

How Can We Understand Success and Failure in Conflict Mediation with Islamist Parties?

Glimpses from Past Peace Talks in the Philippines and Afghanistan

Abstract

This thesis explores how we can understand mediation success in conflicts involving at least one Islamist conflict party. Building on previous research about Islamism in conflicts and peace process contexts, and using broader theory regarding international mediation success, a theoretical framework describing mediation success with jihadists is developed. This framework is applied on two case studies: the negotiations between the United States and the Taliban, mediated and facilitated by Qatar in 2019-2020, and the negotiations between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) facilitated by Malaysia 2001-2014, mediated by an International Monitoring Team (IMT) 2005-2014 and an International Contact Group (ICG) 2009-2014. The study is comparative in nature, and content analysis is used to gain insight from materials ranging from official governmental documents, NGO reports, statements from jihadist organisations, podcasts with persons who were present during the talks, news articles as well as framework and comprehensive peace agreements. The findings show how mediation success should be measured in terms of both process and outcomes, and that even though a mediation effort is deemed as successful, this does not always lead to a successful end of conflict.

Keywords: Mediation, Islamism, Taliban, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and scope of research

During the last few decades, conflict involving either religious parties or religious issues has been on the rise as shown by Svensson and Nilsson in the Religion and Armed Conflict data set 1975-2015 (RELAC). Especially, conflicts with islamist claims have risen, and the data has helped to show differences in deadliness in conflict depending on what type of religious claims have been made (RELAC, 2018). There is also evidence showing that such conflicts, over religious claims, generally are more intractable and lasts longer than conflicts lacking the religious dimensions i.e., a religiously identified party or a religious claim of conflict (Nilsson & Svensson, 2021). To this day, not very much research has been done on mediation involving islamist parties, and it is important to fill this hole to establish knowledge about these events, both in specific cases, but also to develop more general theories to help alleviate future conflicts.

This topic is of interest not only for fellow researchers of peace and conflict, but also for the broader civil population. Those living in conflict affected areas could potentially benefit from research being made, as it hopefully helps put conflict and suffering to an end. During the last few years we have seen a growing interest in islamist organisations in non-affected areas as well, with terrorist attacks happening in western countries followed by heavy media coverage. Questions about transnational Islamism and groups such as al-Qaeda and IS has entered into daily speak between ordinary citizens. Many feel as if a threat to world peace is close in everyday life.

A common perception is that liberal democracy and Islamism are of totally different world views, the two sides will never be able to live in peaceful coexistence and that conflict between them will be never-ending with great losses of lives and prosperity. This is thought about many conflicts, it is in the very nature of violent conflict. However, we have seen that when violence fails to achieve the longed-for victory, and negotiations are difficult, mediation can have a positive impact on the situation and hopefully lead to lasting peace. Mediation could be a key to solving the rising number of contemporary religious conflicts, but due to the lack of research and knowledge about the process, some work needs to be done.

Hence, the research question guiding this thesis will be: How can we understand success and failure in mediation with islamist parties? The reasoning will be based on former research regarding international mediations' successes

and failures, combined with previous research on jihadist parties in conflict mediation. The goal is to establish a deeper understanding of how mediation could be done in order to be more successful, so that this knowledge can be applied in real life conflict mediation with islamist parties, but also to bring new perspectives and digging deeper in case studies to contribute to the ongoing research being done in these areas.

In a hope to understand underlying mechanisms and factors leading to successful mediation with islamist groups, this thesis aims at exploring the cases of mediation in the Philippines and in Afghanistan, to unravel some knowledge which can be used to find future solutions in ending conflict and violence committed in conflicts with one or more islamist party.

1.2 Previous research

Svensson and Nilsson have put together a dataset to find trends in and explain religion in conflict between the years 1975 to 2015. This is called the Religion in Armed Conflict dataset (RELAC), and one among many discoveries include the evidence that salience of religious claims has risen significantly under this period (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018, 1138). Even though both salience of religious claims, and religious issue/actor conflicts are more prevalent now, religious mediation has decreased significantly since 1989. Religious mediation is a concept where religious organisations take diplomatic initiatives to settle conflicts through the use of dialogue. However, this type of mediation is mostly made in conflicts without religious claims or actors, and hence, will not be the centre of this thesis (Johnstone & Svensson, 2013).

Instead, this essay will focus on mediation in violent conflict where at least one party self-identify as islamist or have clearly expressed islamist claims in the conflict. Some research has already been done on this topic, which will be presented below. I have chosen to organise these claims into ideas of mediation process versus mediation outcomes, this structure will be seen throughout the thesis and is often used by researchers of the area.

1.2.1 Process

Previous research has shown the importance of distinguishing between religion as an identity of the parties, or the very issue of the conflict, as crucial to mediation success. Another important factor for mediation success is to desacralize religious dimensions of which the conflict is fought over. Priorities need to be changed, so that the religious issues will be less valuable, and focus will instead be put on implementing practical solutions which all parties can benefit from, rather than exploring guilt or root causes to the conflict (Baumann et al., 2018).

Svensson explains that being more flexible than usual towards the islamist party, and being able to compromise on one's pre-set goals, can be of great importance when mediating with islamists. The flexibility is crucial as it can lead to success in form of peace agreements, and one example raised is how islamists in Bangsamoro has been given authority to partly rule an area with sharia law. Even though this was not what the other party had hoped for, as it goes against their definition of lawful rule and democracy, it seems to be very successful. Thanks to being able to compromise with such a fundamental principle, they benefited from less hostility and a significant decrease of violence in the conflict. This is not fool proof though, the same strategy was used in Pakistan in 2008, where the Taleban was promised a similar solution. This was unsuccessful since the agreement was not followed through by the parties on neither side of the conflict (Svensson, 2017, 80-81).

For transnational islamists to agree to negotiate, the conflict must be transformed into mainly revolving around local context. Transnational networks such as al-Qaeda and IS have very big pools of candidates ready to fight for their cause. They are not as exposed to local costs, neither in money nor in lives, and are not as prone to war fatigue as regular conflicting parties could be. This is one reason to why the cost benefit calculation is not properly working in such cases, and such a conflict party is not as prone to agree to negotiation. Another obstacle to overcome is that these organisations are viewed as "evil" by the broader public in the west, and this creates an aversion in agreeing to talk to them. The fear of being seen as a traitor and in support of the transnational jihadist ideology is too big and risking one's public support can be detrimental for any conflicting party (Svensson, 2017, 83).

While it seems to be difficult to even get to the table with transnational jihadist organisations, revolutionary or separatist islamist movements are no more or less likely to accept participating in negotiations than any other conflict party regardless of ideology or religion. However, there is a widespread belief that islamist conflicts are hard to settle through negotiations. This idea of intractability comes from the belief of extra worldly rewards such as martyrdom. This is also something which offsets the cost-benefit calculations for the parties, leading to difficulties in negotiation and mediation (Nilsson & Svensson, 2020).

1.2.2 Outcomes

Conflicts with jihadists often end when they decide to create a political party of their own and compete in a democratic setting rather than using violence. Some examples are Hamas in Palestine and the Muslim Brotherhood. This would not be likely though if the conflict party is transnational islamist, since they oppose democracy as an ideology (Svensson, 2017, 81).

In religiously defined conflicts, there are often absolute claims which leads to it being very hard to find room for compromise. It is also known that if a party has used religious arguments or threats in the beginning of a conflict to gain public

support, it is very hard to change these claims later in the process (Nilsson & Svensson, 2020, 393).

Much focus in previous research has been put on the difference in world view between jihadist parties and liberal democratic parties. With this thesis, I wish to take a look at the mediation process itself and how identity markers and religious issues are predisposed to affect mediation efforts. Since such conflicts are perceived as difficult to solve, investigating what constitutes mediation success is very interesting.

2 Theory

Researchers have for many years tried to find a “golden formula” to predict what factors lead to success versus failure in mediation in violent conflict (Kleiboer, 1996, 360). But what is actually considered as “successful” mediation? In order to understand this, we need to take a closer look on some definitions and assumptions about mediation as a whole.

2.1 Outcomes

It would be impossible to assess success in mediation without knowing what the goals are, and these goals widely differs depending on both world views and conflict contexts. It could be argued that successful mediation is the actual signing of an agreement after negotiations. But this is not a very precise measurement; the agreement could either be signed early on or very late in the negotiation process, meaning more or less violence has had the time and possibility to take place. Another reason to why this is not a precise measure of mediation success is because it is not clear whether what was actually written in the agreement has any real importance in reducing suffering, neither in the long nor the short term. A grant for humanitarian action, a promise to exchange prisoners, a cessation of hostilities on the ground or only words agreeing to continue the talks? All these can be argued to be successful outcomes of mediated negotiations, but a signature on a document, even though it comes from all conflict parties, does not equal implementation and a promise to follow through on what has been decided (Arnault, 2006). No, we need to look further.

The literature on mediation is very large and seems to be pointing in all possible directions. It seems as even though every researcher has something good to say, there is a gap in understanding the whole picture. Due to these problems, Kleiboer has come up with four proto theories in how we should understand and evaluate mediation efforts in conflict. She means that different sets of assumptions lead to different outcomes when searching to explain mediation success (Kleiboer, 1996, 378).

If we assume that the world system is anarchic, a realist perspective, where sovereign states are the main actors to conflict and a higher central authority does not exist, conflict is believed not to pose a threat to anyone as long as it is handled diplomatically. However, as soon as it turns into military practices, it starts being a threat to the international system and needs to be controlled. This is believed to be done by reaching settlements, i.e., negotiated compromises between the conflicting parties which leads to reduction in conflict intensity (Kleiboer, 1996,

397-380). Success is ultimately the reduction of conflict intensity and restoring a power balance between the conflicting parties.

However, if we instead view conflict with the belief that conflict arises only when certain groups in society are not satisfied or have not had their basic human needs met, conflict can seem to be an opportunity for social change. In this point of view, conflict settlement only works in trying to take away the violent behaviour, but this will not be enough to deem a mediated negotiation process as successful. Instead, conflict resolution is needed where root causes are addressed and the results lies in the change of social order, preferably those towards equality (Kleiboer, 1996, 380-381). Success is the challenge of the previous social order, a change in domestic policies towards one based in humane ideas and where all will be viewed as humans with the same rights, regardless of group identity and previous inequalities.

2.2 Process

Above, the focus was mainly based on the possible outcomes of mediated negotiation, but it can also be argued that even getting to the table is a success in mediation. There are many different theories explaining the reasons and factors behind success and failures in mediation in conflict. Some classics range from “ripe moments” by Zartman (1986) to the importance of leverage and status of the mediator (Cot, 1972) to specifics in understanding underlying identity and conflict contexts as crucial for success (Bercovitch et al., 1991).

Grieg and Diehl argue that mediation success comes down to “pain and promises”. According to them, the biggest factor for success is actually getting to the table in the first place. The main factor regarding if the conflict parties will agree to mediation is that the conflict is too costly to keep fighting (pain), and that by accepting mediation, they will get offers that will benefit them more than their adversary (promises). After the parties have agreed to mediation, Greig and Diehl argues that it is very important to have the right mediator and they list some core qualities, but in the end, the reasons to why the conflicting parties accepted mediation in the first place, will likely decide the outcome; success or failure. Therefore, it is crucial to understand why the actors decided to negotiate and use this information to steer the process towards the right direction (Grieg & Diehl, 2012, 67-89). Success is getting to the table and understanding the separate goals of the parties so as to work towards those.

The third proto theory as explained by Kleiboer, is based on the assumption that conflict comes from distrust between actors. The distrust leads to assumptions about the adversary’s powers and makes conflict spiral towards violence. War and conflict threaten all human beings and everyone’s prosperity regardless of belonging; therefore, this must be prevented as much and as quickly as possible. The solution, and the key challenge, to conflict is to prevent these spirals from happening and work to deescalate violence. This can be done by fundamentally changing attitudes and behaviours of the conflicting parties, by starting to build

trust and peaceful relationships. The process is what is important in this case, developing a dialogue to achieve long term relationships is what will hinder conflict to take place in the future. In this way of thinking, success would be to initiate and sustain productive communication, going beyond track one diplomacy to get everyone involved, as well as soften the parties to consider alternative solutions to what they might originally wish (Kleiboer, 1996, 380-381).

2.3 Theoretical framework

It is clear from the theoretical explanations of mediation above that there are many ways to look at and understand mediation success. In this thesis, I define mediation success as having two equally important steps/dimensions; the first step is the process, and the second step is the outcomes such as implementations made from the decisions taken during the negotiations. The claims I make below are based on previous research and theory developed in the area of conflict mediation, where some parts are especially chosen based on my consideration of what seems to hold importance in a context where mediation involves jihadist parties.

Mediation is deemed as successful when it has accomplished both step one and two:

1) Process:

- a) All parties to the conflict can agree to talk to each other. Delegates from different levels in society are included.
- b) The parties can express themselves in ways which does not involve violence, and thought is put into respect of each party's culture and/or ideology.
- c) Meaningful conversations can be held between the parties. Meaningful conversation involves mainly discussing implications of the violence used, creating social bonds between delegates, and looking to find solutions rather than speaking about root causes for the conflict.

2) Outcomes:

- d) Agreements are signed.
- e) The content of these agreements is focused on solutions for the common good for all parties. The common good would be to stop violence and cease hostilities, allow for humanitarian organisations to enter the affected area, reaching compromises on how the area should be governed and other factors that would lead to prosperity.
- f) There is evidence in the agreements that discussions on implementations have been held during the negotiations.

The second step could of course be split up further, but the point I want to convey is how important the mediation process is for the direct results and decisions made in the mediation, whereas implementation can depend on other factors such as international involvement, parties engaging in multiple conflicts at the same time or other issues hindering a successful end to conflict regardless of the successful mediation.

3 Method

3.1 Introduction to methodological choices

In this thesis, content analysis is used. Data has been gathered by analysing what is written in reports, official documents, news reports as well as said by people who were present in various stages of the mediations examined. This method was chosen because it is a rather easy way to get access to good quality information. Since the research was done within a limited amount of time, and access to mediators or the conflicting parties in the chosen conflicts would have been difficult for me as a student, this was a reasonable choice. Conducting interviews with people who were present during the peace talks would of course have been a great way of finding out hidden details, but that would have been too costly and difficult. An advantage of doing research by content analysis is that it is possible to go back in time and take part of material produced during the event, rather than conducting interviews in hindsight when minds might have changed and new ideas have been born, which could lead to false claims. Content analysis gives the opportunity to systematically explore and analyse materials to give understanding of what actors may have thought at the time (Halperin & Heath, 2017, 160-161).

The thesis will take the form of a comparative case study, where two cases will be explored in depth and later compared to uncover causal mechanisms and assess the theoretical framework derived from the previous research and theories presented. The reason to why the thesis only includes two cases is that this will better allow for exploring details and understand the mechanisms more in depth, than if the thesis was based on many more cases lacking these important details.

3.2 Choosing cases

The two cases investigated in this thesis are the negotiations between the United States and the Taliban mediated and facilitated by Qatar in 2019-2020, and the negotiations between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) facilitated by Malaysia 2001-2014, observed by an International Monitoring Team (IMT) 2005-2014 and mediated by an International Contact Group (ICG) 2009-2014.

The main reason to why these cases are chosen is that they differ in how they are viewed by the public and researchers worldwide: the Philippine process is praised for its success while the Afghan process is critiqued for its failure.

Both cases involve conflict between islamists and democratic parties, and both have been mediated by third parties. The Taleban and MILF have in common that they are not of the transnational jihadist ideology, but revolutionary versus separatist islamist. The conflict in Afghanistan is an internationalised internal conflict, but the one in the Philippines is internal.

Both cases have been heavily documented, and therefore access to suitable and credible data is possible.

3.3 Material

The main information about the conflict background, intensity and parties are taken from the RELAC dataset as well as directly from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) website. This information is deemed to be correct since it is carefully collected by renowned researchers.

The raw materials used comes, in first hand, from agreements signed during the mediation processes. The thesis explores primarily final agreements such as comprehensive peace agreements or framework agreements, but in some cases also traces back to previous, smaller agreements when necessary. Of course, it would have been even better if all material could have been analysed as to give more strength to the analysis, but due to the time limit for this research, a reasonable selection had to be made.

As Halperin and Heath explains, it is important to have triangulation, i.e., use material from many different sources to increase reliability, credibility and avoid bias (Halperin & Heath, 2017, 160-161). Therefore, I have tried to find materials from many different types of sources such as NGO's supporting the different sides of the conflicts, podcasts with negotiators from different sides and news articles from papers with various underlying ideologies. Material is also taken from peace institutes across the world, to give many perspectives.

Some materials used and looked at when searching for answers to the research question have been in other languages than English, mainly Arabic. Unfortunately, I do not speak or understand any Arabic more than the most used terminology when discussing jihad and Islamism. However, Google translate has been of great value when reading texts written by the Taleban and other organisations in support of their cause and this has given me the possibility to overcome the language barrier. As we all know, Google translate is not perfect, so everything derived from these readings have been taken with a grain of salt.

3.4 Operationalization

To examine how we can explain mediation success versus failure in these two cases, I have chosen to operationalize the theoretical framework by asking some questions towards the material:

Process:

- a) Were the main parties in the conflict attending the talks, and was this desired or forced? Signs of this will be found in roadmap or framework agreements.
- b) Did hostilities during the time of the talks decrease or increase? This information is available on the UCDP website.
- c) What were the main subjects discussed? Was the focus towards finding solutions, or to determine root causes and guilt? Signs of this will be found by analysing the many sources of materials and combining these.

Outcomes

- d) Were any final or comprehensive agreements signed?
- e) What were the main points in these agreements? Were they focused on the greater good i.e., stopping violence, ceasing hostilities, allow for humanitarian organisations to enter the affected area, reaching compromises on how the area should be governed and overall indicators for increased common future prosperity, or something else?
- f) Were any decisions on implementation present in the signed agreement?

The answers to these questions will be found in the material, and these will constitute the foundation in the evaluation of mediation success.

4 Results

4.1 Case one: Afghanistan

4.1.1 Short introduction to the conflict and mediation context

Since 1989, Afghanistan has experienced many different types of conflict, between many different groups with many different ideologies. The conflict in focus in this thesis will be the one starting with the US invasion of Afghanistan after that the Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin-Laden after the 9/11-attacks in 2001. After the invasion, the Taleban was quickly defeated and they fled to rural areas in the mountains, near and in Pakistan, where they continued to launch attacks on civilians in both rural villages and in bigger cities, mainly through suicide bombings. In 2014, the US combat mission ended and was replaced by ANDSF which was aimed at protecting and secure Afghanistan and its civilian population. However, during this time the Taleban stepped up and used more violence, leading to a re-augmentation in the US combat forces once again in 2017 (CFR, 2022a).

Doha, Qatar has been the place of the US-Taleban peace talks during 2019-2020. Qatar has acted as a facilitator of dialogue as well as a host, as explained on their government's website. Their goal in all mediation is to reach comprehensive peace agreements, which includes both the absence of violence as well as reconciliation, justice, promotion of human development, defence of human rights, economic recovery and so on. (Government of Qatar, 2022a).

Worth noting is that the peace process discussed in this thesis is the one between US and the Taleban, not the negotiations between the Afghan Government and the Taleban which has been heavily reported in media since the breakdown of the process, and the Taleban overtake of power in Afghanistan during fall 2021.

4.1.2 Process

During the negotiations, only the US and the Taleban were present. The Afghan government was not involved in the talks, even though the issue heavily revolved around them too. Their sake was mainly argued by the US, but they did not get to be there to present their own thoughts.

The conflict has been described as if both the Taleban, the Afghans and the international forces present have fought to a deadly stalemate. The in-battle deaths and civilian casualties have been reported to have reached record levels, compared to similar conflicts (USIP, 2022a). This shows that all parties have suffered the pains, and might feel more forced to participate, rather than willing and hopeful. There has also been heavy media coverage on the fact that the US want out of the war, and there is a push in their domestic politics and support for exiting the Afghanistan war. This points to that the US also was more forced than willing to participate in the negotiations.

The violence from the Taleban did slightly decrease during the peace talks, but they still launched attacks, and no official ceasefire was held. After the intra-Afghan talks, the Taleban has once again used violence to overtake the power in Afghanistan (CFR, 2022a).

It is difficult to find what has been discussed during the talks, probably because of the secrecy and the very sensitive nature to these talks. However, in the final agreement “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan (...) (ABPA)” mostly hard subject issues are stated, such as prisoner release, the US withdrawal, and the promise to enter intra-Afghan negotiations afterwards and keep terrorists from using Afghan soil to plan and execute attacks against the US (Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan, 2020). The root causes and question of guilt seem to have been left out, and the focus is very much on the future implications and deals made between the parties.

4.1.3 Outcomes

The Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan was signed in February of 2020, after one year of negotiations. The issues written about in this agreement are very focused on stopping violence, making sure there is a roadmap for how and when changes will be made. There is not much evidence suggesting that questions about how trust and peaceful relationships will be made, the language in which the document is written has strong connotations that both sides still view each other as illegitimate and enemies. In ABPA, Part 3, Point 2, it is however stated that the actors seek positive relations with each other. An effort has also been made to show that both parties have tried to accommodate to their cultural and theological differences and agreed on equal terms: dates are given both according to the western calendar as well as the Hijri Lunar and Hijri solar calendars.

There are some points referring to the implementation of the agreement, mostly about that there will be international witnesses to the agreement and the

following implementations, when the Intra-Afghan peace negotiations should start and that they absolutely must include the negotiation of a ceasefire between the parties (Agreement for Bringing peace to Afghanistan, 2020, 1). General claims pointing towards the will of creating future prosperity is not found in the agreement.

4.2 Case two: the Philippines

4.2.1 Short introduction to the conflict and mediation context

Since the Philippines became independent from their former colonial power Spain in 1945-1946, there has been difficulties and conflict between the Muslim and Christian populations, especially in the Mindanao region in the southern part of the Philippines. The country has also seen a communist insurgency, but this will not be in focus in this thesis. Instead, the focus will be on the conflict between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the mediation between the two parties in Kuala Lumpur between 1997-2014. MILF is a separatist Islamist group who have fought for the independence of the Muslim population, also called the Moro people (UCDP, 2022b).

The conflict has mainly been fought over territorial issues, but with a background in religious differences. When masses of Christian settlers came to the southern regions, this was perceived as a threat. The conflict centres on Moro independence (UCDP, 2022a).

The peace process in the Philippines is often described as successful, both in media and by scholars. In 2014, a peace agreement was signed which led to the cease of hostilities and the creation of a transitional government in the Bangsamoro region. However, there are still jihadist attacks occurring in the Philippines, but these are mostly made by former members of MILF who instead of continuing the fight for Moro independence, has joined IS since they share the transnational jihadist ideology rather than the separatist islamist one (UCDP, 2022b).

The peace process has been supported by a complex architecture of facilitators and mediators. In the beginning, 1997, negotiations were held directly between the conflicting parties, but since violence escalated and no solutions were found, third parties were invited by the Philippine government. Malaysia has acted as facilitator and host on invitation since 2001. The International Monitoring Team (IMT) was deployed in 2005 as a mediator and contributed with so called shuttle diplomacy, speaking with both sides separately when they could not meet face to face due to the strained situation. It included participants from Malaysia, Libya, Brunei, Japan, Norway, and the EU. In 2009 the International Contact Group (ICT) was formed. This group combined diplomats from Japan, UK, Turkey, Saudi Arabia with representatives from the international non-governmental

organisations Muhammadiyah, The Asia Foundation, the HD Centre, and Conciliation Resources. The ICG has been praised to be an effective model in supporting peace talks, since it has combined technical expertise from the NGOs with economic and political leverage of the diplomats (CR, 2022a).

4.2.2 Process

In the Philippines, there are several groups with islamist claims (the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)). The government has negotiated with all these groups, but separately and at different times. It seems as all these groups share the common goal of autonomy for the Muslim people, and during the early talks with MNLF, MILF agreed to lay down their arms as to not disturb the process. (UCDP, 2022a) (UCDP, 2022b).

The talks included many different actors; Filipinos and internationals, military and civilians, institutions, and representatives from civil society (NOREF, 2015, 1). There was a broad inclusion of actors of different levels, and the inclusion of women has been described as crucial for the outcome. In the episode of the podcast *The Mediator's Studio* with Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, head negotiator for the Philippine government, she mentions that MILF after many tries finally did agree to negotiate with women, and in a later stage they took in women in their official negotiation teams too (*The Mediator's studio*, 2021).

The negotiations started in 1997 without any mediation support, but attacks were still made, and the government declared an all-out war on MILF in 2000. MILF suffered heavy losses and were defeated within four months, however the government realized quickly that the root causes to the conflict would not disappear only because of a military victory, and they wanted to talk. MILF seems to be in a position where they have been more forced than willing to participate, due to their defeat and losses. However, the grief from heavy losses on both sides have seem to be a common ground for better understanding between the parties (NOREF, 2015, 2).

The hostilities declined when the peace talks were resumed in 2001. However, violence and new attacks have taken place continuously during the peace talks. Violence increased every time the negotiations were stopped. This happened in 2000, 2003 and 2008. Both sides made new attempts at talking afterwards, and this led to accepting help by mediators as well (NOREF, 2015, 2).

Even though root causes were recognized by the government, this was not the main focus of the talks. Instead, the focus was always in finding a solution by dialogue. The main subjects on the agenda were humanitarian response issues, security issues, rehabilitation, and development questions as well as what to do with the ancestral territory. Transitional justice and reconciliation were touched upon but decided to be looked into afterwards, so that the peace talks were to focus on the future solutions rather than root causes and questions about guilt (NOREF, 2015; 3-5). Normalisation was also heavily discussed and decided upon.

The term means a community process where the desired quality of life can be achieved, and political participation can exist in a peaceful setting. A general narrative held during the talks was to win the peace, not to win the war (NOREF, 2015, 3, 5).

4.2.3 Outcomes

After 17 years of negotiations, all appendices were finished and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) was signed by the government and MILF.

In the agreement, details of the creation of a self-governing political entity called Bangsamoro were included. The Bangsamoro replaces the old autonomous region in Mindanao, and the objective is to promote democracy and the emergence of different political parties in the new entity (CAB, 2014). There is also a focus on the common good, where justice will be made, and wealth be spread to the citizens of Bangsamoro. The language is neutral and shows no sign of hostility between the parties after they have agreed to the points in the document.

Issues regarding implementation were only lightly touched upon in CAB: continued multisector dialogue on both sides and the decision that an exit agreement will be signed in the future when both parties have lived up to their decisions were the only signs of decisions about implementations. However, in the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB), a 15-page agreement explaining in detail both law, commissions and transitional rights, a thorough explanation of implementation is found, which seems straight forward and well thought through (FAB, 2012).

Overall, the peace process and the mediation efforts in the Philippines are praised for its success and effectiveness, as well as its focus on the future and prosperity of the civilian population.

4.3 Discussion

From the investigation of both cases, we see clearly that the Philippine case corresponds to the expectations presented in the theoretical framework, and is, once again, assessed as successful. However, the Afghanistan case does not as clearly show that it is in line with the expectations for successful mediation and is therefore assessed as only partly successful.

There are several differences between the two cases, the major difference being in the balance of the focus on process versus outcome. In the Philippines, much focus was being put towards building trust between the parties and create social bonds and relationships on many societal levels. In Afghanistan, the focus was more about the short-term outcomes, and little to no importance was given to

building trust between the parties other than enough so that they would both enter the talks and sign the final agreement. This difference shows how Kleiboer's idea about assumptions of success seems to be correct: the Afghanistan mediation process is more about conflict settlement and restoration of the power balance, while the Philippine conflict mediation is made from the understanding that conflict hurts everyone just as much and needs to be stopped by changing views and behaviours towards those who contribute to the common good. So, if the mediating actors in the different mediation efforts had these separate goals in mind, both processes seem to have been successful as the goals were lived up to. However, since the framework in this essay, which is based in previous research, clearly points toward that both process and outcome dimensions, i.e., both conflict settlement and conflict prevention, needs to be fulfilled for mediation efforts to be deemed as successful, the Philippines case was successful, but the Afghanistan case was only partly successful.

In the Philippines, a common narrative of suffering on both sides has seemed to aid in connecting the two sides; the shared trauma has helped to create a bond and helped the talks progress towards finding solutions which would help both the Filipinos and the Bangsamoro population in the future. This was not seen in the Afghanistan case. Even though it is evident that both sides have suffered for a long time, they were not able to connect through this, and the hostility between the parties might have hindered the process from becoming one which focuses on trust building. There could be many explanations to this; maybe the realisation that the Filipinos and Moros will have to coexist forever forced the parties to consider such questions, while in Afghanistan, they would not have the same obligation since the US had already sent signals that they want out of the region.

An interesting difference in the two cases is who considers the process as successful versus a failure. The Philippine talks have been praised by both the western public and researchers sharing liberal and democratic ideas, whereas in Afghanistan the process has been frowned upon by the same people, but the Taliban has received many compliments and congratulations from other extremist jihadist organisations (Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, 2021) (Jaysh al-Ummah, 2021). These greetings were sent after the Taliban takeover in fall 2021, and therefore not directly related to the mediation efforts. However, it could be argued that the takeover was made possible because of the way mediation was done.

This leads us on to another issue, where should we draw the line when assessing mediation success versus failure? In the thesis, success is measured in two dimensions: process and outcome. However, the outcome part is a bit tricky to assess since it is hard to distinguish which events came from the mediation, and which events would have happened anyways due to the larger context. It would be a pitfall though if we were to generalise such a difficult and complex situation, and that is the reason to why the operationalisation was straight forward and only measured what was included in the agreements, and not if they were acted upon as decided. This is of course a weakness to the study, and in future research, a third dimension relating to measuring long term outcomes, such as factors of positive peace after mediation could be added to give more certainty and new perspectives.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings in this thesis show that the Philippine peace talks were successful due to the fact that both process and outcome dimensions were thoroughly addressed, and that the Afghanistan peace talks were only partly successful, due to the lack of focus on the process dimension.

Applying the theoretical framework seem to give good insight in success and failure in conflict mediation. In the light of previous research, this thesis manages to give some nuance to mediation success with islamists. However, we cannot claim that mediation is successful even though all criteria are fulfilled, there is always room for unexpected factors, and mediation can never be measured in absolutes. However, the theoretical framework shows that the factors mentioned needs to be fulfilled in order to even consider assessing mediation as successful. It also serves as to point out which specific parts of cases of mediation are successful, and it can be used to guide towards good practices. These good practices seem to heavily involve social bonds and building trust between the parties, from all levels in society, to help end conflict and create prosperity, as well as conflict settlement and the restoration if power balances by addressing difficult issues. This seems to be true in many cases of mediation, as well as the one involving islamists.

6 Literature

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