Ceasefires in Intra-state Peace Processes

Ceasefires are one instrument frequently used to try and stop violence. To improve the effectiveness of ceasefires in advancing peace, concerted efforts by mediators, policymakers and researchers are needed to better understand the way they interact with the political decisions made in peace processes.

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Ceasefires are a feature of both international and intra-state armed conflicts. They can take different forms and have different purposes. As a result, the use of the term "ceasefire" in the general media is under-specified and covers very different phenomena, varying from very loose, informal and unilateral arrangements to more formal, bi- or multilateral agreements to stop the fighting.

Even by narrowing the exploration of ceasefires to the context of intra-state and internationalized intra-state armed conflicts, as the following analysis does, the diversity and distribution of ceasefires varies widely across years and regions. Between 1989 and 2018, more than 1,900 ceasefires and related follow-up arrangements were reported in the media, across more than a hundred intra-state armed conflicts (see graph).

The characteristics of ceasefires vary between conflicts, but also within one and the same conflict. In Syria, local ceasefires offered some temporary respite to the beleaguered population in some areas. Yet in other situations in the same country they were used as part of a military strategy, implying surrender of one side and potentially

Government officials, ethnic rebel groups and international witnesses pose after the signing ceremony of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in Myanmar, October 15, 2015. *Soe Zeya Tun / Reuters*

enabling violence elsewhere in the country. In Myanmar, in contrast, a nationwide ceasefire agreement between the military and numerous – but not all – ethnic armed organizations has, despite challenges, held since 2015. It remains key to providing the space for ongoing political negotiations aiming at a comprehensive political settlement. In Colombia, a successfully implemented ceasefire agreement led to the laying down of arms of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC-EP) and ending the status of war with the FARC.

What is a Ceasefire?
The examples above show the wide variety of phenomena covered by the term "ceasefire" and the need to try and better understand their diverse role in peace processes.

Ceasefire arrangements aim to stop the violence. They do *not* resolve the conflict by addressing the political, socio-economic, judiciary, ecological etc. issues underlying and fuelling a conflict, which is the purpose of a peace agreement. Beyond this broad understanding of ceasefires, there is no clear consensus on exactly what a ceasefire is. Terminology remains confusing, with actors using different terms to refer to similar concepts, or using the same term to refer to different concepts. This inconsistent use of language has complicated the process of comparing and evaluating different forms of ceasefires across different contexts. At the same time, mediators and conflict parties need linguistic flexibility when talking about ceasefires in different contexts, as whether an arrangement is referred to as a ceasefire or by some other term can have important political and cultural implications.

Ceasefires can be defined as all arrangements by or between conflict parties to stop fighting from a specific point in time. The specific stipulation to stop violence is what differentiates all ceasefires from other forms of violence reducing arrangements (e.g. no-fly zones). Ceasefires can be further categorized into three broad types: "Cessation of Hostilities (CoH)", "preliminary ceasefires", and "definitive ceasefires" (see table). CoH are often understood as informal arrangements to suspend fighting without provisions to monitor compliance. Preliminary ceasefires, by contrast, are formal agreements that include specific compliance provisions and provide for the monitoring and/or verification of the agreement. They are usually linked to a peace process. Definitive ceasefires are formal ceasefires, which include compliance mechanisms and can also provide provisions to disarm and demobilize the conflict parties. Their aim is to terminate armed conflict, rather than only suspend the fighting. Definitive ceasefires are a key outcome of peace talks, usually part of a peace agreement covering the political and other issues underlying a conflict.

The Role of Ceasefires

From the perspective of a conflict party, ceasefires are a strategic tool to advance their political goals. As such, the party's intentions for entering into a ceasefire may be radically different from progress in the peace negotiations. From a third-party peace-making perspective, ceasefires are often seen to play different roles in different phases of a peace process:

A Typology of Ceasefires	Aim to stop violence	Compliance mechanisms	Disarmament and demobilization
Cessation of Hostility	✘		
Preliminary Ceasefire	✘	✘	
Definitive Ceasefire	✘	✘	✘

Pre-negotiation phase: Prior to the onset of the negotiation phase, different arrangements to contain and reduce violence, including CoHs, are used for different purposes including signaling intent, building trust between the parties, demonstrating command and control capacity, reducing civilian suffering, freezing the battlefield to facilitate negotiations, and testing out security arrangements that might be used once talks begin.

The stated objectives of any arrangement in this period are relatively modest, e.g. to contain or reduce some parts of the violence. Mediators may have a rudimentary road map of how these arrangements might be developed in the future as part of a broader process, but for the parties, such

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arrangements are likely to relate to short-term considerations.

Negotiation phase: During political negotiations, a key concern is to delink the negotiation process from the violence on the battlefield. If there is no such delinking, the ongoing violence can contaminate political negotiations, eventually leading to the stalling or collapse of negotiations. One way to stabilize the situation and insulate the negotiation process from battlefield violence is through a preliminary ceasefire. The aim here is not only to agree to stop the violence, but to also put in place compliance mechanisms such as monitoring and verification provisions that help improve the robustness and resilience of the ceasefire. Preliminary ceasefires also often include a commitment to a political negotiation process, which can be in the form of a framework agreement or negotiation

agenda, to demonstrate a clearer trajectory towards the broader political goals.

The creation and implementation of a preliminary ceasefire is generally the first point at which the conflict parties collaborate meaningfully. This often represents a significant form of confidence building that increases not only the chances of successful implementation, but also the space for the parties to practice future collaboration. This said, such agreements also come with the risk that emerging trust can be destroyed if the ceasefire fails.

Armed non-state actors may be hesitant to go into a preliminary ceasefire, as they fear this involves giving up their source of leverage – i.e. armed combat – and risks predetermining the future security situation. For this reason, preliminary ceasefire agreements generally leave arms in the hands of the armed groups, even if the future question of disarmament may have been discussed and even been tested in a very limited form (e.g. geographically or on a limited number of combatants).

There are two broad approaches guiding how ceasefires are used (or not) during the political negotiation phase:

In the sequential approach, parties agree on a preliminary ceasefire prior to, or during negotiations. The ceasefire is used to create the space for negotiating the issues underlying the conflict. In the Philippines, for example, a preliminary ceasefire was in place for years while the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) negotiated first a framework agreement and later a comprehensive peace accord. In the case of the Sudan North-South peace process, only a geographically limited ceasefire was in place in the Nuba Mountains in the early phases of the negotiations. As such, the negotiations began in the absence of a preliminary ceasefire. After a major military battle around and within the city of Torit in southern Sudan seriously undermined the negotiations, the parties agreed to a preliminary form of a ceasefire with a Verification and Monitoring Team (VMT) under the responsibility of the Chief Mediator General Lazaro Sumbeiywo. This stayed in place for the remainder of the negotiations.
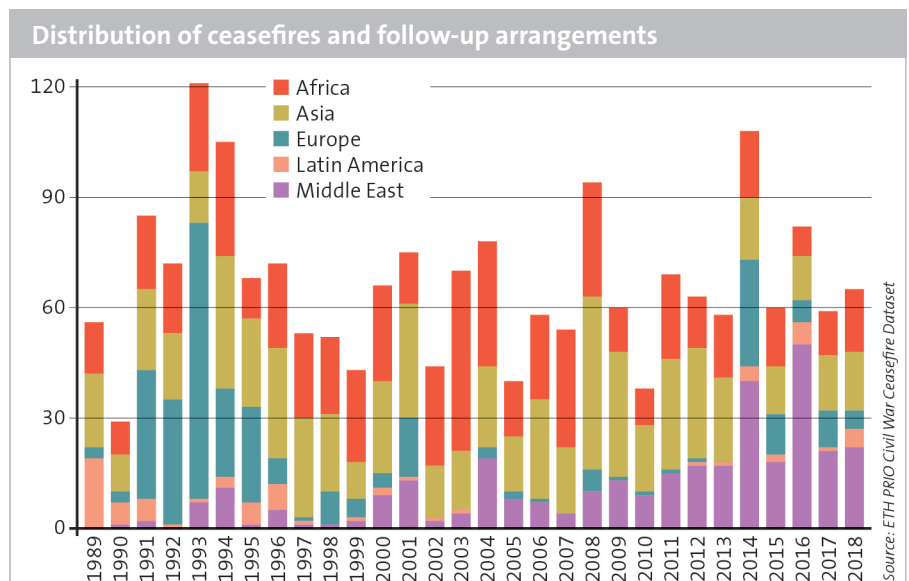
In the parallel approach, the conflict parties negotiate the issues in the absence of a preliminary ceasefire. Particularly in cases where previous talks have failed or cease-

fires were misused for military purposes, actors may prefer to 'talk while fighting'. This reduces the likelihood that either party uses a ceasefire for military gains. However, violence on the battlefield often threatens to derail peace talks. Over the course of such negotiations, parties consequently often adopt a CoH or find other ways to de-escalate conflict violence. For example, in Colombia, a number of unilateral ceasefires and scaled Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) were used, which developed in relation to the situation on the ground and the progress made in the political negotiations.

The implementation of the preliminary ceasefire or CBMs during the negotiation phase plays a vital role in building sufficient levels of trust between the parties. It helps to test possible security arrangements (e.g. joint units, localized demobilization) and gathers valuable information on what works and what does not in preparation for the negotiation and implementation of the definitive ceasefire agreement. As the parties approach a political settlement in the peace agreement, the terms of what will eventually become the definitive ceasefire agreement are negotiated.

In both the sequential and parallel approach, parties need to build trust through a series of "successful" security arrangements during the negotiation phase so as to be able to implement the definitive ceasefire. For example, in the Central African Republic, numerous definitive ceasefire agreements with clauses for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration have failed. This could be due to the failure of the political negotiations, but also due to the inability of the parties to agree to CoH or preliminary ceasefires prior to the definitive ceasefire.

Implementation phase: A peace agreement and/or definitive ceasefire generally includes the provisions for disarmament and demobilization of the non-state actor, or their integration into the future security forces, as well as changes to the structure of the state security forces. Non-state actors are only likely to agree to such provisions if they are satisfied that they are going to achieve some of their political aims. As a result, the negotiation of a definitive ceasefire takes place towards the end of the negotiation process (even though working groups may prepare the ground beforehand), and is only signed once all the rest has been agreed

Distribution of ceasefires and follow-up arrangements

Legend: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East

Source: ETH PRIO Civil War Ceasefire Dataset

upon, e.g. the political, social, economic wealth-sharing, judiciary. Once the parties agree to a political solution, the definitive ceasefire sets out the steps in the transition from a status of war to peace.

Beyond the peace process: Ceasefires may also serve purely humanitarian purposes or facilitate specific activities, such as evacuating

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civilians from the zone of combat, or the celebration of religious holidays that may or may not be linked to the peace process.

Why do Ceasefires Fail?

Identifying "successful" ceasefires is not straightforward, as they have different roles, forms and purposes. From a conflict management perspective, suspension of violence is generally the immediate objective. However, in many cases ceasefires reduce rather than suspend violence (e.g. the Minsk Agreement in Ukraine), or they only suspend violence for a very short period (e.g. the Annan-mediated ceasefire early in the Syrian conflict). This means ceasefires need to be reflected on in relation to their intended purpose, technical quality and their link to the political negotiation process. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify two main reasons that lead to ceasefire failure.

Political will: Ceasefires are primarily a strategic tool used by conflict parties to move towards their political objectives, which may or may not include a negotiated peace agreement. Ceasefires occur when the parties see some utility in entering into an arrangement. Parties are then likely to continue to honor the agreement as long as they perceive that this is the most effective way of moving towards their political goals. If, for example, the political process fails to make sufficient progress, or the break in violence is seen to be favoring one side (politically or militarily), an actor may abandon the ceasefire and return to the violent pursuit of their goals. Similarly, if they only entered into an agreement to re-arm, re-group or otherwise gain a military advantage, we may see a subsequent intensification in the same conflict, or a strategic redeployment of their forces to manage other armed challengers.

Ceasefires may also fail when a party enters into an agreement following pressure from outside parties. When powerful international actors compel the parties to enter into an agreement, significant enforcement is required to ensure that the parties stick to the deal that they were reluctant to agree. In the absence of sufficient enforcement, these "imposed" ceasefires are likely to quickly break down.

Agreement and process design: The technical quality of an agreement and the process of reaching it are also likely to have a strong bearing on the outcome of a ceasefire. Well-crafted agreements embody a con-

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Swiss Ceasefire Engagements

Mediation: The Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) provides ceasefire expertise to conflict parties and mediators in peace processes as part of their good offices and mediation activities. In recent years, this expertise has been provided in the peace negotiations in Burundi, Colombia, Indonesia, Liberia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Uganda.

Research: The CSS ETH Zurich, Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO) and Uppsala University collaborate on the Ceasefire Research Project, and are developing a research-practice network on ceasefires, as well as facilitating exchange and publications on the topic. The Mediation Support Project (CSS ETH Zurich and swisspeace, funded by the Swiss FDFA) does applied research on ceasefires. Publications include J. Brickhill, "Mediating Security Arrangements in Peace Processes" and D.I. Abdi & S. Mason "Mediation and Governance in Fragile Contexts".

Training: Together with the United Nations, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense, the Swiss FDFA organizes the annual one-week UN Ceasefire Mediation Course. The two-year MAS ETH Mediation in Peace Processes, two-week Peace Mediation Course, and one-week OSCE mediation course also include specific blocks on ceasefires.

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ceptual framework designed and owned by the parties, with clearly defined terms, phases and a timetable. They arise as an integral part of the mediation strategy, and take time, training and commitment from the conflict parties, as well as the third parties supporting the process. Equally, the inclusion of provisions setting out the terms for monitoring compliance, verifying violations and the creation of some means of transitional security management are often vital in sustaining a ceasefire and facilitating the transition from war to peace. This does not mean that a ceasefire would not succeed without a high-quality agreement. Indeed, if the political will is sufficiently high, it is sometimes possible to navigate a process with a weaker agreement. However, in general, an agreement that is owned by the conflict parties and of high technical quality will have higher chances of succeeding than a poorly designed agreement without conflict party ownership.

Looking Forward

To improve the potential of ceasefires to advance peace, much remains to be learnt about the specific factors that lead conflict parties to accept or reject ceasefire arrangements, which provisions within an agreement have what significant effects, and the full range of (intended or unintended) impacts of ceasefires on the dynamics of intra-state armed conflict. Moreover, advances in technology now offer new possibilities to monitor and verify ceasefires, which may have a significant impact on the way ceasefire design evolves in the years ahead. Despite the technical nature of ceasefire agreements, they shape and are shaped by political decision-making processes of conflict parties. A fuller understanding of this dynamic interaction is needed to better grasp the role ceasefires play in peace processes. This is likely to require greater and continuing collaboration and communication between mediation practitioners, researchers, policymakers and NGOs, all of whom are likely to be helpful to further our understanding of ceasefires.

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