



Introduction

Traditional diplomacy has tended to eschew media and public exposure. Diplomats and negotiators of the old school prefer to conduct their business in private settings out of the public limelight. While such confidentiality of negotiations is highly prized by most peacemakers, keeping things quiet and behind the scenes has become increasingly difficult.

There are several reasons for this. The “information revolution” of the 1990s drastically changed the process of conveying and receiving information: news is now reported from all corners of the world around the clock and in real time by electronic media. Another aspect of this apparent openness is the increased use of a variety of information tools by the parties to a conflict. In the past, governments generally had a monopoly on information in times of crisis and war. Today, however, nonstate actors, including the antagonists, have access to information channels and frequently use them effectively. Indeed, information has itself become a field of conflict. To some extent, then, the electronic media have helped to level the playing field by making easy-to-use information technology available to all conflict parties. In dealing with these new information challenges, concepts such as *media diplomacy*, *public diplomacy*, *information warfare*, and *Internet war* have evolved and have provided tools that are employed by growing numbers of interlocutors in peace and in war.

Those who aim to make peace in international conflicts need then to be cognizant of the information aspects of their efforts at negotiation and mediation, and must develop strategies to communicate with a variety of public audiences interested in and affected by the negotiations. Local populations are those most directly concerned by violent conflict and usually stand to gain from the results of peace negotiations, but they are often left out of the information loop. As a consequence, local people are

frequently ill-informed and easily misinformed—sometimes deliberately so—about the purposes of a third-party intervention.

The international community's knowledge of the history, origins, and perpetrators of such conflicts is usually scanty and not always factually correct.¹ Furthermore, in war zones fast-paced events require frequent information updates to stay on top of developments. Very few people are able to follow these swift changes. Journalists covering the conflict must try to do so, but they often fall victim to what BBC presenter Nik Gowing has termed the “3Fs”: first, fast, but flawed.

Communication is an art form, but information strategies and practices can be learned by those who must plan an information campaign to convey messages to publics in foreign settings. Effective professional communication can help to

- gain support for peaceful avenues of managing and resolving an international dispute, locally, regionally, and internationally;
- promote an informed understanding of the peace process in the area of conflict;
- maintain support for the peacemakers at their own base (i.e., in the capital or place where their headquarters is located)—such sustenance is vital for continued funding as well as enduring support in international political arenas, such as the UN Security Council;
- gain the backing of allies and friends of the peacemakers, both governmental and non-governmental, who are expected to play a positive role in helping resolve the conflict at hand and who may not always see eye-to-eye with the primary negotiator;²
- unify the presentation of the image of the peacemaker and the messages projected by his or her team and other collaborators—often those deployed in such settings have only vague ideas why they are in the theater of conflict and what their main goals are;
- counteract divisive strategies that may be employed by the conflicting parties or combatants and thus increase the leverage of the third-party mediator vis-à-vis possible spoilers of the peace process;
- help transform the postsettlement media landscape in the area of conflict by encouraging freedom of expression and transparency of

the political environment, and by assisting in the development of new media and information channels in the peacebuilding phase, if deemed *necessary*.

This handbook sets out six steps and numerous tasks that can be undertaken by mediators and their information teams prior to embarking on negotiations, as well as during and after peace negotiations.

- Step 1 is to thoroughly analyze the information environment in the area of conflict, carefully assessing the main media and civil society actors and the influence they wield.
- Step 2 is to plan early for public information tasks and develop a structure (a well-trained staff, a network of allies, etc.) for information management so that the campaign can swing into action as soon as the mediation begins.
- Step 3 involves designing an information campaign that will support the mediation, bearing in mind strategic communication needs.
- Step 4 is to implement the information campaign locally and internationally, matching target audiences with information products on selected issues. Most tasks will focus on the theater of operations and will involve using all available tools, including radio, television and video, print production, and web-based services. Crisis management in the area of conflict is also an important tool in the information campaign.
- Step 5 is to engage civil society and develop partnership relationships with non-governmental actors.
- Step 6 is to evaluate and assess the information tasks by monitoring the media and surveying local public opinion. After-action reports will assist in the continuing learning process and should be shared with other peacemakers.

These steps form a continuum, and some of them, such as step 5, can and should be performed throughout the mediation process.

The mediation process is itself part of a larger process made up of phases that form a continuum, from prenegotiation to negotiation, agreement to implementation and beyond. These phases are often overlapping, recursive, or simultaneous. Nonetheless, mediators tend to

be busiest during—rather than after—the negotiation of an agreement, and this handbook is written with that phase chiefly in mind.

Managing Public Information in a Mediation Process is designed to help mediators identify areas where they may need more research or preparation, as well as options and strategies relevant to the particular case on which they are working. Examples (*in italics in the text*) from past mediation efforts are provided to illustrate how various strategies have played out in practice and how various factors have facilitated or impeded the mediator's work. These examples are drawn from a wide variety of mediation efforts and are intended to be of use to mediators involved in an equally broad range of situations. Some mediators may represent the United Nations or a regional organization, others may work for a third-party government, and others may be serving in a private or semi-private capacity. Some may be heading UN peace missions, others may be working concurrently with such missions, and others may be operating at the request of one or both of the conflicted parties. The guidance contained here is intended to be appropriate to most, if not all, of these situations.

The Peacemaker's Toolkit

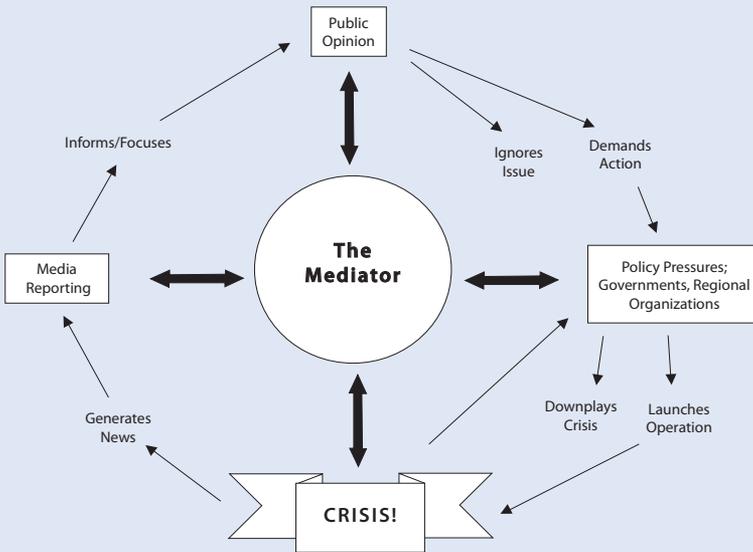
This handbook is part of the series *The Peacemaker's Toolkit*, which is being published by the United States Institute of Peace. The first in the series, *Managing a Mediation Process* by Amy L. Smith and David R. Smock, offers, as its title indicates, an overview of the mediation process, and may be read in conjunction with *Managing Public Information in a Mediation Process*.

For twenty-five years, the United States Institute of Peace has supported the work of mediators through research, training programs, workshops, and publications designed to discover and disseminate the keys to effective mediation. The Institute—mandated by the U.S. Congress to help prevent, manage, and resolve international conflict through nonviolent means—conceived *The Peacemaker's Toolkit* as a way of combining its accumulated expertise with that of other organizations active in the field of mediation. Most publications in the series are produced jointly by the Institute and a partner organization. All publications are carefully reviewed before publication by highly experienced mediators to ensure that the final product will be a useful and reliable resource for practitioners.

The Online Version

There is an online version of *The Peacemaker's Toolkit* that presents not only the text of this handbook but also connects readers to a vast web of information. Links in the online version give readers immediate access to a considerable variety of publications, news reports, directories, and other sources of data regarding ongoing mediation initiatives, case studies, theoretical frameworks, and education and training. These links enable the online *Toolkit* to serve as a "you are here" map to the larger literature available on mediation. The online version can be accessed at http://www.usip.org/mediation/tools_resources/index.html#toolkit.

The Mediator and the Media-Opinion-Policy Loop



This diagram describes an interactive, iterative loop that begins when a crisis occurs somewhere in the world. The media cover the crisis with varying degrees of accuracy and completeness, and that coverage influences the formation of public opinion on the crisis. That opinion impacts the reaction of governments and intergovernmental organizations. It may become a driving force for international policy on the crisis. But the public may also ignore the crisis, as governments and intergovernmental organizations tend initially to downplay crises. However, the initial response to the crisis will influence the effectiveness of the operation that may be launched. Early inaction, for example, usually exacts a price in terms of criticism of the inadequacy of the response; that criticism then generates further news and reenters the loop. The mediator is interested in and influenced by all phases of the loop; he or she must be engaged everywhere and anywhere.

Adapted from Ingrid A. Lehmann, *Peacekeeping and Public Information: Caught in the Crossfire* (London: Cass, 1999).