

Measuring the effectiveness of Norwegian peace facilitation

By Javier Fabra-Mata

■ Executive summary

Over the past twenty years Norway has established an international reputation as a peace facilitator. The Oslo Accords and Norway's active involvement in other peace processes in the 1990s provided the basis for constructing a peace narrative around the supposed disinterestedness and uniqueness of the Norwegian approach, which has evolved over the years, with a major move towards the professionalisation of the country's peace efforts.

Critics have questioned the results and effectiveness of Norwegian peace engagement. While they point to the collapse of peace processes and conflict recurrence, Norwegians engaged in these processes take a more positive view, avoiding absolutes and underscoring instead less spectacular, but nonetheless important achievements. Over and above peace agreements, peace processes can generate a series of tangible and intangible peace assets – e.g. confidence building, informal peace alliances, formal institutions, etc. – some of which may help to reduce the severity of the conflict and even survive the collapse of the peace process.

This expert analysis deals with the issue of conceptualising success in peace facilitation. From a study of the fundamentals underlying Norwegian peace facilitation, it shows the importance of being able to measure the degree of success of peace processes, presenting a three-tier, modular proposal for Norway to capture tangible and intangible gains in the short, medium and long term.

Background

Peace mediation: traits and trends

Peace agreements ended approximately 40% of the armed conflicts that occurred in the post-cold war period (Human Security Report Project, 2012), while according to other studies, this figure could be as high as 82% over the last thirty years (Fisas, 2013). Most of these peace agreements were reached as a result of negotiations between armed actors with assistance from a third party, e.g. the United Nations (UN), a regional or subregional organisation, a state, or a non-state organisation.

The end of the cold war and the bipolar world order made the blooming of peace mediation possible, mainly because states and non-state actors mediating in conflicts no longer

had to face the risk of being accused of taking sides in the "big picture". In the cold war period many proxy wars were fought, and overall there was not much interest on the part of the U.S. and Soviet Union to allow for a negotiated end to a conflict through external facilitation. Between 1989 and 2003 attempts by the UN to facilitate negotiated peace agreements increased more than fivefold (Human Security Report Project, 2011). The ascending post-1989 trend in peace mediation is also visible in mediation by other actors, including states like Norway – a country that, in the words of Jan Egeland, former state secretary in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "saw the end of the Cold War as a possibility" (Perelstein, 2009) that allowed the country to position itself in the international arena as a relevant peace actor.¹

¹ However, during the cold war Norway did carry out some peace efforts, mainly in South Asia and Africa (Skånland, 2011: 7; Kristoffersen, 2009: 24-25).

Norway seized the opportunity and carved a niche for itself in the world of mediation: in terms of peace mediation counts, Norway can be equated with powers like the U.S. or Russia (Mason & Sguaitamatti, 2011; CHD, 2007), countries with strategic interests and diplomatic and military resources far superior to those of the Scandinavian nation.

Norway: a tradition of peace

The Oslo Accords marked a milestone for Norway's reputation as peace facilitator.² Norway's role in the secret negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation that culminated in the 1993 agreements signed in Washington, DC put the country on the exclusive map of world diplomatic powers. Also in the early 1990s, Norway's contribution to achieving peace in Guatemala boosted this reputation and provided the foundations for making peace facilitation an ongoing building block of Norwegian foreign policy. A 1995 Norwegian government white paper³ not only recognised that peace work had increasingly become an important part of Norway's foreign policy; it also reiterated that this work was to continue through political commitment and development efforts. In 1996 Bjørn Tore Godal, then minister of foreign affairs, concluded his foreign policy address to the Norwegian parliament with a clear statement of intent: "To build the road or roads to peace is the top task of [Norwegian] foreign policy" (Godal, 1996).⁴

In addition to the Oslo Accords and the Guatemala process, Norway officially acknowledges its engagement in eight peace processes since 1993 (i.e. Afghanistan, Colombia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines,⁵ Somalia, Sri Lanka and Sudan-South Sudan). The list is, however, incomplete, as some of the peace processes Norway has been part of are bound by secrecy (MFA, 2013). According to media estimates, Norway could have facilitated more than twenty peace processes, including in Nigeria, the Kurdistan region and the Basque country.⁶

By all accounts, Norway has forged an international reputation around peace facilitation as a diplomatic niche. The period 1997–2003 saw the introduction in the country's official discourse of the notion of Norway as a "peace nation" (Skånland, 2008). The construction of this narrative probably reached its discursive peak in 2000, when Kjell Magne Bondevik, then prime minister, laid out a vision for Norway as a "peace nation" in his New Year address to the nation (Bondevik, 2000). This was the culmination of a narrative of peace that is fuelled by a peace tradition dating back to the 1890s (Leira, 2005; Leira et al., 2007), with specific references to historical events (the country's peaceful independence from Sweden and the absence of a colonial past, for example) and national legends (e.g.

Fridtjof Nansen). The elevation of historical features and figures is accompanied by a conscious celebration of contemporary moments of global recognition, e.g. one-time landmarks like the Oslo Accords or a periodic event of unmatched worldwide media coverage and interest such as the Nobel Peace Prize. Norway's generous development assistance, active engagement in the UN, and global leadership in promoting international standards and norms also play their part in infusing life into this narrative and international reputation of the country as a responsive and committed global actor for peace.

Over the years Norway has made strides in strengthening its internal mediation capacity, with the establishment of a dedicated unit in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the Section for Peace and Reconciliation), budget lines for peace efforts, and strategic support to research and communities of practice (Fabra-Mata, 2012). The existence of consensus across the political spectrum around the country's peace efforts as one of the pillars of Norwegian foreign policy (Gahr Støre, 2010) has undoubtedly made peace engagement and the enhancing of internal capacities possible. Another enabling factor has been the involvement of the country's political leadership, facilitating rapid decision-making (Helgesen, 2007: 16) in cases as recent as the ongoing peace talks between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Monocle*, 2013).

Norwegian peace facilitation

A Norwegian model?

Early chronicles of the Oslo Accords and other peace processes facilitated by Norway in the 1990s suggested the existence of a "Norwegian model" for the promotion of peace, with strong partnerships between governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations at its core (Helgesen, 2004; Matlary, 2002; Egeland, 1998). It did not take much for the new discourse establishing a distinct and efficient Norwegian approach to peace promotion to be officially embraced (Skånland, 2008).

A narrative was articulated in terms of which Norwegian peace mediation was characterised by a particular set of qualities – non-coercive, impartial, disinterested, built on trust, respectful of local ownership, rich in resources, linked to Norwegian civil society and committed long term.⁷ As a study of Norwegian peace facilitation in armed conflicts shows, three defining features stand out from this list: close collaboration with Norwegian civil society (non-governmental organisations and the research community), the provision of significant financial resources and long-term commitment (Fabra-Mata, 2012).

2 "Facilitation" is a term sometimes favoured by third parties to underscore the non-intrusive nature of their good offices, portraying their activities as focusing on building communication channels and assisting in setting ground rules for the process towards reaching an agreement.

3 St.meld. no. 19, 1995–96.

4 Author's translation from Norwegian: "Å bygge veien eller veiene til fred er utenrikspolitikkenes fremste oppgave."

5 Between the government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front.

6 <<http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/Hemmelig-fredsmegling-i-over-20-konfliktomrader-7225305.html#.UglDVkzN5gp>>.

7 The key components of the "Norwegian model" narrative are clearly spelt out on the website of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA, n.d.).

It would be misleading on three counts, however, to talk about a “Norwegian model” of peace mediation only because of the existence of these core similar features across Norwegian peace diplomacy. Firstly, a model presupposes the existence of certain variables and rules combined in a particular way to achieve the desired results – there is more to it than just a set of features and principles. Secondly, even if a model existed, for it to have a degree of uniqueness it still has to be proved that it is fundamentally different from the peace facilitation *habitus* of other states or organisations. Thirdly, from a principled standpoint, if a predetermined model existed, Norway could be attacked for embracing a one-size-fits-all approach, amounting to a denial of the principle of national ownership and context-sensitive peacemaking.

Nonetheless, even in the absence of a formal model, Norway has developed an understanding of how peace is to be achieved.

Peace as seen from Norway

Consistent with its role as a non-coercive third party, Norway considers dialogue as the cornerstone of successful conflict transformation. Conflicts cannot be resolved militarily, but only politically through courageous and broad-based dialogue and willingness to compromise. With greater or lesser emphasis, the understanding of dialogue as key to finding a way out of conflict has been a constant in the Norwegian peace discourse: “The essence of [Norway’s] contribution to conflict resolution will always be dialogue”⁸ (Gahr Støre, 2010). Recently the current minister of foreign affairs stated that “dialogue is crucial. Without dialogue, it is not possible to win confidence, or gain insight into the other party’s positions and thinking” (Brende, 2013).

This dialogue is a locally driven process, in terms of which only the parties to the conflict themselves can take the lead and generate creative alternatives for achieving lasting peace. External actors such as Norway can contribute by creating a conducive environment for the informal contacts and formal dialogue between the parties to occur and be fruitful. In this regard, the role of Norway as a facilitator is to build trust with all parties (MFA, 2012).

Similarly, the dialogue needs to be inclusive, embracing not only armed actors, but also civil society actors and society at large. Regarding the former, participants in the peace processes must refrain from acts of terrorism and show real determination to participate in the dialogue in order to find political solutions to the conflict (MFA, 2006). Regarding the latter, the needs and views of the conflict-affected society as a whole should be taken into account (MFA, 2012).⁹

A specific aspect of inclusion involves women-related and gender issues: Norway encourages the participation of women in peace negotiations and the integration of a gender perspective into peace dialogues and peace agreements (MFA, 2011), in the letter and spirit of UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 2122. The inclusion of women is a vital element for a peace process to succeed (MFA, 2012).

When demands for inclusivity are met and the views of multiple actors taken into account, a more comprehensive peace agreement can be reached, with greater prospects for success during the implementation phase and stronger transformational power: “In return for greater inclusion, you are likely to see agreements that last longer and pave the way for greater stability and economic development” (Brende, 2013). Building peace is a long-term process that also requires facilitation support during the implementation of the provisions of the peace accord (MFA, 2012).

Has Norway succeeded in bringing peace to conflict-affected communities?

Is there any evidence that Norway has contributed to bringing peace to conflict-affected communities? Norwegian peace facilitation has been criticised by some as ineffective and incapable of achieving a durable peace (Østerud, 2006). In 2008 Thorbjørn Jagland, former Norwegian minister of foreign affairs, claimed that “close to all [the] processes we have been involved in, now lie in ruins” (in Norad, 2011: 9). In many ways, however, Jagland’s widely quoted words encapsulate an “all-or-nothing” approach that is narrowly focused on lasting peace agreements.

Norwegian diplomats, on the other hand, tend to have a more positive view. As former state secretary and researcher Kjetil Skogrand put it, “it is far between the spectacular successes, but we cannot disregard the fact that the conditions in the relevant areas could have been far worse without Norwegian efforts” (Skåland, 2008: 94). Even in instances where the peace process collapsed, like in Sri Lanka, diplomats consider that Norway played a positive role in reducing human suffering by encouraging the signing of the ceasefire and monitoring its implementation (Fabra-Mata, 2012: 132).

This stark divergence in views on this issue stems from applying different yardsticks to measure success in peace mediation. What does “contribute to peace” mean? What is a “good result” in peace mediation? There is no single answer to these questions. There are many possible outcomes of a peace process, ranging between a “negative peace” and a “positive peace”, between stopping or reducing violence, even if only temporarily, and creating the conditions for transforming societies. While having as the

⁸ Author’s translation from Norwegian: “Essensen i våre bidrag til konfliktløsning vil alltid være dialog.”

⁹ This normative standpoint is based on empirical findings from analyses of people’s participation in peace processes. In her statistical analysis of the effects of including civil society in peace negotiations, Nilsson (2012) finds that civil society participation increases the chances of peace lasting.

ultimate goal the facilitation of the achievement of a sustainable and inclusive peace, peace mediators nonetheless appreciate the “negative peace” gains achieved during the process (Fabra-Mata, 2012). In fact, the peace process might generate a series of intangibles peace assets – confidence building, more knowledgeable peace negotiators, softer political stances, informal peace alliances and networks, etc. – that over time may disappear or possibly remain and generate previously unforeseen peace opportunities. The impact of mediation on the relationship between the parties may be more important than whether or not a peace accord is achieved (Lanz et al., 2008: 10). Former minister of foreign affairs Jonas Gahr Støre referred to this in the following way:

I have learnt that using the term “success” only for when you get parties to sit around a table, signing an agreement is too narrow a definition. What we do, in most cases, is to contribute to a positive development (Nordviste, 2012: 80).

Insofar as it is possible, and within the limits dictated by scenario-based approaches, broad statements of intent and understandings of possible “positive developments” need to be spelt out at an early stage of a peace negotiation. By translating these statements into context-specific objectives, the peace facilitator will strengthen quality control and accountability measures exponentially, and facilitate continuous analysis and learning.

Measuring success in peace mediation

In terms of development aid, attributing results to specific actors is a continuous challenge. This is less of an issue in peace mediation: mediators are chosen by the negotiating parties for different reasons – e.g. perceived impartiality, an established reputation, etc. – and thus *become* part of the peace process. As illustrated in the case of Sri Lanka, facilitation by a state like Norway cannot be treated as an independent variable, but as one that is endogenous to the peace process (Gaarder & Annan, 2013), as determined by the politics of peace facilitation.

As seen above, the impact of peace facilitation cannot be simply equated with a peace agreement; it encompasses other tangible and intangible gains in the short, medium and long term. From the study of the fundamentals behind the conceptualisation of peace entrenched in Norwegian peace facilitation, a three-tier, modular conceptualisation of success seems to be appropriate: (1) success measured in terms of the holding of dialogue between conflict parties (“sit down and talk”); (2) success measured in terms of the signing of a peace agreement between the conflict actors (“negative peace”); and (3) success measured in terms of the peaceful transformation of the conditions that made conflict possible (“positive peace”). Each of these is determined by a subset of assumptions embedded in

theories about dialogue, normative recognition of diversity and inclusion, among others.

- *Dialogue between the conflict actors (“sit down and talk”)*. Direct dialogue between the parties to the conflict is the steppingstone to politically transforming an armed conflict. Even before an agreement is within reach, honest dialogue between opponents will presumably open the way to behaviour change. Dialogue, it is assumed, creates the conditions for conflict actors to de-demonise each other and exercise caution in approaching the media and making public statements. From a normative standpoint, a gender perspective should also be put on the table.

In terms of these considerations, possible indicators to measure this dimension could be the following:

- the extent of inflammatory speech and hate rhetoric in participants’ statements;
- the frequency of skirmishes and clashes;¹⁰
- the number of women participating in the negotiations as delegation members; and
- the extent of inflammatory speech and hate rhetoric in the media.¹¹

- *A peace agreement between the conflict actors (“negative peace”)*. Armed actors do not participate in dialogue for the sake of dialogue. While perceptions and opinions may change during the talks, such dialogue, when it is honest, is aimed at reaching agreements, including anything from relatively modest ceasefires and armistices to comprehensive peace agreements. While the terms of the agreement should address the specific causes of the conflict, including its manifestations and the grievances involved, from a content-oriented and principled perspective it can be expected that the agreement facilitated by a third party will be aligned with international norms and core democratic principles, and will include transitional justice provisions as appropriate. The process to reach the agreement should be inclusive and sensitive to the needs of the conflict-affected society.

The following indicators could capture some of these key aspects of a peace agreement, mainly in terms of their procedural dimension:

- mechanisms for the inclusion of civil society at both the grassroots and national levels;
- the number of concrete proposals from civil society integrated into the peace agreement;
- provisions for increased female political participation; and
- the validation of the peace agreement by the society at large through a referendum or by the National Assembly prior to its ratification.

¹⁰ This presupposes, however, that negotiators can control rank-and-file soldiers.

¹¹ If the peace talks are not secret and agreed protocols allow for some information to flow to the public.

- *Peaceful transformation of the conditions that made conflict possible (“positive peace”).* The implementation of a broad-based agreement is a defining moment that will either make peace or break it. Resources for the implementation of the various provisions need to be allocated, while targets need to be set and responsibilities divided up. Regenerating the social contract, changing attitudes and transforming informal institutions comprise a long-term project requiring the active participation of local stakeholders.

Indicators to gauge progress in this regard could be the following:

- the number of concrete civil society proposals integrated into the peace agreement;
- perceptions of security and peace in the country;
- citizens’ satisfaction with public services; and
- the country’s Gini coefficient.

Conclusion

Over the years Norway has built up an international reputation as a trustworthy peace facilitator. Its involvement in various peace processes and initiatives has made it one of the world’s most active peace facilitators and formed the basis for articulating a peace narrative around a supposedly distinctive Norwegian approach to peace facilitation.

In the process Norway has developed its internal capacities and a particular understanding of the fundamentals of making peace, i.e. through dialogue, inclusivity and tenacity. However, the question of the effectiveness and results of this peace engagement remains open. It is too narrow an approach to define success in absolute terms. Positive gains can occur before and even in the absence of a peace agreement, and such an agreement does not guarantee that a transformational peace will be achieved. To continue to advance the professionalisation of its peace facilitation agenda, Norway should seek new analytical approaches, including in terms of how to measure progress towards or movement away from achieving peace. Notwithstanding the challenges inherent in the process, the development of ways to measure the success or failure of peace processes is not an eccentricity, but a necessity.

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