a tool used to help contain conflict where the conflict parties are not yet ready to move towards peace but where there is a desire from internal or external actors to limit the spread or escalation of violence. In this context, ceasefire monitoring can provide the parties, the public and international community with objective reports on compliance with agreements, which while not being sufficient to stop violence altogether, helps to prevent violence spreading or escalating. Here it is not a means to prevent violence or to build trust; instead, it is a conflict management tool used by peacemakers when a conflict seems intractable, or risks getting much worse. This form of monitoring is perhaps best exemplified with the current Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) monitoring mission in Ukraine (see Box 2).

When is ceasefire monitoring not appropriate?

Monitoring is not appropriate for all ceasefire arrangements. Monitoring normally requires that the conflict parties have an interest in maintaining a ceasefire and expect (and desire) to make progress in the peace process.¹⁶ If conflict parties lack the willingness to commit to the peace process, monitoring itself is unlikely to prevent a return to violence or to build trust between the parties. As workshop participants noted, ceasefire and monitoring structures are not always confidence- or trust-building measures, for when they are rushed, imposed, or quickly break down, they often do 'the exact opposite', undermining the parties' confidence in a peace process, serving as systems of blame that harden conflictual relationships. Similarly, one speaker asserted that external actors often 'care more about the ceasefire than the parties' and so push conflict parties 'to sign ceasefire agreements that they are not genuinely ready to sign.' In this case, no matter how well designed an agreement or monitoring mechanisms might be, it is more likely to 'undermine the party's confidence, both in the ceasefire and in negotiations.'

Ascertaining when monitoring is indeed appropriate is far from straightforward. Different actors might judge the 'ripeness' for monitoring differently (e.g., mediators vis-à-vis conflict parties), parties might misjudge their opponent, or shift position on account of internal fractures. The interests of conflict parties are of course also highly dynamic, and thus while there might be a shared interest in maintaining a ceasefire when an agreement is signed, this might well change over time. Given the time it takes to establish a monitoring mission, support for the monitoring mission may have already waned by the time the mission is deployed. Yet it is often not possible to simply terminate the mission if conflict parties' support declines, meaning monitoring missions can end up operating within inappropriate contexts by virtue of the evolving political and conflict dynamics.

On some occasions it is clear that a monitored ceasefire is not possible, for example when an agreement is only intended to last a short period, or there exists a lack of resources to implement a mission. On these occasions, alternatives such as a phased approach could be considered, where dispute resolution and de-escalation can be initial objectives, and local community networks and civil society can do a lot to support implementation.

The discussion on Afghanistan focused mainly on ceasefire options when monitoring was not possible. In this case, a relatively stalled peace process, the reluctance of the parties to accept a nationwide ceasefire, and a challenging operational environment means a fully monitored ceasefire has never been a realistic option. Instead, a series of local or limited ceasefire initiatives have been adopted (see Box 1: Afghanistan).

Specifying the mandate of a monitoring mission

The conventional wisdom is that ceasefire agreements should leave little room for creative and constructive ambiguity. Agreements need to be as concise as possible, clearly define terms, and specify key concerns, such as the: prohibited behaviours, lines of disengagement, and where and how forces be separated and assembled.¹⁷

This logic extends to the mandate and specificities of the monitoring missions, which should be explicit in an agreement. Areas of ambiguity are likely to be contested during implementation, and thus agreements should provide clarity on key questions, including:

Conflict party ownership and inclusion

- What will be monitored?
- What are the obligations of the conflict parties?
- How will armed actors not included in the ceasefire be managed?

Addressing violations

- What is a violation?
- Are there specific sanctions for non-compliance?
- Who is expected to enforce these sanctions?

Monitoring mechanisms

- What will be the composition of the monitoring body?
- How will gender inclusion in the monitoring body be managed (staffing, processes, policies)?
- How are baselines and benchmarks understood by the parties?

Box 1: Afghanistan

Achieving a national ceasefire has been a major focus of peace efforts and talks in Afghanistan, but so far this has proved elusive. Afghan conflict actors at sub-national level have a history of adopting a range of practices for temporarily ceasing or restraining violence, however, which may offer an alternative framework in the absence of a formal arrangement at national level. The discussion identified five attributes of local or limited ceasefire arrangements that have been used in Afghanistan between 1997 and late 2020 when more comprehensive measures have not been possible. Given the challenges in achieving a nation-wide ceasefire, Afghanistan's rich sub-national experience of local peacemaking and ceasefires shows potential for complementarity.

- 1. Mandates – local ceasefires can be mandated *either* nationally *or* locally, depending on the attitude of the parties' central leadership:** All local ceasefires are locally executed, but some are mandated at the national level. For example, throughout 2019 and early 2020 the Taliban's central military commission authorised their forces in Kunar Province in the north-east to negotiate a local ceasefire with the government to facilitate Taliban military operations against Daesh. Other local peace initiatives and ceasefires have drawn a mandate from local community leaders without authorisation from the Taliban central leadership. These provide an opportunity for fighters to subject themselves to local authority and distance themselves from the command chain.
- 2. Disclosure – announced and unannounced, depending on the level of controversy:** Most local ceasefires are unannounced. For example, during the 2020 wheat harvest, there was a 10-day unannounced ceasefire in Zurmat district in Paktia Province in which Taliban groups agreed to refrain from initiating attacks which could cause disruption of this key economic activity. Not announcing ceasefires, such as in Zurmat, helps the Taliban to avoid controversy and reduces the risk of disruption.
- 3. Scope – regulated violence in different ways and to different degrees:** Most local agreements involve de-escalation. For example, one of the speakers documented an agreement between Mangal tribal elders and Taliban operating in Paktia and Khost Provinces, by which Taliban allowed safe passage for Mangals serving in the security forces who wished to transit Taliban-controlled areas while travelling to and from their duty stations. In other locations Taliban have agreed to minimise violence but have not committed to a full cessation. In such cases, the restraint has not been sanctioned within the command chain and would be more likely to attract adverse attention if violence ceased entirely. Local 'ceasefires' can also be unilateral or bilateral. Localised and informal initiatives, such as the Zurmat harvest ceasefire, can benefit the local population even when only one conflict party agrees to refrain from attacks. However, meaningful and sustained reduction of violence with increased possibility for a more general ceasefire requires a reciprocal agreement between both major conflict parties.
- 4. Multiple functions – such as to facilitate humanitarian access:** In addition to agreements that serve strategic functions, there is a long history of local agreements where violence is paused to facilitate a humanitarian activity sanctioned by both warring parties. For example, during the period of Taliban rule, vaccination campaigns were made possible by multiple local ceasefire agreements, which ensured that vaccination teams had secure access to contested areas.
- 5. Form of negotiation – negotiated directly between the conflict parties or mediated by local communities:** The Musa Qala agreement in Helmand Province in 2006 was famously mediated by local civil society. A group of Musa Qala tribal elders led by one Shah Aqa negotiated separately with the Musa Qala Taliban leadership and the Afghan government provincial authorities to end fighting in the vicinity of their district centre. Conflict actors have frequently found it expedient to act through an intermediary such as Shah Aqa's tribal group, rather than dealing directly with each other.

Details of the panellists in the Afghanistan workshop and suggested reading can be found in Annex 1.

- What are the organisational and operational structures of the monitoring entity (i.e., ceasefire management system)?¹⁸
- How does the monitoring mechanism communicate? What is the public communications strategy (who, when, how)?
- What are the organisational and operational structures of the monitoring entity (i.e., ceasefire management system)?¹⁹

Location and access

- Where will (and where won't) the monitors be deployed?
- Who will decide on and update monitors' deployment locations?
- What access will monitors have in undertaking their activities?
- Where will the conflict parties be positioned (e.g., cantonment), and how will troop rotations and movements be managed?

Security, conduct and training of monitors

- Who will provide security for the monitors?
- What training needs to be provided for the monitors?
- Who will deal with misconduct? Or attempts to discredit monitors?
- What should a contextualised code of conduct for monitors include?

Resources

- What funding is available for the monitoring, when will this be available, and for how long?
- Is the use of technology technically feasible (e.g., connectivity, access) and relevant (e.g., necessary, adds value or unique perspective)?

Operationalising these concerns is an opportunity for confidence building. Yet many of the issues can be challenging to negotiate – whether they are dealt with as part of or outside the ceasefire agreement. A related discussion in the workshops centred on the merits and shortcomings of shorter or longer ceasefire agreements. On the one hand, some participants argued longer agreements that are 'overpacked' with multiple provisions run the risk of not being implementable, in particular when combined with high expectations and steep timeframes. Instead, some participants felt that more concise agreements, that were still clear on key items, were less likely to overwhelm the parties and lead to deeper ownership and ultimately implementation.

Conversely, others noted that concise agreements can suffer from a lack of clarity and precision, which also has consequences for effective implementation. And given that (almost) no agreement is implemented entirely, extraneous provisions make it easier to strategically discard items in the future, whereas concise agreements risk getting watered down further.

Discussion also referenced 'ideal' agreements – desired though rarely achieved – in which provisions create 'hooks' and open space for innovation as better relationships develop between the protagonists, enabling adaptations to be proposed. In general, the need for an iterative approach was noted, given that no matter how detailed a ceasefire agreement might be, the monitoring mission is likely to face unforeseen challenges that must subsequently be incorporated into the planning. For example, while all ceasefire agreements should clearly set out and define violations, in many cases, unanticipated incidents will require the broadening or tightening of prohibited actions to reflect the unique challenges a mission faces in delivering its mandate in a specific context. In the past, parties have achieved this by building on initial short agreements (often criticised publicly for being so skeletal) through additional annexes which provide more technical details. This aligns with the growing emphasis on conflict resolution and proactive problem solving in ceasefire design, including monitoring.

Finally, one expert drew an important distinction between 'technical' and 'tactical' ambiguity in the mandate of monitoring missions. While there should be limited technical ambiguity in the specificity of the mandate (i.e. violations and role of the monitoring force), it was argued that missions benefit from a certain level of tactical ambiguity – that is, sufficient freedom to shape the implementation of the monitoring mission in such a way as to best serve the peace process. To this end, tactical ambiguity offers the body tasked with overseeing the monitoring missions an opportunity to determine when and which violations are reported publicly, and whether or how sanctions are applied. For monitoring missions also serve an inherently political function, which means they should implement their mandate in the way most congruent with efforts to resolve the broader conflict. Considering this, a second expert noted that on some occasions a peace process might even be best served by a certain level of technical ambiguity, as mediators sometimes benefit from ambiguous or contested definitions when attempting to balance the demands and competing priorities between and within conflict parties alongside the expectations and demands of communities.

Context considerations and monitoring approaches

Ultimately, the adoption of a monitoring mission and specification of a ceasefire monitoring mandate depends on a myriad of contextual concerns.

Contextual factors also influence conflict parties' and peacemaker's preparedness to take risks in ceasefire design and implementation. The workshop revealed a number of key contextual considerations and approaches that should be accounted for when designing a ceasefire monitoring mission. These are briefly described below in Table 1.

Table 1: Context considerations and monitoring approaches

<p>Armed actors and parties: Number of armed actors involved; number of armed actors party to the ceasefire; receptivity of conflict parties to the ceasefire and degree of ownership; if conflict parties are formally listed as terrorists in proscription regimes; types of relationships conflict parties have with communities and civil society; nature and quality of command and control; forms and degrees of fragmentation; where non-state armed groups are based, if diffuse and living within civilian populations or living in distinct outposts or areas as a military force; armed actors outside the process that may be disruptive (spoilers) or seek to be engaged; presence of militia (national and international).</p>	<p>International involvement: If an international entity (regional organisation, UN, etc.) has a formal mandate; how many envoys and mediators are involved; if Security Council mandates/resolutions are in force; if mandated thematic experts' groups or processes are in place; preparedness of external actors to deploy independent monitors; interests of states involved in proxy warfare and their support for ceasefire implementation.</p>	<p>Civil society stakeholders and civic space: Types and level of organisation of civil society mobilisation; nature of relationships with conflict parties; preparedness of armed actors to recognise and work alongside civil society; presence and scope of influential civic actors; degree of public support for the ceasefire and parties; status of media and press freedom; forms of protection available to civilians promoting human rights, security sector reforms, women's rights, and humanitarian action; diaspora involvement and influence.</p>
<p>Violence and weapons: Types and duration of violence; battlefield types and locations; weapons proliferation and control regimes and capabilities; dedicated use of violence against civilians including sexual and gender-based violence; if an arms embargo is in place; other processes or mechanisms in place from regional organisations to manage weapons and violence, resupply of troops under ceasefire.</p>	<p>Security: Status and forms of active fighting; ability of monitors to travel freely; types of security vacuum/s created by movement and cantonment of fighters; security guarantees for fighters and leaders; public security needs and expectations; public security providers and capabilities; impacts of pandemics and disasters on access and monitoring, and cantonment of fighting forces.</p>	<p>Past agreements and experiences with ceasefires: Past agreements and types of monitoring arrangements; reasons for agreement failure/s; if past ceasefires included disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and security sector reform, or led to wider political dialogue.</p>

<p>Communications:</p> <p>Distinguishing communications systems and protocols for internal use (between conflict parties) and external audiences (affected communities and other stakeholders); if violations are being publicised, if so, what level of detail should be provided; should there be an attribution of responsibility; which platforms and what frequency; number of languages that communications material will be needed in; ability of conflict parties to communicate to rank and file effectively (timely, consistently, widely).</p>	<p>Internet and smartphone access:</p> <p>Degree of internet penetration; level of smartphone ownership or access; freedom of access to apps and online content; ability to supply data packages to those in remote and rural locations.</p>	<p>Technology:</p> <p>Levels of understanding of types of technology proposed; past experiences influencing negative and positive receptivity to technology; levels at which knowledge and skills support needs to be targeted within conflict parties, communities, and civil society; ability to deploy technology in relevant languages and to different target groups; how the use of technology will be perceived and experienced in contexts with a history of conflict-related surveillance; relevant skills and capabilities to analyse data.</p>
<p>Geography and terrain:</p> <p>Size of ceasefire zones, accessibility, topography; whether ceasefire zones are close or cross over into international borders; if armed actors are based in an adjacent state; human settlements in ceasefire zones.</p>	<p>Violations:</p> <p>What is considered a violation; what violations <i>can be</i> monitored versus will be monitored; expected volume of violations; what is the purpose of recording violations (to ascertain the facts in violation breaches or to attribute blame and seek accountability); past experiences with violation reporting and recording; does this include harassment of CSOs, businesses or specific sectors (e.g., media) and specific types of violence such as sexual and gender-based violence. Are these clearly prohibited? Being specific about these concerns can influence who can monitor, and what specific training, advice and support is needed to record some forms of victimisation (such as torture, sexual violence) including ensuring referral systems for medical and social services are in place.</p>	<p>Verification:</p> <p>How many layers/sources of verification are desired versus what is realistic; will verified violations be publicised, if so – where, how, with what frequency and why; past experiences of conflict parties and relevant others with verification processes.</p>
<p>Financing:</p> <p>Engagement and preparedness of funders and external states and entities to finance the process, past experiences with financing of ceasefires and expectations of the parties.</p>	<p>Inclusion:</p> <p>Understanding of ‘inclusion’ in the context – armed actors or wider societal involvement and representation? Past experiences of forms of inclusion; international expectations and pressure on inclusion; past efforts to promote inclusion in ceasefires.</p>	<p>Conflict-sensitive approaches:</p> <p>How might monitoring and implementation exacerbate conflict dynamics, forms of exclusion and negative asymmetries, or contributing to ‘freezing’ or formalising de facto partition; ability to conduct periodic community consultations to inform conflict-sensitive approaches; what types of advice and learning might be needed.</p>

Who monitors? Traditional ceasefire monitoring

Ceasefires have traditionally been monitored by international actors, the conflict parties, or a combination of both. The most appropriate composition of a monitoring force is shaped by the preferences of the actors involved, as well as various contextual factors (see Table 1).

Conflict parties

The importance of conflict parties taking ownership, including of the monitoring architecture, was consistently stressed across the workshops. To function effectively, monitoring should be developed by, or at the invitation of, the conflict parties, who require a clear understanding of the commitments that they are signing up to. At the same time, it was noted that conflict parties are often clearer on which configurations of a monitoring mission they do not want (e.g., a peacekeeping force, contributions from certain countries, or a heavy international footprint), but struggle to articulate their clear vision for the monitoring architecture. Peacemakers therefore need to work with the parties to unpack their 'red lines' and develop an acceptable monitoring approach.

Throughout the workshop a common stipulation was that effective monitoring requires the active participation of at least the core conflict parties. Joint monitoring increases ownership of the monitoring process, increasing the likelihood that the parties will accept information produced by the monitoring team, and offering an opportunity to work on security issues, develop the institutional structures, and build interpersonal relations to manage violations and prevent future incidents.

Despite the advantages associated with conflict parties taking ownership of their ceasefire, in many cases it is not possible for actors engaged in violent conflict to coordinate and collaborate on ceasefire monitoring without assistance. If left to their own devices, conflict parties also tend to favour narrow agreements and limited monitoring arrangements that focus only on certain forms of military action, excluding a range of broader issues like civilian protection, humanitarian access and protection of business interests. There is then often a need to counter-balance the conflict parties' tendency to limit involvement in monitoring with third parties who bring different resources and a greater appetite for a broader range of provisions.

International actors

Information provided by the monitors will only be trusted by the conflict parties and their constituents if they believe that the information is credible. To this end, trusted international actors are often asked to monitor and support a ceasefire to provide a level of third-party objectivity. The 1956 United Nations (UN) mission in Egypt following the Suez crisis was the first ceasefire monitoring mission of the modern era. Since then, the UN and other international actors, regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) and the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and individual states, have all been involved in ceasefire monitoring and support.

International monitors have several advantages. They are often perceived to be impartial, are generally well trained and equipped for the task, and their presence demonstrates a significant commitment from the international actor(s) providing the personnel. Yet international missions also have limitations. Operating without the active participation of the conflict parties, they can have the unintended effect of undermining the conflict parties' responsibility for the ceasefire, reducing the effectiveness of monitoring, and potentially threatening the safety of monitors. International monitoring missions are also expensive and are more likely to be withdrawn if monitors get caught up in the violence, reducing the flow of information at the point it is likely to be most needed. Moreover, while international missions might benefit from higher levels of impartiality, this can be challenging to maintain when there is a lack of moral equivalence between the parties, a problem that both peacekeepers and humanitarian agencies have struggled with in recent times. This is particularly the case when an international monitor is also the mediator, which creates a conflict of interest around reporting violations that might undermine the process. The 2002 Sri Lankan ceasefire monitored by Norway is an often-cited example of this problem,²⁰ but similar problems exist in relation to the OSCE in Ukraine and the UN in Yemen.²¹ Moreover, when monitors are from neighbouring countries or interested international actors, it is more challenging for the force to operate impartially.

Box 2: Ukraine



The OSCE SMM launching a long-range unmanned aerial vehicle near Kostiantynivka in Donetsk region, 28 March 2018. © OSCE/ Evgeniy Maloletka

Violence broke out in the eastern part of Ukraine in 2014. Ceasefires have since been declared, or reaffirmed, in multiple agreements between the conflict parties. These ceasefires were for the most part largely ineffective at producing a sustained reduction in violence. However, a more concrete agreement in mid-2020 did initially produce a significant drop in violence and the first days without reported ceasefire violations. However, by early 2021 incidents had grown again, and the latest ceasefire also appears to be fraying at its edges.

OSCE involvement in monitoring: The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine was deployed in 2014 to oversee a political transition. During the first six months of its mandate, the conflict erupted in eastern Ukraine followed by the adoption of the first ceasefire arrangements as part of the Minsk agreements. Following the signing of these agreements, the OSCE SMM adapted its operational posture in support of the implementation of these agreements and with that took on a ceasefire monitoring function. The main pillars of the Mission's mandate were monitoring, reporting, and dialogue facilitation, which were extended to also apply to the implementation of the ceasefire.

The monitoring mission covers a significant area of around 52,000 km², with a 500 km-long frontline and a 400 km stretch of international border between Ukraine and the Russian Federation currently not controlled by Ukraine. The Mission was expanded from an original deployment of 100 to almost 1,500 monitors that are deployed on both sides of the frontline. Despite the presence of the monitoring force, frequent violations occurred daily, though this has dropped considerably after the 2020 ceasefire (recommitment).

Challenges: The initial ceasefire framework was more of a 'declaration of intent' rather than a comprehensive ceasefire arrangement, with the conflict parties agreeing that there *should* be a ceasefire, rather than clearly specifying the terms of the arrangement. Humanitarian ceasefires or 'windows of silence' became a common feature, indicating the inability of the broader ceasefire architecture to stop the violence.

The lack of precision in the initial ceasefire agreement, coupled with the different layers of ceasefire regimes, complicated the monitoring process, often making it unclear what should be monitored and verified and by whom. The mission also faced significant levels of insecurity, which limited the ability of monitors to access certain areas, and placed monitors on the ground at serious risk. Managing information has also been a serious challenge for the mission, as competing sources of information – including from local civil society groups on both sides of the conflict – have made it hard for the mission to keep ahead of events. The increasing time pressures posed by real-time reporting of events through social media have led the discussion about whether the mission should report incidents or attempt the more time-consuming and political process of attributing violations to one or another party.

Technology: Technology has been used to support ceasefire monitoring in innovative ways. Cameras and acoustic sensors have been installed in areas suffering frequent ceasefire violations, providing 24-hour monitoring in places where physical presence is often difficult. Satellite and UAV imagery has helped to monitor changes in the positioning of fortifications or heavy weapons over time. Social media has been used to circulate information on ceasefire compliance, for example sharing relevant images to clarify misinterpretation of written reports.

Impact: Ceasefire monitoring does not appear to have led to increased compliance. Lacking any real willingness to abide by the ceasefire arrangements and any significant ownership over the process, the parties have not used the monitoring to build confidence and collaboration but as a source of data to accuse each other of ceasefire breaches. The lack of a verification mechanism has also made it challenging for the monitoring mission to hold the parties accountable. It is clearly not possible, however, to know how violence would have developed in the absence of the mission, and it could be argued that the mission has helped to at least contain the violence.

Details of the panellists in the architecture workshop in which the Ukraine process was discussed along with suggested reading can be found in Annex 1.

‘Three in a jeep’ – conflict parties and international actors

A traditional method of leveraging the benefits of both conflict parties and international actors is the ‘three in a jeep’ method.²² This model of monitoring and verification involves a representative of each conflict party and a third-party monitor. The three-in-a-jeep label comes from when representatives of the three groups would quite literally travel in the same vehicle. Perhaps the best example of this process is the Nuba Mountains ceasefire, in which the conflict parties took primary responsibility for monitoring and verification, with international actors playing a supportive role, the success of which made an important contribution to the Sudan peace process.²³ A focus on the monitoring (and verification) efforts in Colombia, which adopted this method, is summarised in Box 3.

Yet, despite clear advantages with this approach, some questioned how many contexts this approach is relevant to or feasible in today. Joint monitoring is more challenging in fragmented conflicts where often more than three groups exist in complex conflict constellations, and where conflict parties are unwilling

or unable to protect civilians in ‘their’ territory. The three-in-a-jeep method, similar to a conflict party or internationally led set up, has also traditionally promoted a certain exclusivity in the monitoring process, as it tends to include male-dominated militarised conflict parties and international actors at the expense of civilians and civil society. This does not necessarily align with contemporary expectations for representation, inclusion, and transparency. This system has also traditionally failed to leverage local involvement, which can deliver important functions and expertise to ceasefire monitoring, including active citizen participation, territorial access, knowledge of local languages, cultures and terrains, and understandings of how forms of conflict and non-conflict violence are linked or mutate in ways that monitoring must adapt to address. Given its conception in the pre-digital age, it also generally fails to take advantage of new technologies as potential positive and negative multipliers of information (factual and false). Recent experience in Colombia does however show how this method can be adopted to better incorporate civilians and civil society.

Box 3: Colombia

The FARC and the Colombian government did not agree to implement a bilateral ceasefire prior to or during the negotiations. Instead, a bilateral ceasefire was part of the ultimate outcome of the peace talks. During the process, the FARC adopted an unmonitored unilateral ceasefire, which later in the process the government reciprocated through the suspension of air strikes. By 2015, casualties from fighting had dropped dramatically, but violence only officially ceased when the definitive ceasefires entered effect as part of the comprehensive settlement.

Technical commission and ceasefire agreement: A technical commission designed the ceasefire agreement between late 2014 and June 2016. This was composed of members of the FARC and the Colombian military. This was the first time in decades that members of the military forces had sat down with members of the FARC. The ceasefire commission researched other ceasefires adopted in other conflicts around the world and suggested possible options of how it could function in Colombia. The commission ultimately negotiated and designed the entire ceasefire agreement and architecture, including the monitoring and verification mechanism.

The ceasefire agreement was extremely detailed, comprising seven chapters and 68 pages, including 21 protocols describing all aspects of the ceasefire, laying down weapons, and monitoring and verification. The ceasefire process was to last a year from its initiation, after which it was anticipated that violence levels would be greatly diminished. The ceasefire was defined as ending offensive actions between the state security and law enforcement authorities and the FARC. The definition took the commission around three months to negotiate.

Trust, clarity, and accountability: Building trust between the parties was a mainstay of the ceasefire processes. The ceasefire commission was an essential trust-building exercise between the government and the FARC and was key to the successful implementation of the ceasefire agreement as the two sides were committed to implementing the provisions they had negotiated. The agreement and implementation mandate did not leave space for misunderstanding. The parties owned the process and were accountable for its success and failure.

Gender protocols and inclusion in the ceasefire: A Gender Sub-Commission was established to support the peace process. This was tasked with including a gender perspective in all points of the peace agreement and the ceasefire, providing training for the parties, organising exchanges with former combatants and civil society, undertaking research, and convening expert advice. Gender perspectives were formally included in 2014, two years after the process had started. The Gender Sub-Commission was tasked to review three pre-agreed agenda topics. However, in the case of the ceasefire, it was able to focus on gender inclusion from the beginning of the work of the ceasefire commission. The aim was to have 20 per cent female monitors, but this was a big challenge for the government and the UN. Over time, more women from police services and civilians joined the UN component. The government needed to boost the number of females from the military and police. This started improving after the Monitoring and Verification Mission (MVM) started working. The FARC had a considerable number of female combatants and was able to identify women to participate.

Monitoring and verification: National ownership was a guiding principle for the peace process in general and the monitoring and verification mission specifically. The parties were clear that the monitoring mission needed to be owned by Colombians and supported by international partners – not the other way around.

The Colombian government and the FARC agreed a tripartite monitoring and verification mechanism, which included both conflict parties, supported by the UN. The three components worked together at all levels – national, regional, and local. Decisions were made by consensus between the Colombian parties, with the UN as coordinator, not lead, in line with the agreed principle of Colombian ownership.

Negotiating 'separation of forces' locations for FARC personnel was a challenging and time-consuming process. The FARC initially wanted more than 80 encampments, whereas the government only wanted eight. Government criteria for the location of FARC encampments included them not being close to borders, coca crops or towns, and being reachable by road, having electricity and other logistics. For the FARC, basing the camps in remote locations provided some 'way out' to withdraw if things went wrong with the process. Mistakes were made, such as some locations becoming waterlogged in the winter. Prioritising security over logistics also produced significant challenges in building and supplying the camps. Ultimately, some 26 locations were agreed, each housing between 150-500 FARC combatants in a 5 km² transition zone with a buffer area.

Many of the 26 zones were very remote, so for administrative purposes were separated into nine divisions with a headquarters in a main city. The process was overseen by a tripartite political commission to resolve unanticipated problems that arose, despite the level of detail in the agreement. At local level, close to the encampments, the UN, the FARC, and the government lived and worked very closely together in the monitoring and verification local sites. This proximity allowed problems to be resolved quickly, as they were dealt with by all three bodies simultaneously 'on the spot'. A lot of trust was also built. The fact that the UN was in a support rather than a lead role helped maintain the parties' engagement. UN observers were largely from regional countries, making it easy to interact with the FARC and government, and with the communities. The monitoring mechanism held regular meetings with civil society at national, regional, and local level to exchange information, concerns and ideas.

Decision-making slowed as it moved up the chain of command, outside of the immediate jurisdiction of a particular encampment. A lesson is to authorise as much decision-making as possible within a given location. The UN and the Colombian government had also agreed to split costs and logistical support between them. This proved highly bureaucratic and slowed things down in practice.

As set out in the peace agreement, the ceasefire process lasted 12 months (September 2016 to September 2017). After this point, the armed conflict between the government and FARC was considered over, and the ceasefire and tripartite monitoring mission expired. However, in the post-ceasefire period the security guarantees for former combatants, especially those who have entered public life and institutions, has been problematic, and many human rights defenders have also been targeted and intimidated in recent years. This overall climate of fear and violence affects the quality of trust building necessary for peace to take hold permanently.

Details of the panellists in the Colombia workshop and suggested reading can be found in Annex 1.



A UN monitor visits a Transitional Standardization Zone housing FARC members as part of the disarmament process in Pongores, La Guajira department, Colombia in March 2017. © GUILLERMO LEGARIA/AFP via Getty Images

Developments in ceasefire monitoring

Ceasefire monitoring occurs in hostile contexts and volatile spaces. The growing reluctance of Western states to deploy third-party monitors has created additional challenges for peacemakers. These trends, combined with a rising interest in operationalising the 'Sustaining Peace' agenda and its emphasis on local and insider peacebuilders, has provided additional impetus to look for ways to innovate in the ceasefire monitoring. Across the workshops, two developments were discussed: civilian monitoring and a growing reliance on technology.

Civil society and civilian involvement

The involvement of unarmed civilians in ceasefire monitoring is not new but is increasingly coming to the fore. Local actors and civil society organisations have undertaken monitoring functions both as lead monitors and as a complement to other actors. The Philippines and Colombia have strong traditions of civilian involvement in ceasefire implementation and provide examples of good practice.²⁴ The emergence of civilian involvement draws on a long history of civilian human rights monitoring and accompaniment.²⁵ As one practitioner noted, 'civilian monitoring makes ceasefires more inclusive and participatory and brings to life normative standards'. While the traditions of civilian protection and human rights accompaniment do not always sit easily alongside civilian ceasefire monitoring, at the local level these distinctions have been deftly navigated. For example, in Myanmar civilian ceasefire *and* civilian protection monitoring used to co-exist.²⁶ However this generated concern from the military and some armed groups who were reluctant to legitimise civilian involvement in security matters.

Civilians have historically had little involvement in ceasefire implementation yet have the most at stake. In many contexts, it is civilian activists who are the primary, often only, sources of information about the impacts of war and violence, but they are often discounted as biased. Civilian protection and human rights monitoring mechanisms and processes typically pre-date ceasefire mechanisms and can provide a pool from which to draw seasoned monitors. Direct involvement of conflict-affected communities can also offer different forms of local expertise.²⁷ Relationships with armed actors, negotiation skills, cultural knowledge, ability to 'deploy' quickly and language

skills are of direct relevance for effective monitoring. Indeed, the presence of civilian monitoring can play a role in decreasing human rights and ceasefire violations and tackling impunity.²⁸ Such processes can also expose conflict parties to the benefits of civilian involvement and civilian expertise in security affairs.

The relationship between the conflict parties and civilian actors is key. In some cases, civilians are drawn from, or associated with, trusted CSOs.²⁹ In many cases, these are accepted as neutral monitoring actors. However, one participant also spoke of the benefits of involving civilian groups aligned with one of the conflict parties as a means of broadening participation. Civilian groups connected to one of the conflict parties tend to be more acceptable to that actor; this makes it more challenging for that conflict party to dismiss monitoring reports produced by their associates. The challenge here is then to also convince the parties to accept the involvement of a civilian group that they expect to be biased against them.

Civilian monitoring can help to open space for other forms of inclusion, for example increasing opportunities for women to be involved in monitoring. It can help to improve relations between local populations and international missions, increasing information, and help to overcome problems that might arise in the reporting of violations to predominately male missions. In the Philippines, for example, the Bantay Ceasefire group includes all-women monitoring teams.

However, the benefits of civilians' understanding of fighting patterns and trends – invaluable information for ceasefire design and implementation – can come at great personal cost. Civilian monitors are often vulnerable targets and often lack the protection afforded other monitoring actors. A prominent role for civilian monitors can also signal a lack of international commitment to the process that can have downstream effects on compliance. The movement towards civilian and civil society monitoring is growing and demands international attention to practical matters of affirming the value of civil society involvement, their security and diversity of roles.

Box 4: Yemen

The UN Office of the Special Envoy for Yemen (OSE-Yemen) has a Security Council mandate to secure a ceasefire to underpin political dialogue and agreements. Yemen has a volatile security environment, one in which the UN may not be able to comprehensively monitor and verify violations due to limited access and freedom of movement. The OSE-Yemen is designing a mechanism that puts the onus on the conflict parties to commit to dialogue to de-escalate and resolve incidents, with a conflict resolution approach underpinning their efforts.

Dialogue promotion: This significant emphasis on dialogue promotion, incident management and advance notification by the parties to each other will see the UN offering facilitation rather than arbitration and tabulation of violations. The OSE-Yemen will raise concerns publicly and to the parties, pivoting on actions that undermine the spirit of the agreement and impact civilians rather than addressing specific violations, which is not considered feasible due to access problems and the scale of incidents. Accordingly, the OSE-Yemen aims to focus on building trust between the parties through dialogue and fostering their commitment to resolving incidents through the framework of the ceasefire mechanism.

Civilian involvement and the use of technology: The approach is inherently incremental and, where success takes hold, may provide space for innovation including the increased involvement of local communities, including civil society and tribal leaders. Civil society involvement is at present a point of great contestation with the parties. Indeed, civilian protection is weak in Yemen. Human rights defenders and journalists are particularly exposed to intimidation, victimisation, injury, and death. The UN would not be able to guarantee the safety of civil society if they were to get involved in a formal ceasefire mechanism. The OSE-Yemen is exploring a range of options for the inclusion of civil society, including: supporting a coalition of CSOs, to offer group support and a form of safety in numbers; a guarantors' committee of INGOs; and a reference in a future ceasefire to recognise the potential role civil society could take at the governorate level.

New and bespoke technological tools are also being developed by Hala Systems to support incident management and the development of a common operating picture for the parties. The aim of deploying technology is to allow for the direct sharing of information from the ground in real-time by the parties, allowing for a more transparent mode of information sharing to exist between the parties and UN.

The Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights also contributes to this process through support to activists in Yemen to use technology and social media to monitor security conditions in ways that can conform to international legal standards and increase the quality of information for future use. Additional sources for verification include videos, photos, news articles and other materials. The recording and reporting of violations are often in non-traditional formats that armed actors and many international actors dismiss or are not familiar with using, such as Facebook and other social media platforms. These are often seen as less credible and reliable by traditional peace support actors. The Centre provides access to different platforms and advice and support on using technology in alignment with existing international standards. This includes training in how to interview survivors of violence ethically, the documentation and safe storage of data, and verification techniques. Experience from elsewhere is relevant. The Centre also works in Syria, Iraq, and South Sudan. The Iraq Reporting Tool developed by the Centre in 2016 is one example.³⁰ It draws on the Ushahidi Platform, developed in 2008 to monitor election-related violence in Kenya and evolving into a social enterprise to facilitate tech-led civilian monitoring of violence and human rights violence.³¹

Details of the panellists in the Yemen workshop and suggested reading can be found in Annex 1.

New technology

Peacemakers are increasingly attempting to overcome contemporary monitoring challenges through technological solutions. The types of technologies in use are extensive and vary across contexts. They include cameras at lines of control, smartphones and apps, videos and photos, acoustic sensors, UAVs or drones, apps that detect sentiment from social media, and satellite imagery. The significance of technology as both a powerful tool and a challenge for ceasefire implementation was a consistent topic in workshop discussions, and the promises and pitfalls of technology featured heavily in the discussion focusing on Yemen (see Box 4) and Ukraine (see Box 2).

Compelling reasons were offered for using technology in ceasefire implementation. Technology can contribute to improving the reach of monitoring operations and the quality of information from conflict areas by providing more accurate real-time information (e.g., through satellites and UAVs). For ceasefire management structures, the boom in technology has sped up the transmission of information which enables more time-sensitive and potentially informed decision-making around contentious issues (e.g., identifying and managing violations).

Technology can also help to support confidence-building measures, for example by helping facilitate the recovery of armed actors killed in action, or civilians caught up in conflict, or the repair of vital infrastructure.

Technological monitoring methods can often be deployed faster and more safely than humans. It also allows for more structured and systematic analysis of ceasefire violations, to gain a deeper understanding of who is often involved where, and what patterns or trends there are across time. This provides significant analytical possibilities to better understand the patterns of violence, and so design appropriate responses to common problems. It also offers the possibility to challenge commonly held myths about the nature of the conflict.³²

A communications strategy is also an important component of modern monitoring missions. Technology (e.g., social media, phone, and internet) can help in the communication around monitoring missions, helping to share the scope of the mandate, in particular key details around prohibited actions, and how to report violations. This is especially important in contested spaces where the monitors are likely to be operating. Key here is that technology can open up possibilities for a much wider collection of actors to report violations, *if* they are afforded the rights to do so. Some experts also noted that technology and social media can play a role in managing expectations through more transparency of information, particularly related to ceasefire scope.

Technology can also promote inclusion and transparency, supporting war-affected communities to have more timely information, and actively contribute to monitoring compliance (e.g., through app-based incident logging). It can also be used to create more informal collaboration in real time and shift away from formal meetings at higher levels between conflict parties which can be delayed and replete with well-worn negative power dynamics. It can also help leapfrog the formal etiquette issues that often cause delays and undermine productive face-to-face meetings of the conflict parties due to hierarchy, stifling protocols, and the like.

However, some practitioners voiced concerns about an overemphasis on technology and implications for the quality of processes and ownership of outcomes. There was concern that giving prominence to technology could divorce ceasefires from their political realities. Some argued that technology can erode the effort of more traditional confidence-building measures (CBMs) to create means for the parties to act jointly and collaboratively, especially if there is no ceasefire management process/mechanism through which the data collected using new technologies can be processed and followed up on with the conflict parties. One individual opined: “The whole question of information management and its application in verification and monitoring processes is taking us further and further away from the simple ‘three in a jeep’ formulation.” Simply put: the more technology, the less the parties engage and own the process. A seasoned practitioner in the workshops also reflected that the increased flow of public information offers conflict parties an opportunity to further inflame and blame each other, resulting in more tension (and possibly violence) not less. Thus, it is not a given that more information is inherently beneficial.

New challenges born specifically from new technologies were also discussed particularly ways in which information and media are now ‘weaponised’ in many conflicts. In the era of ‘fake news’, manipulated ‘deep-fake’ videos and images can cause speedy reactions from conflict parties, communities, and others. Here the problem is with misinformation and disinformation. Even where this kind subterfuge is not used, the possibility for manipulation of information can reduce trust in the validity of all sources, including in the monitoring process, and potentially shift the focus away from discussing incidents, violations and their impacts and towards the credibility of different data sources.

The challenges of managing data volume were also discussed. While machine learning or artificial intelligence is constantly evolving and improving, practitioners asserted that quality assurance cannot be left to machines and that human analysis and perspectives will likely always be essential for analysing political violence. As such, the increased

data generated by new forms of technology creates serious new burdens on human resource to review and evaluate it. This is particularly the case with regard to the analysis (rather than reporting) of data, which has to date been rather limited.

The sensitivities of certain technologies were also discussed. Tools such as drones can evoke sensitivities and anxieties about intelligence gathering – a concern of many non-state armed groups. Key considerations for the use of any technology in ceasefire monitoring are consent, trust, and knowledge of the technology.

In sum, a general view emerged that technology is best understood as a 'multiplier' and complementary tool but can never a replacement for human effort or political will. It is a supplement rather than a substitute.

Face-to-face interactions between the conflict parties within a monitoring mission, and the monitors and civilians, are likely to remain key confidence-building tools, essential for a full understanding of a context. Yet there are limits to human capabilities, such as difficulties monitoring the sizable geographic spaces often covered in a ceasefire agreement. Maintaining a 24-hour presence is rarely feasible or cost-effective, and maintaining a presence during intense periods of violence is dangerous and challenging. In these cases, technology can help to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the context, improving coverage and speed of information, often at a lower human and economic cost.

Box 5: The promise and pitfalls of technology use in ceasefire monitoring

Benefits

- Lifts the quality of, and access to, information around ceasefire compliance.
- Can help to increase the accountability of conflict parties within a process.
- Deployable faster and more safely than humans.
- Improves communication and promote inclusion and transparency – supporting war-affected communities to have more timely information.
- Supports informal collaboration in 'real time', reducing reliance on high-level formal meetings.
- Strengthens the validity of information through triangulation.

Risks and caveats

- Dehumanises and divorces ceasefires from political realities, eroding the confidence-building function of human monitoring, and reducing conflict parties' and others' engagement and ownership of the ceasefire process.
- Information is 'weaponised' in many conflicts.
- 'Fake news' and 'deep fake' manipulated videos and images can cause rapid, antagonistic reactions from conflict parties, communities and others.
- Drone and satellite monitoring can evoke sensitivities about intelligence gathering.
- Requires the right 'fit' to levels of technological know-how, internet availability and access.
- Can negate civilian access to participation in reporting.

Conclusion

The seminar series convened by Conciliation Resources affirms the significant and growing interest in ceasefires. Ceasefire monitoring was discussed as an often-vital component in helping to make ceasefires 'stick'. The wide range of participants, representing a diverse collection of institutions, highlights that the ceasefire process is no longer the sole preserve of military powerholders. The discussions, and this subsequent report, reveal a number of important considerations, but also point to the need for further cross-community engagement, research and practitioner sharing of good practice focused on ceasefire architecture and support.

About the authors

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Dr Govinda Clayton is a Senior Researcher in Peace Processes at the Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich. Dr. Clayton combines research, teaching and practice to transform communication and conflictual dialogue between individuals and groups, to help bridge differences and heal political divides. He currently leads the Ceasefire Project, a collaboration with researchers and practitioners from the mediation support team at ETH Zurich, the Peace Research Institute Oslo, Uppsala University and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. This project seeks to generate knowledge and practical guidance on how to negotiate and implement ceasefires during civil war. Dr Clayton is also the strategic director of the Conflict Research Society, and served as a specialist advisor to Conciliation Resources for this project.

Dr Alexander Ramsbotham is Director of Research and Innovation at Conciliation Resource, having before that been Director of Accord and Series Editor. Previously, he was a research fellow in the international programme at the Institute for Public Policy Research. He has worked as specialist adviser to the House of Lords European Union (EU) Select Committee in its inquiry into the EU Strategy for Africa, before which he was head of the Peace and Security Programme at the United Nations Association-UK. He has also been an associate fellow in the International Security Programme at Chatham House.

Annex 1: Resources and information on the 2020 seminar series

Ceasefire architecture and trends seminar, 13 October 2020

Panellists:

- Ajay Sethi, senior advisor on ceasefires and security arrangements in the mediation support unit (MSU) of the Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs (DPPA)
- Shadia Marhaban, Mediators Beyond Borders
- Alexander Hug, former Principal Deputy Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine

Resources:

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Afghanistan seminar, 14 October 2020

Panellists:

- Habeeba Sarabi, Member of the Afghan Peace Negotiation Team
- General Abdul Hadi Khalid, Senior Advisor, Afghanistan Ministry of Interior
- Khalillullah Safi, Afghan peace analyst

Resources:

Safi, Khalillullah (2020) 'Navigating local and central dynamics: peacemaking with the Taliban', in Cate Buchanan (ed.) *Pioneering peace pathways – Making connections to end violent conflict*, Accord 29 (London: Conciliation Resources). www.c-r.org/accord/pioneering-peace-pathways/navigating-local-and-central-dynamics-peacemaking-taliban

Larson, Anna and Alexander Ramsbotham (2018) *Incremental peace in Afghanistan*, Accord 27 (London: Conciliation Resources). www.c-r.org/accord/afghanistan. See:

- Michael Semple, 'Elusive settlement in Afghanistan: ten priorities for peaceful progress'
- Julius Cavendish, 'Brokering local settlements in Helmand: practical insights for inclusion'
- Perspectives of leaders of five Taliban caucuses – interviews

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Yemen seminar, 20 October 2020

Panellists:

- A. Heather Coyne, Chief, SSR Team, UN Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General
- John Jaeger, Founder and CEO, Hala Systems
- Miriam Puttick, Head of Middle East and North Africa Programme, Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights

Resources:

Palik, Julia et al. (2019) *Yemen: Ceasefire Project Country Report*, PRIO and ETH Zurich. <https://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=12028>

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Colombia seminar, 21 October 2020

Panellists:

- Juanita Millan Hernandez (Former Adviser to the High Commissioner for Peace in Colombia, Member of United Nations Mediation Standby Team).
- Major General Javier Perez Aquino (Former Chief Observer of UN Mission in Colombia and Coordinator of the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism)
- Mireya Andrade (FARC Representative in the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism)

Resources:

Cortés, Omar & Juanita Millán (2019) The role of the Armed Forces in the Colombian peace process. *Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution* (September). <https://noref.no/Publications/Regions/Colombia/The-role-of-the-Armed-Forces-in-the-Colombian-peace-process>

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8. The ceasefire oversight mechanism may have a role ensuring implementation.
9. This depends on their being the requisite level of political will from the conflict parties, and a mechanism to enable the management of violations.
10. See also, Potter, Antonia (2004) *Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification*. Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.
11. Indirectly monitors may produce costs, such as reputational costs associated with violation reporting.
12. For a broader discussion see Verjee, Aly (2019) *Monitoring Ceasefires Is Getting Harder: Greater Innovation Is Required*. Geneva, Switzerland: The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.
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