



***Fragmentation of peacemaking and peacebuilding:
Non-Western dynamics of peace and transition management***

Conceptual and methodological framework

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Background

This stream of research focuses on ***complementarity, overlap, and competition*** among international actors in the contemporary peacemaking and peacebuilding field. Present-day peacemaking and peacebuilding is being fundamentally reshaped by multiple factors, such as the introduction and accessibility of new technologies; environmental degradation; pandemics; increasing fragmentation of local actors; and erosion of a state-centric world. The causal pathways of these factors are often unclear, with individual factors overlapping and feeding into each other. To address these broader transformations in peacemaking and peacebuilding, our research adopts ***an actor-centric approach***, querying how different international actors conceptualise and operationalise contemporary peace and transition management, and how their individual approaches fit together.

As the global order transitions ***from a unipolar to a multipolar order***, we are witnessing a proliferation of international actors in many conflict and post-conflict settings. This necessitates an analysis of a broader range of relevant actors. States and regional organisations who a decade ago would have had marginal involvement in mediation, design of peace agreements, and the subsequent peacebuilding tasks, are increasingly assuming leadership roles - and potentially expanding and reshaping what is understood as peacemaking and peacebuilding. What do these actors consider peacemaking and peacebuilding to be? What motivations underpin their engagement? How does this influence their approaches to different conflict and post-conflict settings? How are their approaches interacting with those of the more traditional Western/liberal peacebuilders? How do local actors navigate this new reality? What does this increased ***fragmentation of international actors*** and ***diversification of styles of engagement*** in contemporary conflict and post-conflict settings mean for the nature and trajectories of the 21st century peacemaking and peacebuilding?

To probe these questions, the project focuses on two broader geopolitical trends: (1) the increasing presence of global and regional states in contemporary peacemaking and peacebuilding; and (2) the viability of collective regional responses as a potential alternative to collective global ones. Through a case

study approach of non-Western states and regional organisations, we plan to elucidate how the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar global order has influenced ***the concept, the practice, and the norms of peacemaking and peacebuilding***.

Overall approach and methodology

The project moves from the simplistic understanding of non-Western and Western actors as rivals, instead exploring complementarity, overlap, and competition in practices of states and regional organisations. It asks how the styles of engagement and concrete practices of non-Western actors in peacemaking and peacebuilding differ from those of Western/liberal actors, and whether these practices are underpinned by different normative approach(es). Based on the analysis of practices and their ideational underpinning, we can provide an appraisal of whether and how the overall concept of peacemaking and peacebuilding is being re-articulated by non-Western powers. This, combined with an analysis of how other actors are receiving non-Western peacemaking attempts, allows us to shed light on the nature and trajectories of the 21st century peacemaking.

To ensure a rigorous approach, our overall methodology builds on the state-of-the-art understanding of norm contestation processes. ***Norm contestation*** is broadly understood as a process involving disputes about the meaning, the validity and the applicability of norms, which are defined and re-defined through an interactive practice that involves at least two participating agents (Stimmer and Wisken, 2019; Wiener, 2014). While we often think of norms as stable, norms always contain an element of fluidity and potential for change. The process of norm contestation is always present, but in different degrees and forms. There are two aspects of recent research on norm contestation that are particularly relevant to this project and have inspired its design and methodology.

First, norm contestation is a poor predictor of what is happening to the robustness/status of the norm. Just because non-Western actors might be contesting established liberal norms, they are not necessarily undermined. ***What matters is the type of contestation a norm faces***, with there being two types: validity contestation and applicability contestation (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020). Norm ***validity contestation*** questions “the righteousness of the claims a norm makes” (ibid.: 51). For example asking whether specific norms - such as gender inclusion - are still legitimate to uphold in peacemaking. Norm ***applicatory contestation*** considers when and how to apply a particular norm to a specific situation. For example, when engaging in mediation, should we prioritise gender inclusion and design mechanisms to monitor its implementation, or should priorities lie elsewhere. The two types of contestations can be distinguished by whether norm core is challenged: validity contestation questions norm core whereas applicatory contestation does not. Contestation of the applicatory scope can also help clarify the norm rather than diminish its validity. For example, applicatory contestation could clarify prioritisation of a particular norm in relation to others.

Second, although most research on non-Western peacemaking and peacebuilding has focused on open debates about norms, there is a second type of norm contestation where norms are contested through particular forms of implementation. Both discursive and behavioural contestation are important to

understanding the impact of non-Western approaches on existing norms. In **discursive contestation**, relevant political actors engage in discursive debates about different understandings of the meaning and/or relative importance of a norm. This could question both the validity and applicability of norms. **Behavioural contestation**, on the other hand, happens “below the radar”. As Stimmer and Wisken (2019) argue, behavioural contestation does not question the validity or meaning of the contested norm on a discursive level. In fact, the contestant may claim to adhere to the predominant understanding of the norm - for example to avoid reputational costs - but undermine or re-articulate the norm through implementation.

There are **two types of behavioural contestation** and both are important for understanding the impact of non-Western peacemaking and peacebuilding approaches. The first suggests that behavioural contestation can occur when **actors fail to introduce any implementation mechanism or introduce ineffective implementation mechanisms**, whilst simultaneously paying “lip service” to the norm. Actors might be talking about the importance of the rule of law but fail to include mechanisms to monitor its implementation. The second type of behavioural contestation involves **obstructive practices**. These encompass third party attempts to obstruct, interfere with, or otherwise influence the norm implementation of other actors. Examples of such obstructive practices include starting a parallel mediation process to undermine the first mediator’s efforts or providing unconditional aid to undercut another actor’s aid packages which are tied to conditionality arrangements. Both these types of behavioural contestations can compromise the importance – or applicatory scope - of the existing norm, but motivations for such behaviour could be vastly different. When actors fail to introduce proper implementation mechanisms, the consequences or impact on the norms might be unintended, and the actor might not have a wish to undermine the norm. On the other hand, obstructive practices imply a clear intention/motivation by the third party. Remedying the impact on the original norm would therefore necessitate different responses.

By examining how individual non-Western actors **practice** peacemaking and peacebuilding, and **what normative commitments their practice advances**, we can better understand their idea of peacemaking and peacebuilding itself and **whether and how it challenges the validity and applicability of Western conceptions of peacemaking and peacebuilding**. Conversely, by looking at how non-Western practices and ideas are received and implemented by other actors, and how actors that are being intervened upon negotiate between multiple practices and normative commitments, we gain a better understanding of the contemporary understanding of peacemaking and peacebuilding.

On a practical level, this means that any study of norm contestation needs to address both 1) the behaviour and motivations of potential norm challengers; and 2) how their practices and ideas are received by other actors. The methodology in our case studies reflects that logic. We are interested in capturing both the top-down dimension, that is, **motivations and practices of non-Western “interveners”**, and the bottom-up dimension, that is, **implementation and perception of the “intervened upon” and other actors in the peacebuilding field**. While methodology is slightly adapted to each study, they all combine desk-based research with elite level interviews.

Capturing practice and motivations of non-Western powers in peacemaking/peacebuilding

The project captures practice and motivations of a diverse set of actors, some with a regional and some with a global reach. The cases in this *top-down dimension* of our work include two actors with a potential global reach in peacemaking and peacebuilding (*China and Russia*) and several actors with a strong regional focus (*Turkey, Ethiopia, Sudan, Qatar*). We also included two sets of *regional organisations, in the Middle East and North Africa* - which focuses on the GCC, LAS and OIS - and *Africa* - which focuses on the AU, IGAD and SADC. These actors were chosen not just for their increasing involvement in conflict areas, but also because studying them allows us to draw some preliminary conclusions on broader trajectories in how non-Western actors approach peacemaking and peacebuilding in their neighbourhood and globally.

Individual studies will provide an overview of where and how non-Western powers are engaging in peacemaking/peacebuilding more generally, in addition to providing a deeper understanding of their strategy and motivations in the relevant case studies forming our bottom-up analysis. There is variation among non-Western powers, and individual studies conducted by regional experts will focus on the aspects pertinent to each of them. However, to ensure coherence and enable comparative research, the core research focus and methodology will be shared between the studies.

Each case study will broadly address a common set of questions:

- 1. Overview: level of involvement**
 - a. How has it changed? Why?
 - b. Where is the actor involved?
- 2. How does the actor articulate/conceptualise PM/PB?**
 - a. What do they see as part of it?
 - b. What role for normative aspects? Where is there conformity and where differentiation with liberal norms? Possible norms:
 - i. Stable institutions vs good governance, rule of law and accountability
 - ii. Inclusivity of actors and individual human rights
- 3. How does the actor see their role in PM/PB processes?**
 - a. Where and when do they get involved? Who do they engage? At what level?
 - b. Are they involved formally or informally?
 - c. What role do they see for other actors (Western, UN)?
 - d. How do they navigate other actors in PM/PB?
- 4. What are their priorities/interests/motivations in PM/PB?**
 - a. Intersection of domestic and foreign policy (near and far abroad)
 - b. How do they navigate between conflict management/containment and conflict transformation?
- 5. Is there a variation between their involvement in different cases we are exploring in our bottom-up studies? Why?**

Capturing implementation and perception of non-Western peacemaking/peacebuilding

To assess how non-Western ideas of peacemaking and peacebuilding are implemented in practice and how these are received and perceived by other actors, we will incorporate *a bottom-up dimension*, focusing on the following case studies: **Libya, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia**. This allows us to empirically substantiate how local actors mediate between and interpret the multiplicity of international approaches to peacemaking, and whether non-Western approaches are seen to be complementing or competing with Western ones.

Individual studies will provide an overview of where and how non-Western states and regional organizations are engaging in peacemaking/peacebuilding in six chosen case studies and how this practice intersects with approaches of traditional/liberal peacebuilders. There is variation within the case studies and country experts will focus on aspects particularly relevant to each of them, however, to ensure coherence and enable comparative research, the core research focus and methodology will be shared between the studies.

Each case study will broadly address a common set of questions:

- 1. Overview: level of involvement of different actors, where, when**
- 2. How do local actors (state and non-state) navigate this fragmentation?**
 - a. What do they understand as peacemaking/peacebuilding and what interventions are not seen as part of that?
 - b. How do they deal with different 'international' actors?
- 3. Who is taking the lead in which areas and why?**
 - a. Who do local actors prefer and why?
- 4. How do non-Western powers approach the process of peacemaking/peacebuilding in practice?**
 - a. When they are taking the lead, how directive are they in their approaches?
 - b. Does that differ from how Western powers would approach/are approaching the process?
 - c. Does that differ between different non-Western powers? (i.e., near vs far?)
- 5. What priorities and normative commitments are included in discussions and any final outcomes, implementation/follow-up?**
 - a. How is the balancing between different norms achieved? Possible norms:
 - i. Stable institutions
 - ii. Good governance, rule of law and accountability
 - iii. Inclusivity of actors
 - iv. Individual human rights (which if any)

References

Deitelhoff, N., and L. Zimmermann. 2020. "Things We Lost in the Fire: How Different Types of Contestation Affect the Robustness of International Norms." *International Studies Review* 22 (1): 51–76.

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