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opinion

Talking Peace in a
Time of Terror:
United Nations
Mediation and
Collective Security

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The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue is an independent and impartial organisation, based in Geneva, Switzerland, dedicated to the promotion of humanitarian principles, the prevention of conflict and the alleviation of its effects through dialogue.

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Talking Peace in a Time of Terror: United Nations Mediation and Collective Security

Martin Griffiths

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1 Introduction

1 *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, UN General Assembly, A/59/565, especially paragraphs 100-103.

For those of us in the business of conflict resolution, the UN High-level Panel's considerable emphasis on revitalising UN mediation efforts is a much needed and long awaited boon. The Panel's recommendation that the mediation capacity of the United Nations should be dramatically enhanced is unambiguous. It calls clearly for a significant increase in staffing, competence and resources to ensure much greater UN capacity to support sustained, field-orientated mediation to prevent and resolve internal and inter-state conflicts.¹ The Panel is in no doubt that the UN needs to raise its game in this important aspect of world politics.

This new determination to recognise, professionalise, resource and apply political mediation adequately within the United Nations is a welcome development in more ways than one. Practically, it should mean more skilled UN mediators operating with a wider reach and in greater depth around the world. It also signals the coming-of-age of UN mediation as it emerges from the gentlemanly and frequently last-minute practice of the Secretary General's 'good offices' into a more rigorous and finely tuned part of UN core business. Politically, it is a profound acknowledgement of the strategic importance of dialogue alongside conventional security measures in today's post 9/11 world.

It is surely right that the important task of conflict mediation is now being recognised as a strategic global craft that has significant political value. The current need for creative go-betweens who can convene warring parties and work with international backing as political problem-solvers is high indeed.

Having said this, UN policy makers need to think much further than they have done so far in the High-level Panel report. The Panel is right to prioritise mediation, to recognise that the UN needs to do more in this respect and to be better resourced for the purpose. But this is only half the answer. In reality, the Panel says virtually nothing on what this means in practice. What will all these new UN mediators actually do?

The Panel's report sees the need for heightened significance and increased resources for UN mediation. However, it stops short of a creative and practical vision of what such new capacity might look like and how it might be used. The Panel identifies UN mediation as a new key tool to counter threats as they emerge – but does not spell out the job it needs to do. It recommends expanding the cast of UN mediators – but does not define their roles on the wider stage of peace-making. There are already a wide variety of different conflict mediators operating in the international arena today – but the Panel's report gives no hints as to how expanded UN mediation should best shape a complementary role alongside them.

As a matter of urgency, UN policy makers must now engage in a much more serious analysis of what they can bring to the party. Otherwise, all the new posts and resources recommended in the report will simply be a massive expansion of UN bureaucracy and an unthinking continuation of how things have always been done.

UN conflict mediators should not simply be out to duplicate what others are doing in the growing field of formal and informal mediation. Instead, we need the UN to be creative as a distinctive player and standard setter in the increasingly heterogeneous world of contemporary mediators, and to offer strategic peace-making leadership.

With the benefit of the HD Centre's five years of experience of facilitating conflict resolution efforts in internal conflicts as diverse as Indonesia (Aceh), Burundi, Myanmar, Sudan (Darfur), Uganda, and the Philippines, this short paper offers some thoughts about how the UN's political department might be wise to use its reinvigoration and enlargement to shape a new role for itself in mediation and peace-making. It also draws on our experience as the co-convenors with the Norwegian Government of a the Mediators' Retreat – a network of 20 seasoned track-one mediators who have met annually to discuss mediation policy and practice for the last two years.

The paper concentrates on challenges and opportunities in the external environment, the world at large, as well as more institutional and bureaucratic challenges within the UN itself, particularly perhaps within New York – a place that UN staff can sometimes mistake for being the world at large. Unless the realities of the world inside and outside the United Nations are taken seriously, it is unlikely that these new efforts will bear much fruit.

It is obvious, yet still important to note that the UN is not coming to mediation anew. Despite the High-level Panel's implicit criticisms of insufficient UN capacity in mediation, the UN has a distinguished history as a mediator in inter-state and internal conflict. In El Salvador, Guatemala and Cambodia, the UN has played a frontline mediator role and brought complex peace processes to successful completion. In Cyprus and Western Sahara it has valiantly tried but not quite succeeded. In many other countries, UN mediation has been crucial to agree ceasefires, prevent renewed conflict or make peace agreements stick. Indeed, in a business where no single player is flush with success, there is little doubt that the UN is already the world's most successful track-one mediator.

Today's world is a little different. First, the global political context in which any mediation takes place has some important new features, as well as some resilient old ones. Second, mediation itself is a rapidly emerging and diversifying field of international political practice with many more players than there used to be – state, inter-state and non-state

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alike. Without due appreciation of the current peace-making landscape, a larger UN effort runs the risk of just being bigger but not better. To avoid such a result, the UN needs to think hard about three issues in particular: clarifying its distinct role in the current peace-making scene; the continuing and new obstacles to dialogue in today's world; and the type of people the UN needs to recruit to work effectively for peace. To begin we sketch an overview of the state of international conflict mediation today.

2 | Mediation today

Recent international efforts to resolve armed conflicts have produced a delicate and diverse ecology of track-one peace-making organisations. The genie of mediation is now well and truly out of the bottle and many governmental and non-governmental organisations are doing it. The genie cannot be put back and the UN will need to find its place in this new galaxy of conflict mediation actors. A healthy mixture of governments, regional organisations and private foundations has now emerged alongside the United Nations to lead, facilitate and support mediation efforts around the world.

Two European governments – Norway and Switzerland – have deliberately specialised in mediating conflict as a central part of their foreign policy. Regional powers, like South Africa, Nigeria and Malaysia have often been the driving force within the mediation efforts of regional organisations like the AU and ASEAN. Within the Commonwealth, the Secretary General or particular member states have also acted as go-betweens in particular disputes, and France has on occasion played a similar role in La Francophonie.

Neighbouring states – like Tanzania, Chad, Libya, Kenya and Thailand – who live next to some of the world's worst wars, have also lead, actively encouraged or practically facilitated mediation. The USA and EU have frequently taken determined roles as mediators in the Balkans and the Middle East or played strong supporting roles using their considerable political leverage in many other conflicts.

A number of independent foundations, like the HD Centre, have also emerged as significant track-one mediators in the last decade. These all engage in mediation efforts between governments and armed opposition movements. These small private groups are set apart by virtue of being so-called 'weak mediators', who have no political power of their own. They have no intrinsic leverage to bring to the process of talks and no economic and political resources to bring to the peace-building phase.

This weakness is a strength in some conflicts. It can make such private actors mediators of choice to those who are wary of state or inter-governmental motive. Our non-governmental tradition means that we are stylistically different to deal with. We do not move and work with the baggage of formal, linear diplomatic protocol. Nor do we rely on the long chain of command and the mandate mindset that comes with government and inter-governmental decision-making. It is, thus, our very political weakness and our operational dexterity that make us an important niche player.

It is striking that the leading private track-one mediators have so far emerged from Europe and the USA. It is to be hoped that organisations from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East will also take up the challenge of track-one mediation. In particular, the emergence of independent conflict mediation organisations based in the Islamic world would be highly advantageous in this day and age. For people to start such organisations obviously requires a level of political freedom and impartial financial support. But international responsibility for dialogue and peace cannot be confined to states. New organisations are needed to offer creative and credible options to warring parties today.

If there is a diversity of players, there is also a diversity of approach today. Every situation is different and the UN can no longer assume that – as the UN – it will play the same role in each peace process. It must be ready to take different parts, to make room for others and to work with them. Each new conflict attracts a slightly different configuration of mediators in accordance with the particular political climate within and around any given conflict. Three main forces seem to shape each new configuration:

- acceptability of the mediators – their personalities and the way they are politically perceived by the warring parties;
- timing within the conflict – the parties' own room for manoeuvre, their political calculation and their sense of threat and opportunity at any given time that mediation is suggested;
- hard political pressure – from regional and global interests but also from intra-group rivals which cannot be ignored.

From these ingredients emerge the peculiar cocktail of each different peace process which results in unique patterns of international actors every time.

3 | One mediator among many

The UN cannot expect to add the same ingredient to each peace process. Nor can it expect to be the natural choice of mediator in every conflict. A new UN peace and mediation team cannot hope to work to a set menu of interventions. It will have to operate *a la carte* as part of a wider selection of options on offer to warring parties and great power interest.

Nevertheless, in the midst of this international peace making network, the United Nations remains a significant and highly valuable player with three considerable organisational and operational strengths.

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First, and most important of all, perhaps, is the formal level of international political legitimacy and support that UN-led mediation can lay hold on when legally mandated and fully resourced by a majority of the international community. This political legitimacy is grounded too in the UN's legal legitimacy as the guardian and standard bearer for much of the international legal framework of human rights and international law making surrounding contemporary conflict and peace – most notably by the Security Council. At its best, such legitimacy is hard to beat. This unmatched international legitimacy also gives the UN exceptional convening power to call together and set international standards for the wider network of conflict mediators.

Secondly, in its unique range of social and economic agencies, the UN has an exceptional ability to follow-through from a frontline mediation role into an implementing role of peace-building and reconstruction. More than any other international institution, the UN is integrated in such a way as to cross the war-peace threshold organically and very practically on the ground.

Finally, of course, the UN is global. It has knowledge, expertise and organisational structure in almost every country in the world. While this global reach may also be true of the USA, the EU and possibly even some transnational corporations, it is not the case with any other state, inter-state or private organisation engaged in track-one mediation. This reach is an extraordinary resource.

Like all of us, however, the UN also has weaknesses as a mediator. None of these seem to have been considered by the Panel. As with most of us, the UN's weaknesses are the shadows of its strengths. On occasion, the UN is hampered as an effective mediator by its statism, its mixed mandates and its potential overstretch.

“ The statist nature of the UN means that it is seriously inhibited in its relations with non-state armed groups.

First, the intrinsically statist nature of the UN means that it is seriously inhibited in its relations with non-state armed groups and routinely operates with the caution of a government rather than the flexibility of a true go-between. The UN must now finally face up to ‘the rebel question’ and negotiate with armed groups as a matter of routine when it is obviously appropriate to do so. This will not always be the case. Sometimes the UN will be an unacceptable mediator to one or both sides. However, when there is room for manoeuvre between all sides, UN staff must be empowered to make the most of it. Too many able senior UN staff – especially in the field – are reluctant to take a risk on contacting armed groups directly for fear of being left high and dry by senior staff in New York should things go wrong and the host government take exception to such contact. At field level and in distant capitals, UN staff must be free to talk to rebel groups when the situation cries out for it. Without doing so, there will be nobody for the UN to go between as a mediator.

Secondly, the UN’s capacity for military, economic and social follow-through does not always combine well with a mediator role. The UN’s ability to manage peacekeeping forces, organise elections and revitalise social and economic infrastructure alongside government and civil society comes from the range and mix of mandates across its various agencies. These mandates can sometimes clash with the neutral and disinterested role of mediator.

The UN’s post-conflict prescription for weak and failing states is now well known. Multi-party elections are followed by economic liberalisation and socio-political reform along human rights lines. Those who resist such an agenda are unlikely to choose the UN as a mediator – for whom such political outcomes are an institutional given. Similarly, mediation of some kind usually needs to continue throughout the implementation of a peace process and – as the HD Centre discovered in Aceh – being involved in implementation can erode one’s continuing position as a mediator. The UN’s position as an agreement mediator may be compromised by its subsequent role as a peace implementer.

Finally, of course, global reach can all too easily become global overstretch. The best mediators are often those who discipline themselves to doing a few things well. In a business which can all too often swing between the peaks and troughs of a volatile market, handling just the right amount of work is notoriously difficult. Prioritising conflicts and being disciplined in taking on mediation commitments will be a big and critical challenge for UN policy makers.

4 | Defining the UN's role

Today's mediation field may not be large but it is nuanced. UN policy makers will need to think carefully as they design a mediation policy that finds sensible answers to typical policy questions. In which types of conflict is the UN best placed to concentrate its resources? What is its comparative advantage over other mediators? What knowledge, structure, agencies and financing can it bring to a conflict to support other mediators in a given situation? In other words, when might the UN's best role be as leader, ally or supporter in a given mediation?

With a keen awareness of UN strengths and weaknesses, the best approach the UN can take is to define itself strategically as a broad-based peacemaker and not simply as a mediator in the narrow sense. The UN could usefully focus on three key roles beyond its own role as mediator. These are: strategic leadership; standard setting, and knowledge sharing for the international peace-making community as a whole.

The UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) would be wise not to become fixated on strict conflict mediation just because the word is the label used in the High-level Panel's report but focus instead on a broader idea of leadership and support for international mediation. This can be expected to take different forms at different times and will require closely integrated work with the Panel's proposed Peace-building Office.

At the heart of such a role must be a new mindset amongst UN peace people. Their peace programming must not be continuously self-referential – always coming up with UN action as the right response. Instead, they must see the value of others and play as part of a wider peace network: encouraging and enabling the actions of others; leading, catalyzing and not merely coordinating.

Mediation is only ever one ingredient in a more varied process whereby different players facilitate and support a peace process by helping to provide incentives, increase contact, provide accompaniment, offer technical advice and contribute resources. These various forms of support help to maintain pro-peace momentum over the inevitably long period of peace-making. In many situations, strict mediation is not likely to be the optimal role for the UN to play. Being flexible as broad-based peace facilitators, a larger UN team in DPA can play a highly complementary part in the wider network of conflict resolution organisations.

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A critical part of such support and leadership must be concentrated UN work on the great missing link between tracks one and two. Track-two movements are vital to a successful, widely owned and participatory peace – that deep peace which comes from real inclusion and incentives in all sectors of society. Yet, strategically, the two tracks are seldom effectively connected around international mediations.

Every profession has its Achilles heel – a key area which it knows to be critical but at which it is routinely weak. Creating real connection and synergy between track-one and track-two is the professional lacuna for peacemakers. Bourgeois politicians, diplomats and international officials know it makes sense but are often culturally resistant to it. Few people move easily between the diplomatic and the popular circuits. Diplomats are not rewarded for good work on track-two. Political pragmatists prefer to work with the small-group decision-making of powerful political leaderships rather than the diverse, contested and emergent processes of civil society and popular movements.

The UN is well placed to pull these two strands of peace together. It could play an extraordinarily useful role in doing so by using its convening, analytical and agency power to create holistic national and international action around peace in the same way that it has done around health, childhood, gender, disability and poverty generally.

The UN's global reach and exceptional international legitimacy also makes it ideally placed as the standard setter for mediation principles and practice. In this role it could orchestrate the design and dissemination of an internationally accepted normative framework for mediation and peace support. With so many different actors engaged in mediation and peace-making today, the UN must show real leadership by seeking inter-government consensus on politically legitimate and high quality mediation and peace support practice. This would involve setting certain international standards of good practice and operational principle that must be respected by would-be mediators and peacemakers. Such a framework is increasingly important in an expanding and diversifying field – not least when the emergence of a new breed of “mercenary mediator” may be just around the corner.

Related to its role as a standard setter, the UN's reach and convening power also makes it the perfect place to develop global analysis and learning on mediation. From its unique vantage point it could ensure deep monitoring, knowledge gathering and reflection upon conflicts and their peace processes. A third aspect of an enhanced UN role is therefore one of learning and expertise. An enhanced UN peace capacity must take the lead on global monitoring and analysis across the spectrum of conflicts and peace processes. It can then use its convening power and political legitimacy to disseminate knowledge, learning and analysis to both state and non-state actors.

Here, of course, the nettle of intelligence sharing must be grasped. If UN mediation and peace facilitation is really to see a step change in effectiveness, access to good intelligence about conflicts and their protagonists must be as good as possible. This may require some collaboration between the intelligence services of relevant member states and the expanded DPA. The High-level Panel Report is silent on this difficult issue but it is, of course, of the utmost operational importance if the UN is to keep pace with events and with other mediation players.

A UN which is able to accumulate a real depth of knowledge on ongoing conflicts and peace policy will make itself the natural first port of call for those engaging in these conflicts to find good information and good ideas. Reorganisation and recruitment following the Panel's recommendations in the coming months must prioritise a role for the UN to give real intellectual leadership around the analysis of conflict and peace just as it does in other sectors of international policy and concern.

5 Dialogue in today's world

Even if the UN shapes a role along the lines described above, how easy will it be for UN mediators and peacemakers to pursue dialogue in today's world? The Panel has rightly seen that dialogue is a vital political strategy and that conversation is a security priority. This is refreshing, but any implementation strategy will need to look very hard at the challenges facing any strategy of dialogue today.

The Panel notes that there is an important diversity of perceptions around security today which determines who sees what threats as paramount. Their report makes clear that no single state or armed group's view of security is absolute and there is no single issue upon which everyone's security is hinged or unhinged. Rather, threats to collective security are many and interconnected. What you see as a threat depends on where you stand. Danger looks very different from different places.

The Panel argues that collective security today is not simply about single issues – Palestinian rights, Kashmir, unfettered capitalism, nuclear proliferation, Islamist politics, terrorism, US hegemony or North Korea. Instead, collective security is about how all these hard political problems combine with structural global threats like poverty, crime and disease to create a conflictual and often violent world.

Conscious of multiple and inter-weaving threats, therefore, the High-level Panel rightly complements its focus on hard security strategies of control, containment, regulation and military intervention with a *leitmotif*

“ **But how feasible is dialogue - and UN-led dialogue in particular - in today's conflicts?**

around the softer power of dialogue. Without political dialogue, common interests will never be discovered and conflicts will simply harden and become more difficult to resolve. This is as true at the sub-state level of internal war as it is at the supra-state level of global discord.

This is an implicit criticism of ideologues of all kinds who want to shape overarching global definitions of threat and security in line with their own particular interests and fears. Instead, the Panel makes clear that people and politicians have to converse with and listen to each other to understand what factors and actors actually count as threats to one another. In this the Panel is surely right. Problems of perception and differentiated threats are indeed best met by a strategy of dialogue. But how feasible is dialogue – and UN-led dialogue in particular – in today’s conflicts?

The Panel’s thesis recognises that it is good to defend ourselves and that talking is also a good way to do it. It believes that beefing up the UN’s mediation capacity will enable the world’s pre-eminent multilateral organisation to join, start, lead and shape vital political conversations around the world at both sub-national and international levels that will help foster security. What are the obstacles ahead as the UN pursues such dialogue? And how can they be overcome?

6 Obstacles to dialogue

Finding the political space to talk and the opposite numbers with whom one can talk, is not easy today. In a variety of political contexts around the world, any UN-led dialogue is likely to be highly problematic for three main reasons – one old and two new.

The two new reasons concern the dominant political paradigm of terror and counter-terror and the emergence of headless networks, or incommunicado groups who are unable to field their leadership in any negotiation process. The old reason turns on the time-honoured political doctrine of sovereignty – the stubbornness of which remains both a blessing and a curse to post-Westphalian politics.

More than three years after the atrocities of 11 September 2001, the global conflict between terror and counter-terror is still framed in such a way as to make little room for dialogue and mediation. This is certainly true of the global struggle between Islamist terror and US-led counter-terror. However, it is equally true of the way many national governments choose to interpret and label political conflicts within their own states in terror and counter-terror terms.

In the current political climate of zero-tolerance for any politics that is labelled either ‘terrorist’ by one side and ‘crusading’ or ‘infidel’ by another,

there is little room for talking. This is as problematic for the UN as it is for all of us in contemporary mediation. The UN has always had mandate problems talking to rebel groups in internal conflicts. It will have just as many trying to talk to 'terrorist' groups. It has also often had trouble persuading certain states and groups of its independence from great power interests.

The UN will continue to have this image problem with many anti-western groups which are often also anti-UN. These mandate problems flow from the UN's inevitable statism and potentially weaken the organisation where it needs to be strongest - in the upstream moments of a conflict when personal contacts need to be made fast so that mediation and dialogue can be offered early on.

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The Panel is right to try and chip away at the black and white political dualism in which the terror and counter-terror conflict has been largely conceived by its main protagonists since 2001. It is also right to acknowledge that many conflicts have multiple causes that are not all tied to the world's current meta-conflict. In practice, however, getting below respective meta-positions to a creative discussion of deeper needs and interests - the main job of any mediator - may often prove extremely difficult for the UN. Realistically, such contact will regularly be forbidden as illegal or perceived as an outright act of enmity and bias by either side.

The emergence of armed political networks makes mediation extremely problematic when mediator and state alike cannot find or will not tolerate the public appearance of an opposite number. Networked Islamist political violence is obviously a reality at the global level in what is still called Al Qaida by the press. It has become a reality at the sub-state level too where outcast movements with a local secessionist and nationalist interest have been given 'terrorist' status and so adopted a networked structure - whether by design, accident or bluff - so as to appear headless and dispersed to those who seek them out.

Finding purchase on such political entities will be one of the great challenges for UN-led political dialogue in the years ahead unless the leaderships of such groups are given the political space to emerge more freely into the political landscape. This raises the question of whether outlawed and networked political violence will require networked mediation to meet it. If so, what might networked mediation look like in practice? Will it involve the UN working much more together with other mediators, often in a secondary rather than cutting edge role? Perhaps, other new mediators can be expected to play the role of vanguard mediators while the UN will be more engaged in discussion of second phase follow-through arrangements.

Our old friend, sovereignty, remains a resilient brake on mediation around the world today. In weak and failing states, international respect for sovereignty means that we continue to see the Hobbesian nightmare of

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anarchy writ large. In many strong states, sovereignty ensures an ease of repression and denial which allows the well organised suffering of millions to remain effectively ring-fenced from international intervention.

In protracted conflicts full of human suffering in Nepal, Sudan, Indonesia, Burma and Uganda, states have shown they are able to resist what they perceive as interference. Because of this, many conflicts can be impermeable to mediation for many years and usually remain so until such a time as both sides are exhausted or one side has sufficient advantage to make mediation work in their interest.

7

Finding and supporting the right people

Having outlined a distinct UN role in mediation and peace support and identified some of the main obstacles that stand in the way of any strategy of political dialogue in today's conflicts, it is now important to discuss the kind of people the UN will need to carry out such a challenge.

The High-level Panel report puts great emphasis on ensuring that the UN Secretariat is staffed with 'the right people'. The recommendation of a "one-time review and replacement of personnel" and the appointment of a new Deputy-Secretary General for Peace and Security is indeed an excellent way to prioritise new skills, select appropriate personalities and give real senior leadership to mediation and peace-building within the Secretariat.² The right person in this new leadership role will then have a genuine opportunity to inject real substance into the UN's capacity and set a new tone for UN political engagement around conflict and peace. But creative recruitment and appropriate staffing will not be a routine matter.

² See recommendations 95 and 96d.

Mediation is not a simple government function. It is not an aspect of policy that can be applied easily by functionaries working to clear procedures. Instead, conflict mediation and the facilitation of peace is an art that requires skilful and discerning practitioners. Many of the governments mentioned above have produced persistent and gifted mediators from within their Foreign Ministries. Similarly, the United Nations has developed an exceptional stable of highly skilled and seasoned mediators.

“ Mediation is a tough and lonely trade and the best mediators are not institutional people.

People will indeed be the key to UN success. The ‘right person’ in mediation combines a certain personality with intuitive political insight, excellent character judgment, a touch of entrepreneurial flare, some judicious risk-taking and sound knowledge of the various mechanics of peace processes and peace-building. Such types will not be easy to find and the UN must be ready to hire and trust a number of mavericks. Mediation is a tough and lonely trade and the best mediators are not institutional people.

Most mediators are outsiders of some kind who tend to exploit organisations, individuals and opportunities rather than conform to them. If the UN is going to attract and cultivate the best it may have to tolerate a bit of counter-culture recruitment. It will certainly not be able to rely on apparently generous secondments of conventional diplomats. Nor should it make the mistake of bureaucratizing the mediation role into a conventional UN post. This will only produce a dull job description and person specification that confines recruitment to the norm and fails to capture and attract the exceptional.

3 Recommendation 19a.

Above all, perhaps, the Panel is rightly adamant that the supreme characteristic of all UN mediation staff must be an overriding sense of being “field-orientated”.³ Everyone in the new UN team must have deep field experience. They need to be just as adept in a dusty session with local fighters as in an air-conditioned diplomatic meeting. They must be suits and boots people – equally at ease walking through mud or across a marble floor. Even in the most intricate political discussion mediators need to maintain an innate empathy not only with the people in front of them but also with conflict as it is lived on the ground by many different people. If UN recruitment cannot always combine these two virtues in one person they must be represented and mutually respected in any UN team.

4 Recommendation 19b.

The Panel’s focus on “competence in the thematic issues that recur in peace negotiations” must also be made a reality – especially if wider peace support roles are to take shape.⁴ The UN will need a deep seam of up-to-date expertise in the process of peace-making which includes a range of inter-disciplinary tasks: convening and chairing talks; drafting; cease-fires; agreement monitoring; disarmament; social, economic and political transition; elections, and different mechanisms for national reconciliation.

Not every UN mediator can have detailed knowledge of every one of these fields but he or she does need to know the golden rules of each and to have quick access to a person who can tell them more. Here, a good pool of international lawyers, peace scientists, economists, military advisers, police officers, track-two specialists and data-heads will be crucial to keep track of UN learning across conflicts.

This connection between mediation and peace-building will be central to UN success. It will be essential to ensure a highly creative and

collaborative working relationship between UN mediators in DPA and the new Peacebuilding Commission and its Office for Peacebuilding that is proposed by the Panel.⁵ There can be no competitive empire building and destructive UN turf battles between these two groups. All the right people in the world will not add up to much if these two offices fall out with one another and fail to work intelligently and decisively together.

8 Conclusion

The High-level Panel's recommendations for enhanced UN mediation are to be warmly welcomed. The emphasis the Panel puts on political dialogue as a strategic security priority is a bold one in today's climate. Its determination to increase and improve UN mediation capacity to meet this need is timely. But the broad brushstrokes of the Panel's recommendations need much more detailed consideration to work out what this means in practice.

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Some of the external challenges that the UN is likely to meet include: the persistent dualism of today's terror and counter-terror paradigm; the UN's perennial problem about talking to rebels; the emergence of incommunicado networked insurgency, and the stubborn fact of sovereignty abused. These need to be taken seriously by UN policy makers as they work out how to confront the obstacles to mediation and dialogue today.

It is also important that the UN plays as a part of the wider international peace network and is flexible as it does so. In particular, there is an opportunity for the UN to add significant value to this network in three ways: to think beyond its own mediation to a wider range of roles in peace support and facilitation to the mediation of others; to take on a peace leadership role in setting standards for international mediation and playing a central role in linking tracks one and two; and to use its exceptional global reach to develop exceptional knowledge and expertise with which it can give an intellectual and political lead on matters of conflict and peace as it does on so many other global issues.

Finally, in recruiting 'the right people' for the job, the UN will need to deepen skills, value field experience and attract the maverick.

With the firm support of member states and the appointment of a first rate Deputy Secretary General for Peace and Security, the UN should be able to develop a practical vision from the High-level Panel's intuitive but under-developed idea of greater UN mediation.