

# **The State of Global Peace and Conflict: Implications for Mediation**

**Contribution to the UN High-Level Mediation Course**

**Opening remarks by  
Ambassador Thomas Greminger, Executive Director, GCSP**

Glion, 14 June 2026



Thank you very much for the invitation to address this UN High-Level Mediation Course, to exchange with so many prominent mediators and, of course, to see many familiar faces.

Dear colleagues, dear friends.

### **The world situation**

Many of the assumptions that underpinned the work of the UN, regional organizations, and even diplomacy over the past few decades no longer apply.

Three out of five members of the UN Security Council are regional hegemony and pursue sphere of influence policies that we thought belonged to the past.

Many basics of international law, human rights and international humanitarian law are being consistently violated – with few consequences.

Funding for international organizations is being slashed.

Meanwhile, the number of conflicts is increasing. Yet there seem to be fewer peacemakers – and many of the ones we have are not professional mediators.

**Functional multilateralism** is urgently needed to deal with what Kofi Annan called “problems without passports” – such as climate change, mass migration, transnational organized crime, and pandemics. But geopolitical competition and conflict are hampering states from working together.

Another factor to throw into this mix is technology. It is shrinking time and space: revolutionizing the way we connect, use money, and acquire information. It is also changing the nature of how we make war and peace.

### **Impact on mediation**

This world of instability, opportunity and fast-paced change needs more mediators!

Unfortunately, when you look around the world at the moment, the UN or regional organisations, for that matter, are not involved in preventing, managing, or resolving some of the most serious international conflicts: such as in Iran; Ukraine; between Israel and Hamas; and across the Sahel.

The irony is that this has happened on the watch of a UN Secretary General who called for “a surge in diplomacy for peace”. His role has been marginalized to a large extent by Great Power rivalry that has gridlocked the Security Council. Regional organizations have not been much more effective.

In some cases, state actors are playing a mediating role. Traditional mediators, among them Switzerland or Norway, are still around and shall not be written off. However, we have seen a variety of other countries step up to try to reduce tensions, provide a venue for peace talks, or support mediation processes. Think of Pakistan or Oman in the context of Iran, the UAE, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia in relation to Ukraine, as well as other players such as Qatar and Kazakhstan in various contexts.

The problem is that very few current mediation attempts are structured processes led by capable mediators. Rather, too many are *ad hoc* meetings that are badly prepared, with insufficient engagement or ownership by the parties, and where solutions are imposed or leaked in the press – which undermines trust. Too often, today’s mediation (not least by some high-profile property



developers) is based on shuttle diplomacy rather than relationship building and rarely underpinned by solid diplomatic expertise. Transaction costs increase with every encounter.

Furthermore, many of the so-called peace agreements of the past few years are not durable because they are insufficiently implemented. The approach is short-term and transactional rather than long-term and sustainable. This goes to show that deal-making and peacemaking are not the same thing.

With the number of conflicts proliferating while Track 1 mediation processes wane, Track 2 processes have gained increased relevance.

By way of example, I would like to give you a glimpse into some of the Track 2 work that we have been doing at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy.

### **Track 2 on Ukraine**

When I was Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, I felt that the OSCE could be used more effectively as a forum to reduce tensions between Russia and the West. However, dialogue was made difficult, both by COVID and, quite frankly, by an unwillingness by both Russia and some NATO countries to talk to each other or to engage constructively in discussions on military risk reduction and confidence- and security-building measures. I therefore suggested that states should make more effective use of informal spaces for dialogue. But there was little political will to do so, including using platforms that had been created for this purpose only a few years before, like the “Structured Dialogue”.

Soon after becoming Director of GCSP, I saw the urgent need for informal dialogue because Track 1 processes were jammed by a “no business as usual” mentality, which frankly often resulted in no business at all, in particular at the OSCE.

We therefore started several Track 2 processes – although I must admit it was difficult to raise money from states for this type of diplomacy. We were fortunate to have core funding from Switzerland, and to raise money from a couple of generous private donors.

One process involved high level experts from Ukraine, Russia, Western Europe and the United States to explore possibilities for de-escalating tensions both between Russia and Ukraine and between Russia and the West. I must say, at times it was one of the very few channels for sending signals between Moscow, Washington and Kyiv. This process was kept highly confidential, because at that time, any talk of dialogue with Russia was taboo. This changed, when President Trump came into office, after which bilateral relations improved slightly between the United States and Russia, and trilateral talks were launched to end hostilities in Ukraine.

The second process that we initiated, already in the spring of 2022, was to gather some of the world’s leading ceasefire mediation experts, including from the UN, for confidential meetings – just outside of Geneva – to explore state of the art modalities for a ceasefire. This was a very technical process that resulted in guidelines for preparing and monitoring a ceasefire. Again, for the first two years you couldn’t even mention the word “ceasefire” – but this has changed since early last year, and the parties and mediators are looking for concrete suggestions. We have published two reports: one that we like to call a “Swiss army knife” or toolbox of options for a ceasefire, and the other on the use of technology for ceasefire monitoring. If you are interested, you can find more on our webpage.



The third process that I want to mention is called «Conversations on the Future of European Security». That sounds rather harmless, doesn't it? But it has been impossible to have such conversations in Track 1 arenas over the past few years, mainly because some states argue that you can't talk about the future of European security until the end of the war in Ukraine. Our view is different. Our sense is that there are three lines of conflict fundamentally affecting European Security and ongoing simultaneously. The US political scientists and diplomat Michael Kimmage calls these lines of conflict "collisions". I like this image of "collision". There is one between Russia and Ukraine, one between Russia and the West and one between Russia and the United States. You can't solve one without the other.

Yet there is no appetite to talk about the future of European security, for example in the OSCE. Therefore, we assembled a group of top experts from Russia, Ukraine, North America and Western Europe. They identified a number of building blocks to address the three collisions; building-blocks that would eventually allow to rebuild European security and again bring some elements of cooperative security to the dominant deterrence posture.

What's quite amazing – after more than four years of war – is that at all three levels there is almost no structured process of dialogue. There is no Contact Group. Almost no envoys. No agreed modalities. No common set of issues to discuss. It's the opposite of what good mediation should look like.

The challenge is therefore to see how Track 2 processes can provide impulses to Track 1. In this case, it is indeed very challenging because Russia, Ukraine and now the United States have presidential administrations where the circle of decision-makers is very small and being hard to penetrate.

The key is to find actors with access as well as the right entry points. In an unstructured process, there is not much to plug into. But we have had some success, and are pursuing Track 1.5 initiatives, for example through reaching out to national security advisors.

Ultimately, it will have to be state actors in Track 1 processes who will have to make peace. But the complexity of the process could benefit from expert input: this is where we think we can play a role.

The time will also have to come to bring international organizations back into mediation processes. While there may be scope for *sui generis* arrangements in some cases, ceasefire monitoring, election monitoring, stockpile security and rebuilding Ukraine are all areas where organizations such as the UN and the OSCE have expertise, mandates, and capabilities. I hope that parties and member states will see the self-interest in using these organizations rather than reinventing the wheel.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Colleagues, I want to conclude with 10 general remarks on what the current world situation means for the work of the UN in the area of peace & security.

1. First, I hope that the new Secretary General rediscovers the "good offices" role. The leadership of the UN in mediation is badly needed in so many parts of the world.
2. Second, more UN envoys should be deployed to the world's trouble spots.
3. Third, and related to this, is the need for deploying more trained mediators. There is a tendency to appoint top diplomats as mediators – but they often



lack mediation training, skills and experience and are at times not really accessible to mediation support. That is why courses like this are so useful and important.

4. Fourth, even where the UN is not in the lead, it can provide useful mediation support. This can come through support for technical issues, as we saw with the Black Sea Grain deal.
5. Fifth, a ceasefire is not a prerequisite for mediation – indeed, mediation can help create the conditions for a ceasefire.
6. Sixth, pay more attention to process design. Processes should not be rigid, but they should be structured and coherent (which is frankly not often the case today).
7. Seventh, focus on building relationships. This is often the most important trust-building aspect that can create opportunities for peace.
8. Eighth, in political agreements, leave space for constructive ambiguity, but when it comes to ceasefires, sweat the details.
9. Ninth, Track 1 actors should regard Track 2 processes as being complementary rather than competitive, while Track 2 actors should try to build bridges to Track 1 rather than operating in a bubble.
10. Tenth and last, we need to be more creative about exploring how technology can help to support mediation, for example by identifying the compatibility of positions of the parties.

Those were some of the ideas that I wanted to share.

I hope that provides some useful insights and food for thought.

I stand ready to answer any questions.