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Readiness Theory: A New Approach to Understanding Mediated Prenegotiation and Negotiation Processes Leading to Peace Agreements

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Abstract

Two main theoretical strands suggest causal explanations for the shifts in the de-escalation dynamics of conflicts, in which parties that had been unwilling to sit together at the negotiating table ultimately agreed to do so and eventually signed an agreement. The first is the ripeness strand which embodies three loosely related subtheories, and the second, a corollary of it, is the readiness strand which is based on readiness theory. By applying readiness theory to two case studies of mediated negotiations which ended in agreement in Aceh (2005) and Sudan (2005), this study illustrates the value of the readiness strand as an integrative analytical framework for examining the negotiation process from prenegotiation to negotiation and agreement. This type of multicausal and dynamic analysis, which considers gradual changes in the variables throughout the process, offers insights for researchers as well as for practitioners.

This article illustrates the value of readiness theory in elucidating the multiple causal effects and movements underlying mediated negotiations which conclude with the parties reaching an agreement. By applying readiness theory to two case studies in which third parties were engaged in mobilizing the adversaries to negotiate and come to agreement, the article explains how readiness theory and its hypotheses can contribute, as a single analytical framework, to our understanding of the dynamics which influence parties to negotiate and come to a mutually accepted understanding.

Two main theoretical strands in the conflict resolution field suggest causal explanations for the shifts in the de-escalation dynamics of conflicts, in which parties that had been unwilling to sit together at the negotiating table ultimately agreed to do so and eventually signed an agreement (Schiff, 2020). The first of these two is the "ripeness strand." This strand, which originates in ripeness theory (Zartman, 1985, 2000, 2008, 2012), embodies three loosely related subtheories. It includes the original ripeness theory, which centers on the Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS) and the Way Out (WO) conditions as well as the notions of "Soft Stalemate" (S5) and Turning Points to explain prenegotiation dynamics in internal conflicts (Zartman, 1995, 2012). The ripeness strand also incorporates a third subtheory, the "Push and Pull Theory" (Zartman, 2008, 2012) which applies the basic logic of ripeness and the perception of Mutually Enticing Opportunity (MEO) to explain the successful conclusion of negotiations. This strand

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has dominated the discourse in the field of conflict resolution with respect to the opportune timing for the inauguration of negotiations.

The second, newer, readiness theoretical strand is based on readiness theory (Pruitt, 1997, 2005, 2007, 2015a, 2015b; Schiff, 2014a, 2014b; Schiff, 2020) which is a derivative of ripeness theory. Readiness theory lays out the processes underlying the movement toward settling conflicts. It explains what drives parties which are immersed in conflict, especially in intractable conflict, to engage in dialogue for the purpose of reaching an agreement to resolve their conflict. Though originally focused on exploring prenegotiation dynamics that foster readiness for negotiation (Pruitt, 2005, 2007), recent studies have extended readiness theory's reach and confirmed its efficacy in the bargaining phase as well, to assess the elements which influence the parties' readiness to make concessions and arrive at an agreement, beyond the prenegotiation stage (Schiff, 2020, 2014a, 2014b).

The main argument in this study is that the unique features of the readiness theory strand make it a useful analytical framework for the exploration of the origins of peace agreements (Schiff, 2020). These features include its richness in the manner in which it outlines the multiple antecedents of negotiation, and its discussion of multiple variables which can assist in screening the gradual movement in the parties' perceptions, which lead them to the negotiation table. Another singular feature of readiness theory is that it is integrated or unified as it discusses the same variables as antecedents of both entry into negotiation and progress within it, including the various forms of third-party engagement (Pruitt, 2005, 2007; Schiff, 2020, 2014a, 2014b). The qualities inherent in readiness theory contribute to illuminating the complex interrelationships among the factors at play in peace processes, allowing researchers to isolate more causes and causal effects in dynamic processes that are not necessarily linear and often have multiple sources (Pruitt, 2005, 2007; Schiff, 2020). These traits also enable readiness theory to elucidate multiple effects and movements in de-escalation processes in a wide range of historical cases, whether interstate or internal, bilateral or mediated, thus revealing the mechanisms through which third parties influence the dynamics and outcome of the process.

This article presents the efficacy of readiness theory by applying its analytical framework to an examination of the factors which affected the outcome of prenegotiation and negotiation episodes in the Aceh conflict, which led to the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), and in the Sudan conflict, which culminated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). In these two intractable conflicts, third-party engagement was intensive and successful: first, in bringing the parties to the table, and then, in helping the parties to reach agreement. Three questions guided the investigation of both cases: Which factors influenced the parties' readiness to negotiate and brought them to the negotiating table? Which factors drove the parties toward agreement once negotiations had begun, or influenced the parties' readiness to reach an agreement? And finally, what was the third party's role during the prenegotiation and negotiation stages?

The empirical evidence derived from intractable conflicts shows repeated attempts to end these conflicts through negotiations, with third parties often both pushing and pulling the parties to the table, and these attempts nevertheless often resulting in nonagreement or in failed negotiations (Faure, 2012; Faure & Zartman, 2012; Hopmann, 2012). It seems that many elements must be in place to enable the process to succeed in bringing the parties to the table and ensuring that they agree to demonstrate the flexibility required for agreement to be reached. The situation in Cyprus since 1974, in which Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have repeatedly started and ended the negotiation process in disagreement; the failure to reach a final status agreement in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict since the signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) in 1993; and the failure to reach a peace agreement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict since 1994 are but a few examples of peace initiatives which continue to flounder. However, peace negotiations can sometimes bring the parties in an intractable conflict to agree on the details of the formula for a solution and to sign a peace agreement, as was the case in Aceh and in Sudan. It is therefore important to decipher the factors and mechanisms which led to the successful negotiation outcomes in these cases.

In both cases studied in this article, the negotiation episodes concluded in peace accords signed in 2005. The peace process undertaken in Aceh between the government of Indonesia (GoI), under then-president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), and the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or GAM) led to the signing of the MoU in August 2005. This MoU, a broad framework agreement for peace, ended three decades of intractable violent conflict in Aceh, where there was an ongoing armed struggle for Aceh's independence from Indonesian rule. The negotiation process, mediated by Martti Ahtisaari, the president of the Crisis Management Initiative, a nongovernmental organization, with the active backing of the international community, produced the MoU in the relatively short space of seven months (Schiff, 2020). The success of this process is especially noteworthy in light of previous failures to reach an agreement. The second case study involves the peace talks between the government of Sudan (GoS), under Omar Hassan Ahmad Al-Bashir's administration, and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), headed by John Garang, which represented the southern part of Sudan. These talks lasted two and a half years and culminated in the CPA signed in January 2005. Third parties featured prominently in this process, including the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) organization, the U.S. and other state actors, and the mediator, General Lazaro Sumbeiywo, who played a particularly crucial role. The agreement officially ended the second civil war between forces from the south and the northern-based government—a war that had raged for more than 22 years—and paved the way for the establishment of an independent South Sudan (Schiff, 2020).

The examination of the case studies is conducted through a qualitative content analysis of the statements by the leaders of the two parties, media interviews with the various actors who played a role, official reports from third parties, and input from secondary sources concerning the processes studied. The article is divided into three parts. The first section presents a theoretical review of the two strands which discuss factors influencing prenegotiation and negotiation outcomes—the ripeness strand and the readiness strand. In this context, emphasis is placed on the necessity of moving beyond the ripeness strand to consider an analytical framework which elucidates the complex relationships among the different factors and the dynamics which affect international negotiation processes, with special emphasis on third-party intervention and influence. In the second section, the concepts of readiness for negotiation and readiness to reach an agreement are subjected to empirical rigor through the examination of the prenegotiation and negotiation episodes undergone by the parties to the intrastate conflicts in Aceh and in Sudan. Conclusions and thoughts for future research are presented in the final section.

Two Theoretical Strands for Understanding the Timing and Outcome of Negotiation

As previously stated, the ripeness strand and the readiness strand both shed light on the elements which convince rivals to change their approach and embark on the bilateral track and even to sign an agreement.

Ripeness as a Theoretical Strand

Zartman's ripeness theory, first outlined in the mid-1980s (Zartman, 1985), was an original idea which seeks to explain why, and thus when, parties to a conflict will commence negotiation toward resolution (Zartman, 2000). It addresses two necessary (albeit insufficient) elements required for the parties to agree to bilateral or mediated negotiation and for "the productive inauguration of negotiations" (Zartman, 2001: 9): a MHS, optimally associated with an impending, past, or recently avoided catastrophe, and a WO (Zartman, 1985, 1999, 2000). The theory asserts that negotiations take place when both parties lose confidence in their chances of winning and see an opportunity for minimizing their losses and reaching a satisfactory solution through accommodation (Zartman, 1995: 9). It stresses that unless the two necessary elements for a ripe moment exist, "the search for an agreed outcome cannot begin" (Zartman, 2000:

227). Both elements (MHS and WO) are perceptional and subjective, are aided by objective evidence, and must exist (though not necessarily at the same level) in both parties (Zartman, 2008; Zartman & de Soto, 2010). In this context, a stalemate is referred to as a painful deadlock between two equal and checking powers, in which both are suffering (Zartman, 1995). This situation must be perceived as such by the parties to the conflict or by a third-party mediator who can try to nurture the ripeness of the conflict (Zartman & de Soto, 2010).

In the framework of the evolving discourse about the ripeness strand, the conditions identified in ripeness theory have been studied and revised to help explain why parties decide to engage in negotiation in internal intractable conflicts, and also to help explain why negotiations succeed or fail (Zartman, 1995, 2008, 2012). Thus, the concepts of S5 and turning points were embraced as elements which may explain changes in the antagonists' political positions vis-à-vis negotiation in intractable intrastate conflicts, including ethnonational struggles, and prod them toward negotiation (Zartman, 1995). Studies have indicated that these conflicts tend to lack the ripeness that creates pressure to negotiate (Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2018; Zartman, 1995, 2005) and that in these conflicts, both the insurgents and the government might at best find themselves in an S5 situation—a soft, stable, self-serving stalemate, a no-win situation for both sides, which is constant, viable, and bearable. As a result, the parties to the conflict do not experience pressure to seek alternatives to their situation (Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2018; Zartman, 1995, 2005, 2008). In these circumstances, some turning points are required to encourage the parties to "change their estimate of future potentialities" (Zartman, 1995: 18) and search for alternatives to the unilateral track.

The concept of turning points as essential elements for pushing and enticing the parties in intrastate conflicts to negotiate draws our attention to the influence of the threat of a worsening situation and the prospect of new opportunities that may be accessed through negotiation, on the parties' willingness to negotiate in internal conflicts (Zartman, 1995). In this framework, the theory suggests a possible role for a third-party mediator in convincing the parties that the stalemate they are experiencing "is neither soft nor stable nor satisfactory in comparison to the benefits that could be obtained from a settlement" (Zartman, 2005, 60).

Another analytical framework which emerged in the ripeness discourse, in response to the challenge of extending ripeness theory beyond the prenegotiation phase and into the bargaining phase, is the previously mentioned Push and Pull Theory (Zartman, 2008). This theory postulates dynamics which include two prerequisites for a positive outcome of negotiation ending in agreement—MHS as a push factor that impels the parties to negotiation and MEO as a pull factor that "draws negotiation to a successful conclusion" (Zartman, 2012: 304). Studies have found that in order for the parties to reach an agreement in the negotiation stage, the perception of MHS must be maintained throughout the course of the negotiation itself. That is, to prevent the parties from reassessing their positions and abandoning negotiation in hope of finding a unilateral solution through escalation, the perception of ripeness must be maintained (Zartman, 2000, 2008, 2012). Furthermore, during the negotiation, the perception of WO must be transformed into a solid formula for a solution that will create a perception of MEO "that the parties perceive as a way out of their problem" (Zartman, 2012: 306). As a pull mechanism in negotiation, the perception of MEO is defined as a resolving formula seen by the parties as the most attractive option, which entices the parties to end the conflict. Though an enticing formula can at times be developed by the negotiating parties themselves, studies indicate that third-party mediators often play a pivotal role in developing an enticing formula during the negotiation. This enticing formula should be perceived by the parties as serving their needs and interests better than the status quo, thus fostering hope for a change in the conflict (Zartman, 2008; Zartman, 2012).

To recap, while ripeness theory, together with the S5 and turning point notions, presents the necessary elements to encourage the parties to embark on negotiations, each of these subtheories is mutually exclusive. Thus, ripeness theory may aptly explain the parties' decision to negotiate in tragic no-win symmetrical situations, when both sides to the conflict have no hope of escalating their way to victory, yet it fails

to shed light on the process leading to negotiation in cases where at least one of the parties does not experience painful deadlock. In such cases, the parties may decide to pursue the path of negotiation due to other factors—for example, when at least one of the parties is motivated to negotiate because of perceptions of threats, rising costs, opportunities, and other reasons rooted in third-party engagement—rather than due to a perception of painful deadlock. This drawback limits ripeness theory's prescriptive value for third parties and adversaries, who seek to understand when and how to pursue the negotiation option in situations that do not clearly meet the condition of MHS perceptions.

The negotiations between Israel and Jordan in 1993–1994, which culminated in the signing of the "Treaty of Peace between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan" in October 1994, exemplify the inadequacy of the ripeness strand. In this example, the condition of MHS was absent, which limits the applicability of ripeness theory as a conceptual framework for analyzing the parties' agreement to negotiation and further casts doubt on the usefulness of the Push and Pull Theory, which is also based on the MHS element as a pushing condition in the negotiation process (Schiff, 2020).

The Israel–Jordan negotiations were conducted against the backdrop of the parties' perceptions of threats and opportunities rather than a perception of a painful deadlock and no-win situation in Israeli–Jordanian relations. After three decades of secret contacts between King Hussein and Israeli leaders, and bilateral negotiations in the Madrid framework in 1991–1993 between Israeli and Jordanian delegations, Israel and Jordan signed two agreements (the Israel-Jordan Common Agenda on September 1993 and the Washington Declaration in July 1994) which paved the way to a peace treaty concluded under American patronage (Shamir, 2012). Jordan's perception of the threats posed by its deteriorating economic situation following its support of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and fears about the kingdom's precarious geopolitical standing in the wake of the DOP signed by the Israelis and Palestinians in September 1993, underlined its need for a peace agreement with Israel at that time (Indyk, 2009; Schiff, 2020; Shamir, 2012; Zak, 1996).

In the early 1990s, Jordan sought to secure the financial, political, and strategic support of the United States, the only global power which conditioned its support for Jordan on progress in the Jordanian–Israeli peace process (Indyk, 2009). Hussein realized that an agreement with Israel, a U.S. ally that had influence on the administration and Congress, would pave the road to Washington (Indyk, 2009) and offset the negative repercussions of his support for Saddam Hussein in the Gulf crisis of 1991 (Shamir, 2012). Beyond American economic support, a peace treaty with Israel offered Jordan potential economic gains from bilateral relations with its neighbor (Zak, 1996). Israel, like Jordan, had major interests in a formal mutual agreement, based on an assessment of its potential benefits. A peace agreement with Jordan was perceived as an opportunity to improve Israel's strategic situation on its eastern front by creating a buffer between Iraq and Israel. Furthermore, the Israeli leadership recognized the web of economic and political interests that connect Israel and Jordan. Such an agreement offered the promise of realizing the huge economic potential inherent in collaboration and would also grant Israel strategic depth, as it made a breach in the wall of Arab enmity. Israel also hoped that the normalization of relations with Jordan following the peace agreement would be a positive example for other Arab states to follow (Shamir, 2012).

This analysis of the perceptions of threats and opportunities which drove both parties to embark on formal negotiations and sign the Israeli–Jordanian peace agreement further illustrates the need for an additional analytical framework to assist in the understanding of the elements which underlie the complex dynamics of success in reaching peace agreements between longtime rivals—one that is more helpful than the ripeness strand in addressing a variety of factors and causal effects (Schiff, 2020).

The exploration of the complex dynamic which led to the de-escalation processes in the violent crisis that arose following the December 2007 presidential elections in Kenya serves as another example of the need to move beyond the theories included in the ripeness strand. The process which led President Mwai Kibaki and ODM leader Raila Odinga to embark on formal negotiations and put an end to the crisis in Kenya in 2007–2008 was characterized by the intensive engagement of third parties in the framework of preventive diplomacy (Lund, 2009). The situation in which the parties found themselves in 2007–2008

might be described as an S5 situation. They were compelled to negotiate without making a clear commitment to the process and intermittently reverted to violence during the first stage of negotiation. Thus, the role played by third parties' pressure during the short prenegotiation phase may also be viewed as the role played by third parties to create the "turning point" required in this situation for the parties to embark on negotiations. At the same time, the critical role which third parties continued to play in facilitating the opposing parties' agreement to negotiate and to reach an agreement against the backdrop of escalating violence (Brown, 2009: 398) reveals the need for a unified conceptual framework to address the complex dynamics of cause–effect interrelations of third-party involvement in the context of various structural conditions, ranging from the prenegotiation phase all the way to agreement.

The violent crisis which arose shortly after the December 2007 presidential elections, when both the president, Mwai Kibaki, and the opposition leader, Raila Odinga, claimed victory, lasted two months and threatened to plunge the country into ethnic civil war. During the two-month crisis, more than 1,000 people were killed and more than 300,000 were internally displaced and the crisis brought to the surface deep divisions within Kenyan society (Juma, 2009). With the intensive engagement of the international community, a national accord for a unity government in Kenya was signed between the parties on February 29, 2008. The "Agreement on the Principles of Partnership of the Coalition Government" formed the basis for a power-sharing deal between the ruling Party of National Unity (GoK/PNU) and the top opposition party, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

The international community responded very quickly, fearful that Kenya, considered one of the most prosperous and stable nations in Africa, might sink into chaos (Juma, 2009). A few days following the eruption of the violence, multiple shuttle diplomacy efforts began, involving senior African figures, the UN, the United States, and the UK, each separately exerting pressure on the leaders to negotiate an agreement (Lindenmayer & Kaye, 2009; Moix, 2009). However, during the first weeks of the crisis the leaders did not agree to endorse these initiatives or to engage in dialogue. This changed when the African Union (AU) offered its official auspices, putting together a panel of distinguished African figures led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The AU mediation team enjoyed the legitimacy of both parties (Juma, 2009) and received coordinated international backing from the UN, United States, EU, and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre) nongovernmental organization (Lindenmayer & Kaye, 2009; Moix, 2009).

In a coordinated international effort led by Annan, various international actors applied a series of facilitative and manipulative strategies to soften the parties' positions in the prenegotiation and negotiation stages. The United States, EU, and its member states, especially the UK, "... forced PNU and ODM officials to meet and accept the AU-led mediation process, using targeted sanctions (mainly travel bans on senior government and opposition figures) and threats of lower aid flows ... threatening to review their foreign aid to Kenya in light of the crisis" (Brown, 2009: 396). Though the adversaries agreed to start formal negotiations on January 22 and to hold a face-to-face meeting between the leaders two days later, violence escalated during the first week of formal negotiation. "Progress in the negotiations was very slow and moved only in fits and starts" (Brown, 2009). It soon became clear that the parties were not fully committed to the process and that "in the same way the parties took one step forward, they could just as easily take two steps back" (Lindenmayer & Kaye, 2009: 9).

In the face of escalating violence in the streets during the first week of the negotiations, international pressure mounted, urging the parties to end the violence and reach a political solution (Lindenmayer & Kaye, 2009). The aim of the international community was to end the violence at all cost, and it viewed power sharing as the only viable strategy. This international pressure led to two major agreements during the first week of February (Lindenmayer & Kaye, 2009) that seemed to move the parties toward a peaceful solution.

However, the parties still could not agree on possible solutions. In the face of reports of the danger of re-emerging large-scale violence should the talks fail (Lindenmayer & Kaye, 2009), the international pressure increased. Threats were issued again that financial support and aid would be reviewed and that

anyone who blocked a power-sharing deal would be punished (Brown, 2009; Lindenmayer & Kaye, 2009). Former UN Secretary-General Annan chaired the talks and skillfully steered them to their successful outcome. He personally took steps to accelerate the process, which included formulation and manipulation strategies and a negotiating style of bluntness and urgency, "...exerting relentless pressure on the parties, repeatedly reminding them of their responsibility to return Kenya to peace" (Juma, 2009: 418).

As an inherently normative field which aims to generate practical insights for managing and resolving conflicts constructively, conflict resolution would benefit from a single analytical framework that addresses the different factors affecting the gradual movement or decision by adversaries to take de-escalation steps on their way to the table and then on toward agreement (Schiff, 2020). Rather than focusing primarily on conditions, this framework would explain the complex dynamics and the variety of causal effects that lead parties to resolve their conflicts, and serve as a single construct that goes beyond the several separate theories comprising the ripeness theory strand.

Readiness Theory, a New Theoretical Strand

Readiness theory is a further restatement and elaboration of ripeness theory (Pruitt, 2007). It asserts that "readiness to settle the conflict" is a characteristic of a party to a conflict which reflects its leaderships' thinking with regard to the conflict (Pruitt, 2007, 2015b). Readiness fosters a wide range of conciliatory behaviors, dependent on the readiness level (Pruitt, 2007). A low level of readiness fosters moderate conciliatory gestures. As the readiness level rises, the party's behavior becomes more conciliatory and may take the form of agreement to a ceasefire or to enter into negotiations. For the parties to continue negotiating and make concessions, an additional increase in readiness is needed; thus, the greater the readiness on both sides, the more likely they are to negotiate (Pruitt, 2005: 9–15, Pruitt, 2007: 1525) and reach an agreement (Schiff, 2020).

According to the theory, readiness is dependent on two necessary psychological variables: "motivation" and "optimism." These may vary in intensity (Pruitt, 2015b, 276–277), and both must be present to some degree for any conciliatory behavior to be enacted. Motivation can derive from any or all of the following: a sense that the conflict is unwinnable, a sense that the conflict generates unacceptable costs or risks, and pressure from a powerful third party (Pruitt, 2005, 2007). Optimism, on the other hand, refers to the possibility of concluding negotiations toward an agreement that is acceptable to both sides. It requires a certain degree of faith that the final agreement will "... satisfy one's goals and aspirations without too much cost" (Pruitt, 2007: 1529), as well as the perception that the negotiator on the other side can in fact make a binding commitment on behalf of that side (Schiff, 2020). In the initial stage, when considering the option of negotiations, optimism reflects a conviction that the other side is serious about escaping the conflict and willing to make concessions to that end. Preserving the optimism requires a belief that a formula acceptable to both sides can be achieved to bridge the parties' opposing positions. The greater the apparent distance between the parties, the lower the level of optimism will be (Pruitt, 2005: 8).

Optimism derives from three states of mind (Pruitt, 2005) including lower aspirations; working trust, or the belief that the other side is also motivated to settle the dispute and will work hard and make concessions; and a state of mind that perceives a "light at the end of the tunnel," which means that an acceptable agreement is taking shape and that the other side is prepared to make the necessary concessions. This third state of mine leads to a higher level of optimism (Pruitt, 2007: 1529).

The theory further argues that motivation and optimism are related in a number of ways (Pruitt, 2005, 2007; Schiff, 2014a, 2014b) and that motivation to end the conflict can foster optimism through a number of mechanisms which have the potential to generate a confidence-building cycle which may lead to negotiations (Pruitt, 2005: 19–21, Pruitt, 2007: 1529). These mechanisms encourage optimism about the success of negotiations and generate new thinking about the rival. The first mechanism, motivation, influences the parties' willingness to be more flexible with respect to their demands, thereby encouraging

greater optimism regarding reaching an agreement. The second mechanism is the accumulation of information which challenges preexisting states of mind. The third mechanism is wishful thinking. In seeking information, wishful thinking plays a part; that is, there is a tendency to find selective evidence of the other side's logic or motivation to end the conflict. Fourth, when a party is interested in ending a conflict, it sends conciliatory signals or seeks clandestine contact with the opposing party. If the latter is also motivated, it will respond to these signals, thereby increasing the first party's optimism, which then sends conciliatory signals which are even more meaningful. The result is a cycle of conciliatory gestures and an increase in optimism. Fifth, a party's motivation to end a conflict is often discerned by a third party, making the latter more optimistic about ending the conflict. Thus, the motivation of a third party to end the conflict can encourage it to take the initiative in bringing the disputing parties to negotiation (Pruitt, 2007: 1530). Such third-party efforts may increase optimism on both sides and eventually lead to full negotiations.

Optimism may also develop through direct contact with people on the other side—for example, through problem-solving workshops. And another way in which optimism and motivation are related in the context of readiness theory is through the postulation that each variable, motivation, or sense of optimism on either side can compensate for the shortcomings of the other. Although some level of both variables is necessary for negotiations to commence, a greater degree of one element can compensate for a lesser degree of another (Pruitt, 2005, 2007). The third manner in which motivation and optimism are related is through the ability of optimism to determine the extent to which the motivation to de-escalate shapes behavior (Pruitt, 2007, 2015a; Pruitt, 2015b).

Recent studies (Schiff, 2020) have confirmed the validity of the basic hypotheses of readiness theory in explaining the readiness of adversaries to reach an agreement. First, both variables—motivation and optimism—must be present and develop in order for the parties to agree on a resolving formula. In addition, more than one of the three motivation-inducing conditions cited by readiness theory is essential for the parties' to reach the necessary level of readiness to reach an agreement. Studies have also emphasized the central role third parties can play as a source of motivation and optimism during negotiations (Figure 1).

The unique features of the readiness theory strand make it a valuable analytical framework by which the origins of peace agreements may be explored (Schiff, 2020). First, to a greater extent than the ripeness theory strand, readiness theory specifies multiple antecedents to negotiation and agreement. Thus, readiness theory offers a different set of filters, which are richer than those set so far by the ripeness strand for
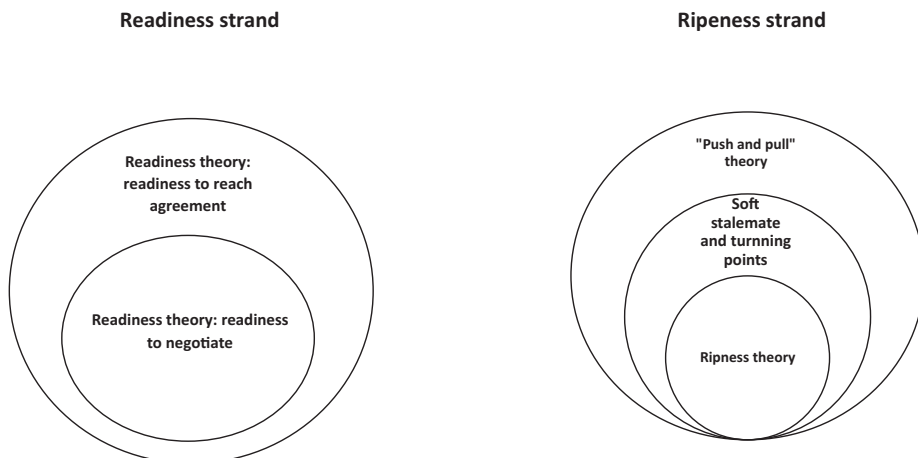
Readiness strand   **Ripeness strand**

Figure 1. Two theoretical strands; ripeness and readiness.

processing case material (Pruitt, 2015b). This could be of great assistance, as was demonstrated in the process which led to the Israel–Jordan agreement in 1994. Furthermore, the filters suggested by the readiness strand should not necessarily apply symmetrically to both adversaries, as suggested by ripeness theory. This feature of readiness theory is potentially useful for researchers seeking to better understand the complexity of the conflict resolution phenomenon in a wide range of historical cases of negotiations (Pruitt, 2005) and even in negotiation in the framework of preventive diplomacy aimed to ensure that the adversaries do not sink into chaos, as was seen in the de-escalation of the crisis in Kenya (Schiff, 2020). In this regard, it can illuminate the mechanisms through which third parties influence the dynamics and outcome of peace processes starting at the prenegotiation stage and extending to the negotiations themselves, and can generate broader practical insights relevant to mediators.

The second unique feature is related to readiness theory's use of variables. All the concepts presented by readiness theory are variables which describe the antecedents or conditions which convince parties to switch from pursuing the unilateral track to the bilateral track. The use of variables in readiness theory facilitates tracking changes over time, that is, movement toward negotiation and toward agreement, which enables researchers to monitor changes in the cases studied (Pruitt, 2015a), to understand the sources of the transformation of conflicts, and to compare the changes in these variables both within and between the cases (Pruitt, 2015b). Conversely, ripeness theory and the two other subtheories in the ripeness strand use the language of states, which does not allow the researcher to monitor changes in these variables throughout prenegotiation and negotiation processes (Pruitt, 2015a).

The third point concerns the integration trait or the unified trait of the readiness strand as compared to the loosely related subtheories structure of the ripeness strand. The readiness theory strand is more succinct in comparison with the ripeness strand, as it uses the same variables as an antecedent of both entry into negotiation and progress in negotiation toward agreement. For example, according to the Push and Pull Theory, the perception of WO originating in the prenegotiation phase must be transformed into a solid formula for solution or for MEO if negotiations are to succeed. As stated, readiness theory uses the same variables to explain movement during prenegotiation and negotiation and postulates that the optimism originating in the prenegotiation phase "must increase during successful negotiation or the parties will drop out at some point."

Two Case Studies: Readiness Theory Analysis

The following section demonstrates the benefit of readiness theory in both elucidating and eliciting practical insights about the elements which influence the prenegotiation outcome (readiness to negotiate) and the negotiation outcome (readiness to reach an agreement) in two cases of mediated peace processes in intractable conflicts.

The Aceh Peace Process (2005)

Does readiness theory explain the process that resulted in the Helsinki MoU? What can we learn by applying this analytical framework to the factors and dynamics that lead parties to agreement in mediated processes? Using the lens of readiness theory to examine the conflict resolution process in Aceh, we see that the readiness of GAM insurgents and the GoI to negotiate gradually increased between mid-2003 and January 2005, during which both parties became more motivated to end the conflict. The personal commitment of the GoI leadership—president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and vice president Jusuf Kalla—to settle the conflict peacefully, the inability of the Indonesian Army to win the war, the high costs for both sides of continuing the fight, and the new circumstances created by the tsunami which devastated Aceh and increased third-party pressure to resolve the conflict peacefully, all combined to trigger some slight optimism that the ensuing negotiations might be more productive than the previous attempts (Schiff, 2020).

The significant increase in motivation on both sides peaked with the tsunami of December 2004 and its disastrous humanitarian consequences. Both parties reached the conclusion that, under the circumstances, the conflict was not winnable and that it posed unacceptable costs and risks (Schiff, 2020, 2014a, 2014b). Timely third-party pressure on both parties played a prominent role in boosting motivation and some sense of optimism and, consequently, readiness to negotiate. The aftermath of the disaster attracted international attention and brought additional pressure to bear on both sides to seize this limited-time opportunity to end the conflict with a peace agreement and to focus on exploring the option of negotiation and the reconstruction of the province. Thus, the parties' perceptions of unacceptable costs and risks were further manipulated by the international community following the tsunami and generated strong motivation among both parties to resolve the conflict. With the assistance of third parties, the international community, and Ahtisaari, the mediator, both sides came to realize that the bilateral track might better advance their interests. Furthermore, from the perspective of GAM and the GoI, the engagement of a prominent figure like Ahtisaari, a former Finnish president with international prestige and connections, along with the international community's commitment to back the process, helped boost both parties' optimism that this process had better chances of success than previous failed attempts (Djuli & Rahman, 2008; Johansson, 2005; Schiff, 2020). This third-party involvement or mobilization mechanism, as it is referred to by the theory (Pruitt, 2007), was consistent with GAM's interest in internationalizing the conflict and the Indonesian leadership's determination to pursue its peaceful resolution (Aguswandi & Large, 2008; Djuli & Rahman, 2008).

Thus, third-party involvement encouraged motivation and the hope that it might be possible to reach an agreement with the other side. In this regard, the strategies applied by the international community in the prenegotiation stage, as reflected in the days following the tsunami, were critical in engendering both motivation and some minimal uptick in the optimism of the parties concerning the new possibilities the negotiations offered (Schiff, 2020). The change in the optimism variable, cultivated by third parties, together with the strong rise in motivation, was sufficient to create the dynamics that brought the parties to the negotiating table at the end of January 2005 (Schiff, 2020).

During the negotiations that took place between January and August of 2005, the readiness of both parties to reach an agreement increased (Schiff, 2020, 2014a, 2014b). The Aceh case study shows that both variables, motivation and optimism, grew as the parties proceeded with their discussions, leading to their readiness to reach an agreement. The same multiple sources of motivation which influenced the parties' readiness to negotiate continued to apply in the negotiation phase and third-party engagement played a particularly crucial role. Several international actors intervened during the various stages of the peace process in Aceh. As noted, their involvement not only brought the parties to the negotiating table, but also induced them to be more conciliatory during negotiations, when the mediator, Ahtisaari, and the international community, played a major role in boosting the readiness of the sides to reach an agreement, particularly with respect to GAM. The international community saw the resolution of the conflict as essential for the success of the post-tsunami recovery efforts and made it clear that the reconstruction process depended on progress toward peace (Biswas, 2009: 12; Gaillard et al., 2008; Keizer, 2008).

Third parties, the mediator, and the international community also played a major role in raising the level of optimism by encouraging a reduction in the parties' aspirations, and facilitating the creation of working trust, by increasing their perception of "light at the end of the tunnel." Ahtisaari brought substantial experience and authority to the role of mediator (Aspinall, 2005; Djuli & Rahman, 2008; Johansson, 2005; Schulze, 2007). Through his international connections, he secured the necessary international backing to increase his political leverage. His management of the negotiating process led both parties to make more moderate demands and to compromise (Aguswandi & Large, 2008; Herrberg, 2008). From the start of negotiations, third-party involvement led GAM to set more modest goals, and Ahtisaari convinced GAM that independence for Aceh was an unrealistic dream. Following GAM's agreement to withdraw its previous demand for Aceh's independence and to discuss a political framework for self-rule

(Aspinall, 2005; Schulze, 2007), the GoI gradually became more optimistic about the possibility of reaching an agreement with GAM (Schiff, 2020).

In addition to the third-party pressure exerted on GAM, pressure was also applied by the GoI through two avenues. From the perspective of Kalla and SBY, who since 2003 have been seeking, unsuccessfully, to engage in dialogue with GAM leadership toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Aceh, the tsunami catastrophe highlighted the urgency of reaching an agreement and thus presented a one-time opportunity to realize their interests (Awaludin, 2009; Kingsbury, 2006; Schiff, 2020). As a result, in the wake of the tsunami, Kalla made a special effort to mobilize the international community to pressure GAM to exhibit flexibility, and the threat of continued military operations was also emphasized (Aspinall, 2005; Cheow 2008; Kemper 2007).

Although most of the pressure exerted by third parties in the negotiations was directed at GAM, whose initial concession enabled the first significant breakthrough in the process, Indonesia also faced pressure to compromise (Kingsbury, 2006). Even though the peace agreement was drafted under conditions the GoI had dictated—for example, autonomy as the basis for discussion and the integration of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) (Biswas, 2009)—pressure was also exerted by the international community on the GoI, to convince it to pursue a peace settlement. The GoI realized that failure to reach an agreement would disrupt the supply of international aid necessary for continued post-tsunami reconstruction, and thus recognized the need to make concessions (Aspinall, 2008; Awaludin, 2009). The fact that pressure was brought to bear on both sides eventually resulted in an agreement that included mutual concessions.

The pressures exerted by the skilled mediator and other third parties as negotiations proceeded, as well as the progress in negotiations and the concessions made by both parties due to this pressure and the mediators' tactics (Schiff, 2020, 2014a, 2014b), together with confidence-building tactics, the willingness of third parties to oversee the agreement, and pressures exerted by Indonesia on GAM—all combined to strengthen the parties' perception of the possibility of realizing their interests through the agreement. In this respect, the willingness of the EU and ASEAN to oversee the agreement contributed to the growth in the optimism variable among both parties which propelled them toward an agreement. It influenced the changes in the cost–benefit calculations of the adversaries during the negotiations and increased both parties' sense of optimism that the emerging agreement could ultimately serve their goals.
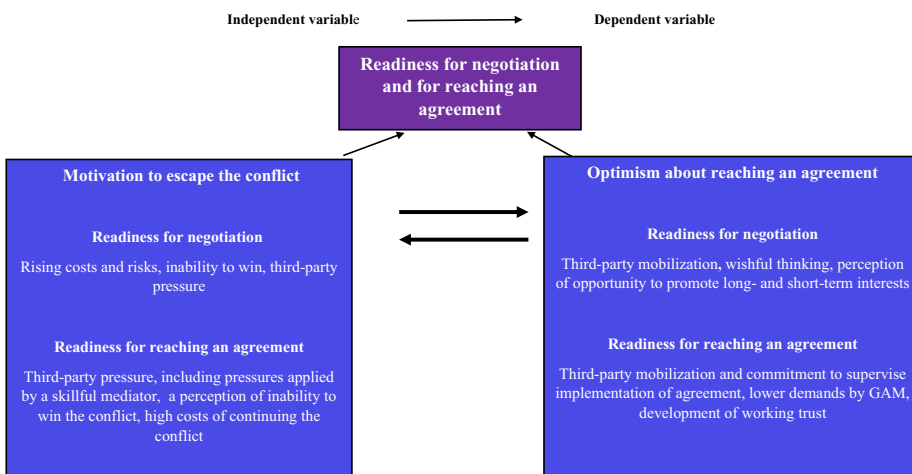

Figure 2. Readiness for negotiation and for reaching an agreement in the Aceh Case Study: the GoI. GoI, Government of Indonesia.
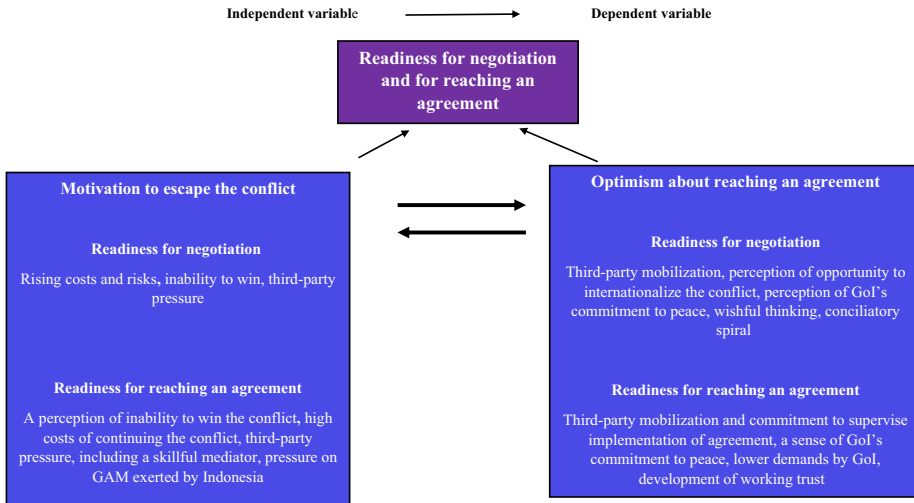
Independent variable → Dependent variable

Readiness for negotiation and for reaching an agreement

Motivation to escape the conflict

Readiness for negotiation

Rising costs and risks, inability to win, third-party pressure

Readiness for reaching an agreement

A perception of inability to win the conflict, high costs of continuing the conflict, third-party pressure, including a skillful mediator, pressure on GAM exerted by Indonesia

Optimism about reaching an agreement

Readiness for negotiation

Third-party mobilization, perception of opportunity to internationalize the conflict, perception of GoI's commitment to peace, wishful thinking, conciliatory spiral

Readiness for reaching an agreement

Third-party mobilization and commitment to supervise implementation of agreement, a sense of GoI's commitment to peace, lower demands by GoI, development of working trust

Figure 3. Readiness for negotiation and for reaching an agreement in the Aceh Case Study: the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM).

Sudan Peace Process (2002–2005)

The analysis of the Sudan peace process by means of readiness theory suggests that the adversaries' readiness to negotiate and reach an agreement increased throughout the process. Motivation was the salient variable in the prenegotiation period, generating the readiness of the GoS and SPLM insurgents to return to negotiations in 2002 on the basis of IGAD's peace initiative. The parties' consideration of the negotiation option was driven by strong motivation and some limited change in the optimism level; the motivation compensated for a low level of optimism in cultivating the parties' readiness for negotiation.

Similar to the sources of motivation found in the Aceh case, the GoS and the SPLM's motivation in the prenegotiation stage in the Sudan conflict derived from several antecedents: perceptions of rising costs and a no-win situation, and intensive third-party pressure. All three components were necessary to convince the parties to embark on negotiation. In early 2002, the relations between Sudan's government and the SPLM in southern Sudan reached an unprecedented low. There was deep mistrust between the parties in the wake of failed regional peace initiatives since 1999, and the military struggle had escalated with no solution in sight. In light of the rising costs of continuing the military struggle, especially following the 9/11 terror attacks and the diminishing chances of ending the conflict unilaterally, both parties felt that the conflict was unwinnable in the current circumstances and that the costs and risks of continuing the military struggle were unacceptable (Schiff, 2017). In the context of mounting third-party pressure, these perceptions created an atmosphere which both sides perceived as conducive for conducting peace talks.

Here as well, third-party pressure was a major factor that persuaded the GoS and the SPLM to return to the peace process. A troika of the United States, Britain, and Norway, under American leadership, together with the IGAD organization, exerted heavy pressure on the adversaries. Both sides were clearly eager to improve their image in the international community and particularly in the eyes of the United States. Sudan's government feared the severe political and economic damage it would likely suffer if it failed to improve relations with Washington. This realization gradually sank in during the late 1990s and was further reinforced after the 9/11 terror attacks, when ending the conflict in Sudan became a key foreign policy objective of the Bush administration (Antwi-Boateng & O'Mahony, 2008; Wennmann, 2009; Woodward, 2006; Young, 2007). Moreover, in early 2000, Sudan's government became increasingly

concerned about the possibility of additional massive support for the SPLM and other armed groups in Sudan by the United States, which was at the peak of its international power (Antwi-Boateng & O'Mahony, 2008; Woodward, 2006; Young, 2007). A significant element in the array of pressures the United States exerted on Sudan's government was the threat to push the Sudan Peace Act (SPA) through Congress. The fear that this legislation would be enacted hovered in the background from the time Bush took office. By wielding this threat, the United States was able to induce Khartoum to cooperate, enter into negotiations, and make progress in them (Carney, 2007; Woodward, 2006).

The SPLM's motivation to begin negotiating with the government stemmed from a realization that the costs of continued fighting were higher than the costs of terminating the warfare (Young, 2007). Until September 2001, in the framework of the first process conducted by the IGAD organization in 1993, the SPLM had very little motivation to reach a peace accord with the government. The SPLM received support from the United States (under the Clinton administration) and exercised full control on the ground, including control over aid deliveries and most of the population in southern Sudan. This situation suddenly changed when the United States declared its war on terror after the events of September 11, 2001 (Terlinden & Debiel, 2004). From the SPLM's perspective, the continued military campaign depended on external support, which was dwindling. After the terror attacks in the United States in 2001, Garang was told that the Bush administration did not intend to continue its massive military support for the SPLM (Carney, 2007) and the Americans began to pressure the organization on the issue of terrorism. The United States made it clear to the SPLM that it would no longer support insurgent groups, fearing that they would serve as a breeding ground for organizations like Al-Qaeda (El-Talib, 2004). Regional actors like Kenya and Uganda, each in pursuit of its own interests, joined the United States in pressuring the SPLM, despite having shown affinity for the SPLM in the past (Antwi-Boateng & O'Mahony, 2008). Moreover, from the perspective of the SPLM, the United States was no longer neutral (Jok, 2007). A positive relationship developed between the governments of the United States and Sudan; the government in Khartoum quickly sought to win support from the U.S. administration and signaled its readiness to cooperate more closely with it. The SPLM began to realize that its military position was weak in the long term (Antwi-Boateng & O'Mahony, 2008; Wennmann, 2009; Young, 2007).

During the prenegotiation phase, both sides—induced by third parties and wishful-thinking mechanisms—increasingly recognized that the path of negotiation would entail lower costs and provide more benefits than continuing the conflict (Schiff, 2020). After taking office in 2001, the Bush administration convened representatives of IGAD, the United States, Britain, and Norway in New York in an effort to coordinate an effective effort to initiate peace talks (Carney, 2007; Iyob & Khadiagala, 2006). The January 2002 peacemaking effort of President Bush's special envoy to Sudan, John Danforth, further served as a basis for a comprehensive ceasefire agreement and the renewal of the IGAD talks (Martin, 2006).

Furthermore, during the prenegotiation stage the third parties proposed working toward an agreement which involved only two parties—the NCP representing the GoS (the north) and the SPLM representing southern Sudan—which was an attractive option to both sides. The framework of the proposed negotiations offered the two sides an opportunity to preserve their political power, and both preferred not to involve additional parties in the negotiations and agreement. In addition, the government's belief in the strength of Garang's leadership also played a part in its assessment of the feasibility of reaching an agreement with the SPLM that could be implemented. Thus, a certain degree of faith that the final agreement would satisfy both parties' goals and aspirations at not too high a cost was developing during the prenegotiations (Pruitt, 2007). Against this backdrop, the conflicting parties—the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and the SPLM—realized that they should be pragmatic and commence negotiations, since this was in their best interest under the circumstances (Schiff, 2020).

The parties' readiness to advance toward agreement once negotiations had begun derived from a major increase in motivation and a slight increase in optimism during the negotiations. Third-party engagement in the peace negotiations provided critical input to boost the parties' readiness to sign interim accords and ultimately sign the CPA. The trio of the United States, Britain, and Norway, among

which the United States wielded the greatest influence, were the driving force behind the process, exerting massive political and military pressure on the sides at various stages of the negotiations (Schiff, 2020). Their involvement reinforced the adversaries' sense that they were mired in a costly no-win situation and helped to generate their readiness to reach an agreement. For example, the compromises made by the parties in the first protocol to be signed, the Machakos Protocol in July 2002, were largely attributable to international pressure, especially from the United States (ICG, 2002; Iyob & Khadiagala, 2006; Jok, 2007). Furthermore, even during the preparatory discussions for the first official meeting of the parties in Machakos in May 2002, the mediator, General Sumbeiywo, faced a wall of distrust and suspicion on both sides and the talks ran aground (Waihenya, 2006; Young, 2007). However, U.S. pressure led the parties to ultimately agree to move forward. The Sudan Peace Act approved by the U.S. Congress in October 2002 was a significant means of pressure on the GoS (Carney, 2007; Terlinden & Debiel, 2004). This legislation mandated additional economic sanctions against Sudan's government and a downgrading of diplomatic relations between the United States and Sudan if the Bush administration could not affirm every six months that the regime in Sudan was indeed negotiating in good faith. At the time, Sudan was carrying a national debt of $22 billion, and there was a real threat that the International Monetary Fund would deny additional loans (Terlinden & Debiel, 2004). The GoS expected, therefore, that the peace agreement would lead to normalization in its international relations and an end to the American sanctions (ICG, 2002; Iyob & Khadiagala, 2006; Young, 2007). Sudan's vice president later admitted that these pressures ultimately convinced the government's representatives to sign the Machakos Protocol (ICG, 2002). At the same time, Washington assured the SPLM that as long as it refrained from acting provocatively as a "spoiler," no direct sanctions would be imposed, while also warning that a unilateral rejection of the peace process would have severe consequences (Terlinden & Debiel, 2004).

The mediator, Sumbeiywo, played a critical role in the process as a facilitator and in formulating the points of agreement, while leveraging the power of the international community to pressure the sides. The tactics employed by Sumbeiywo at different stages of the process also helped prod the parties toward agreement (Martin, 2006). For example, the GoS agreed to renew the Machakos process only after Sumbeiywo threatened to report to the international community that the NCP was backtracking from the process (Martin, 2006). Another example of his effective mediation tactics occurred three days prior to the deadline for concluding the Machakos talks, when Sumbeiywo brought the senior negotiators from each side into a room, closed the door, presented them with draft documents and demanded that they reach an agreement within an hour (Schiff, 2020). Three hours later, the negotiators announced their agreement to everything written in the documents (Martin, 2006).

Furthermore, as noted, the way the negotiation process was constructed by the various third parties, starting in the prenegotiation stage, gave the SPLM and the NCP reason to expect that the potential agreement would satisfy their needs. Thus, the prenegotiation process began with the parties' perceptions of their inability to resolve the conflict unilaterally (following the failure of the first IGAD process) and continued with the two sides sitting at the negotiation table, encouraged by perceptions of opportunity shaped by the third parties (Schiff, 2020).

The methods employed by the third parties were critical in gradually increasing confidence on both sides, that is, the optimism that the emerging agreement could ultimately serve their respective goals. The third parties, primarily the mediator Sumbeiywo, and the United States, orchestrated the peace process in a way that addressed the central needs of the two parties sitting at the table, the SPLM and the NCP, and emphasized the benefits the agreement would bring to both, focusing on finding common ground between them. Both parties believed that if they indeed reached and implemented an agreement, it would lead to peace, prosperity, and development, boosting oil revenues that would allow them to control Sudanese politics for at least another decade. Thus, the peace process offered both sides a chance to achieve in negotiations what was impossible to win on the battlefield (El-Talib, 2004; Young, 2007). In terms of readiness theory, this helped to develop some optimism by creating a mood in which the two parties could see "light at the end of the tunnel" (Schiff, 2020). Therefore, during the negotiations, every

time the optimism of the parties declined and they became trapped in negative dynamics, the third party exerted pressure on them by extending some "carrots." The adversaries' desire to use the opportunity to reach an agreement (under third-party pressure) together with progress in the dialogue (which created a perception of "light at the end of the tunnel") combined to overcome their mistrust.

Throughout the process, third-party involvement had a decisive influence on the parties' readiness to make concessions and reach an agreement. In light of the mutual mistrust during the negotiation stage, the third-party pressure that shaped the negotiation framework and pushed the adversaries to demonstrate flexibility became the most significant factor (Young, 2007). As in the Aceh case, this attests to the important role third parties can play when working in collaboration to assist the parties to overcome the impediments in resolving conflicts (Schiff, 2020).
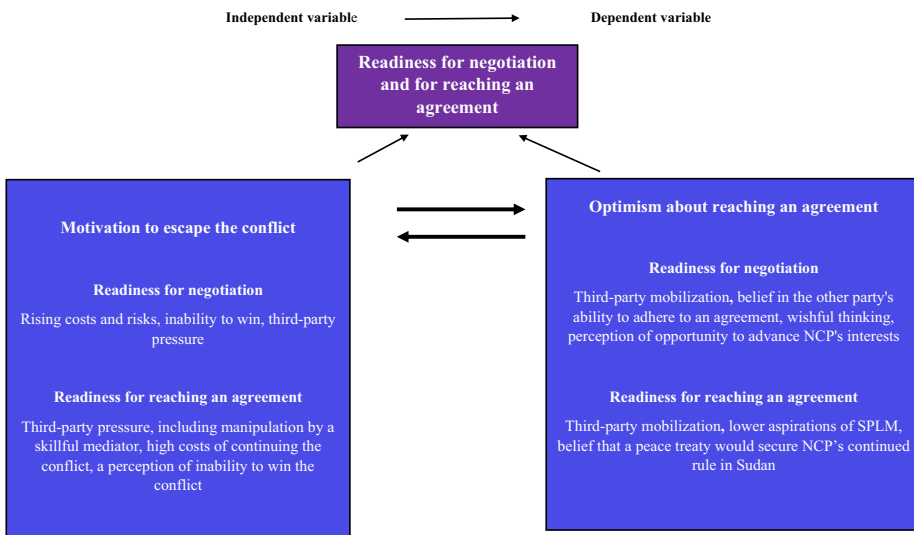

Figure 4. Readiness for negotiation and for reaching an agreement in the Sudan Case Study: the GoS. GoS, Government of Sudan.
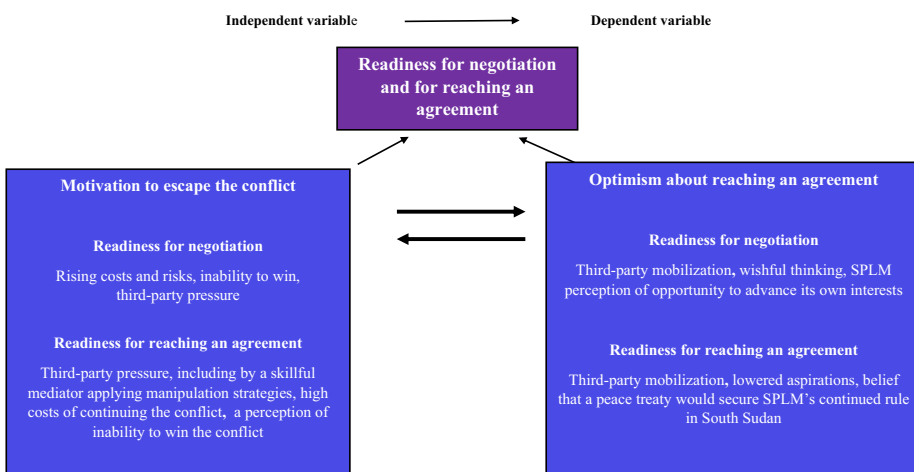

Figure 5. Readiness for negotiation and for reaching an agreement in the Sudan Case Study: the SPLM. SPLM, Sudan People's Liberation Movement.

Conclusions

The analysis shows that readiness theory enables us to identify and map numerous factors which influence and reinforce each other within the dynamics which change adversaries' perceptions about the option of negotiating and reaching an agreement with the other side. The study exemplifies how parties' cost–benefit calculations, together with third-party facilitation, pressure, and incentives, influence the antagonists' political stance vis-à-vis negotiation and agreement. This kind of multicausal and dynamic analysis, which considers gradual changes in the variables throughout the process, offers insights for researchers in the field of conflict resolution who wish to further contribute to the readiness theoretical discourse, as well as for practitioners who seek to successfully assist adversaries on their path to settling their conflict peacefully (Schiff, 2020).

The following points are affirmed, which have implications for both theory and practice, and present substantial observations and conclusions which refer explicitly to lessons for third parties. First, the study validates readiness theory's basic hypotheses concerning the necessity for the two variables of motivation and optimism, their compensatory nature, and the effect that motivation can have on optimism, which leads the parties to *readiness to negotiate*. It also confirms that both variables—motivation and optimism—should be present during the negotiation and should grow or compensate for one another in order for the parties to agree on a resolving formula and its details, that is, *readiness to reach an agreement*. Second, the research finds that in the cases of Aceh and Sudan, the basic hypotheses of readiness theory with respect to motivation and optimism, including their existence, growth, and compensational relations, can explain the dynamics which led to the parties' readiness to reach an agreement and to make concessions during negotiations.

The central role played by third parties—mediators and the international community—in the success of the two peace processes examined is another major finding of this study. In both Aceh and Sudan, third parties took advantage of the circumstances to influence the adversaries' calculations. Thus, throughout the prenegotiation and negotiation process, third-party engagement was seen as cultivating motivation and optimism about reaching an agreement that would better serve the parties' interests in the prevailing circumstances (Schiff, 2020). As stated, third parties wisely manipulated the perceptions and cost–benefit calculations of the adversaries to prod them toward the negotiating table, thus compensating for the minimal level of optimism and assisting in the galvanization of perception of a light at the end of the tunnel, helping to generate *readiness to negotiate*. Throughout negotiations, third parties maintained the pressure and intensified it, extracting concessions from the sides and actively putting together the resolving formula which the parties adopted after recognizing that it served their interests.

The findings of the study have both theoretical and practical implications for third parties engaging in intractable conflicts, which are characterized by the antagonists' mutual mistrust. Third-party pressure was found to be a necessary source of motivation for ending the conflict in the cases studied, where mutual trust was low and the adversaries' positions were far apart. In the case of Aceh, the three sources of motivation cited by readiness theory as essential for concession-making during negotiations remained valid throughout the relatively short negotiation process. The pressure applied by a third party was a significant factor in both sides' realization that the alternative to talks was a return to the bloodshed that had proven to be costly and ineffective. In the Aceh process, the parties' motivation to end the conflict was strong, rooted in cost–benefit calculations of reverting to war and yielding to third-party pressure. This strong motivation compensated for their mutual mistrust and for the gap between their positions when negotiations began, and served to soften their stances during the negotiation and foster the level of optimism necessary to reach an agreement. In the Sudan process too, a high level of motivation influenced by third-party pressure, together with a modicum of optimism fostered by third-party mobilization and wishful thinking, cultivated the parties' perception of "light at the end of the tunnel."

According to readiness theory, this causal effect encouraged the optimism required for readiness to nego-tiate and to reach an agreement, though mistrust was a prominent component of the process.

The comparative analysis of the factors influencing the Aceh and Sudan peace processes illustrates how important it is for third parties to carefully assess the adversaries' changing cost–benefit calculations before and during the negotiations, seize the right moment, and apply the correct strategies. These con-siderations include assessing whether structural changes have occurred in the conflict's environment and whether and how third parties can influence the antagonists' calculations. The latter may entail exerting effective pressure or applying positive incentives and supervising the implementation of an agreement. While the readiness of the parties to reach an agreement is not only dependent on the actions of third parties, their effective engagement was a necessary component in the successful negotiation processes in the Aceh and Sudan cases, reminding us that third parties must always proceed in a careful and well-con-sidered manner, while realizing that not everything is in their hands.

The analysis presented in this study illustrated the salient heuristic feature of readiness theory (Pruitt, 2005, 2007, 2015b). Originally outlined for explaining the reasons why parties come to the table (Pruitt, 2005, 2007; Pruitt, 2015a, 2015b), this study demonstrated how readiness theory can be extended to shed light on concession-making and agreement, and how it can assist us in assessing the important role of third parties and the interplay of third-party engagement with other elements influencing prenegotiation and negotiation dynamics (Figures 2–5).

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