Analysis of multiparty mediation processes

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CHAPTER
III

METHODOLOGY

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3.1 The problem of causality in social science research

Given the multicausal nature of mediation processes, a mere analysis of correlation between independent variables and outcome does not help much in understanding if there was actually a causal mechanism present during the process. Although numerous studies (Crocker et al. 1999, Kriesberg 1996, Böhmelt 2011) have already shown that there is a strong correlation between cooperation (and coordination) among multiple mediators and success in multiparty mediation, these studies may not provide a clear indication of the existence of a causal mechanism which actually links success with the dynamics of cooperation and coordination.

A causal mechanism can be defined as "a complex system, which produces an outcome by the interaction of a number of parts" (Glennan 1996, 52). Similarly, casual mechanisms represent "analytical constructs that provide hypothetical links between observable events" (Hedström and Swedburg 1998, 13). However, observing causal mechanisms might prove to be a difficult task. According to George and Bennett, causal mechanisms are "ultimately unobservable physical, social, or psychological processes through which agents with causal capacities operate" (George and Bennett 2005, 137). Similarly, Hedström and Swedberg argue that causal mechanisms are primarily social constructs and as such they do not have a real-world existence (Hedström and Swedburg 1998). For instance, the case of the Cuban missile crisis, studied by Allison and Zelikow (1999), represents an important example of 'group think' mechanisms, where the emphasis is on the small-group forms of intrapersonal pressures that generate a specific outcome. In this case socio-psychological factors play a crucial role in the causal chain of events however they are quite difficult to measure. Thus the only possibility in such cases is to rely on measuring the mechanisms in an indirect form through 'proxies' or 'indicators' of the observable implications (Beach and Pedersen 2012, 62-63).

In an attempt to solve this problem, Reskin proposes that any analysis interested in explaining how an outcome was produced should scrutinize only "observable" causal mechanisms, and thus exclude various psychological and macro-level mechanisms (Reskin 2003). Beach

and Pedersen expand this claim by pointing out to the need of carefully operationalizing a specific mechanism, as "there are some types of causal mechanisms that can be conceptualized and operationalized in a manner that permits quite close observations of actual mechanisms, and where plentiful evidence exists that enable us to measure the mechanisms quite closely" (Beach and Pedersen 2012, 62). Thus, if a research design accepts that mechanisms are directly observable then the task of operationalization of a particular mechanism should focus on identifying and examining "the empirical fingerprints" that the mechanism leaves in the empirical record (Beach and Pedersen 2012, 63). However, even if a research departs from an assumption that a causal mechanism is unobservable, it should still look into observable implication that a mechanisms should leave. Thus, Beach and Pedersen emphasize, that "the two positions result in similar forms of operationalization" (Beach and Pedersen 2012, 63).

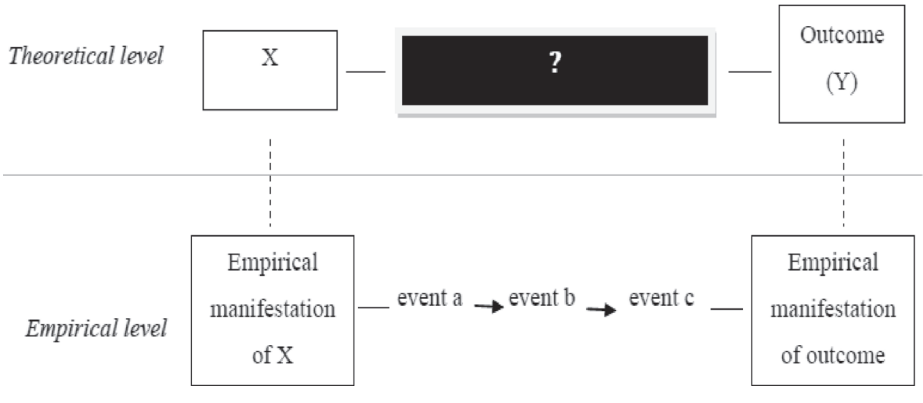
3.2 Process tracing method

Overall, as pointed out by Gerring, if properly designed, causal mechanisms allow us to "peer into the box of causality to locate the intermediate factors lying between some structural cause and its purported effect" (Gerring 2007, 45). Beach and Pedersen argue that the *only* methodological approach which permits a serious analysis of causal mechanisms is *process tracing* (Beach and Pedersen 2012, 7). In principle, process tracing entails "attempts to identify the intervening causal process - the causal chain and causal mechanism - between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable" (George and Bennett 2005, 206). George and Bennett use dominos to illustrate the causal chain:

> "Suppose that a colleague shows you fifty numbered dominoes standing upright in a straight line with their dots facing the same way on the table in a room, but puts a blind in front of the dominoes so that only number one and number fifty are visible. She then sends you out of the room and when she calls you back in you observe that domino number one and domino number fifty are now lying flat with their tops pointing in the same direction; that is, they co-vary. Does this mean that either domino caused the other to fail? Not necessarily. Your colleague could have pushed over only dominoes one and fifty, or bumped the table in a way that only these two dominoes fell, or that all the dominoes fell at once. You must remove the blind and look at the intervening dominoes, which gave evidence on potential process."

Tracing the process that may have led to an outcome helps narrow the list of potential causes (George and Bennett 2005, 207). More importantly, process-tracing points out to potential within-case inferences about the causal processes by generating various observations within the case. Thus, the explanation of the outcome is directly dependent of the way these observations are linked together. As George and Bennett point out, "it is the very lack of independence among these observations that makes them a powerful tool for inference" (George and Bennett 2005, 207). The blindfold from the previous example represents the 'box of causality', Beach and Pedersen (2012, 65) illustrate this through a diagram (Figure 1):

Figure 1:



Therefore, process tracing can be defined as a method that involves the analysis of evidence or indicators present within the case that provide sufficient support (or otherwise overturn) for what was hypothesized. The primary focus is to unfold a hypothesized causal mechanism through 'observable implications' of hypothesized explanations (Bennett 2010, 208). George and Bennett warn that "in process tracing *all* the intervening steps in a case must be as predicted by a hypothesis or else that hypothesis must be amended - perhaps trivially or perhaps fundamentally - to explain the case" (George and Bennett 2005, 207).

Since this research in part generated hypotheses from a game-theoretical model, it should be emphasized that process tracing comple-

ments well rational choice approaches. As George and Bennett point out, "process tracing is a method; rational choice models are theories… many proponents of the rational choice approach that its efficacy must be judged in part by the empirical testing of decision making-processes; process tracing provides an opportunity to do so" (George and Bennett 2005, 208). The aim of this research is to test and refine theoretical insights built from a deductive framework developed through the game theoretical model. Formal models are useful as they help predict outcomes however they are likely to fail to generate acceptable causal explanations. Proper casual explanations necessitate "empirically substantiated assertions about both the causal effects of independent variables and causal mechanisms or the observed processes that led to an outcome" (George and Bennett 2005, 208).

At the same time this research expanded insights from the game theoretical model, by including different assumptions present in existing theories of international mediation. Process tracing can be used for both theory testing and theory development. Beach and Pedersen explain that "in theory testing, a causal mechanism is hypothesized to be present in a population of cases of a phenomenon… here the goals is to evaluate whether there is evidence that the hypothesized causal mechanism linking X and Y was present in the case and it functioned as theorized" (Beach and Pedersen 2012, 19). The idea is to go further than existing correlations between X and Y, by opening the 'box of causality'. On the other hand, "theory building process tracing involves a theory about a causal mechanism between X and Y that can be generalized to a population of a given phenomenon, starting from a situation where we are in the dark regarding the mechanisms" (Beach and Pedersen 2012, 20). In other words, in cases where theory is underspecified, especially regarding the causal mechanisms, then process tracing method helps identifying one or more causal processes.

Hypotheses that were generated in this research can be treated as both theory testing and theory development. The difference between theory testing and theory building is what Beach and Pedersen call "theory-before-fact versus fact-before-theory", meaning that "in theory building process tracing, empirical material is used to build a hypothesized theory, inferring first that what is found reflect observable implications of an underlying causal mechanism… a second influential leap is then made by inferring from these observable implications that they

actually reflects an underlying causal mechanism" (Beach and Pedersen 2012, 25). Therefore, on the one side, since H1, H3, H4, H10 and H11 have all been generated from the existing theoretical assumptions, they will be used for theory testing. On the other, H2, H5, H6, H7, H8, and H9 are all products of iterative research, where causal mechanisms were generated from observable implications; as such they will be employed for theory building.

3.3 Case Study Selection and Operationalization of Variables

3.3.1 Case Selection

This research will conduct case study research of five recent international conflicts that were managed by multiple mediators. As Beach and Pedersen (2012) prescribe, the selection criteria was based on two principles: the fact that a given international crisis was managed by a multiparty mediation endeavor, and more importantly that each process had both the hypothesized X (in this case observable dynamics of cooperation and/or coordination between mediators) and outcome Y (success or failure of multiparty mediation activities). In order to achieve a large degree of theoretical relevance the cases were selected from different regional and spatial contexts: different continents, different historical circumstances and managed by different international actors (even though some actors, such as the US and Russia/Soviet Union tend to be quite present within almost all cases). Therefore, the present study will reflect on three cases that contemporary scholarship describes as successful and two that were unsuccessful. Successful cases of multiparty mediation took place in Tajikistan (Iji 2001; Abdullaev and Barnes 2001), Namibia (Zartman 1989; Crocker 1999) and Cambodia (Solomon 2000; Hampson and Zartman 2012). Multiparty mediation efforts were unsuccessful to yield any results in managing the conflicts in Kosovo (Ker-Lindsay 2009) and Sri Lanka (Goodhand et al. 2011).

3.3.2 Empirical Evidence and Potential Limitations

Hypothesized aspects of causal mechanism represent predicted evi-

dence. In process tracing, predicted evidence is close to what Brady, Collier and Seawright, identify as "causal process observations" which include "an insight or piece of data that provides information about the context or mechanism and contributes a different kind of leverage in causal inference" (Collier et al. 2004, 252). According to Beach and Pedersen, "in operationalizing empirical tests of causal mechanisms we develop predictions of what we should expect to see in the empirical record if a hypothesized part of a causal mechanism is present (predicted evidence), formulated in a manner that maximizes the level of certainty and uniqueness" (Beach and Pedersen 2012, 155). Therefore in order to proceed with process tracing it is important to define the central concepts of this research.

Traditional methodology defines central concepts as variables (King et al. 1994). In such a case, causal relationships are formulated in relation to independent variable (or variables) that cause variation in the dependent variable. Gerring points out that this type of relationship usually indicates a probabilistic causal relationship, where a change in value of the independent variable increases the likelihood of a dependent variables occurrence (Gerring 2005, 167). Since the term 'variable' implies that a concept needs to indicate a level of variance, Beach and Pedersen argue that in process tracing it is more appropriate to talk about 'conditions', which primarily indicate the presence (or a lack) of a particular concept (2012, 73). At the same time, process tracing requires that not only variables (or conditions) are operationalized, but also mechanisms in-between. This allows the research to identify the theorized *process* as particular 'causal forces' are transmitted through a causal mechanism to produce an outcome (Beach and Pedersen 2012, 76). However, it should be noted that testing mechanisms can prove to be quite difficult, as causal mechanisms are mostly unobservable. While important evidence can be generated from primary and secondary documentation, it is still very difficult to expect that there will be a very obvious indicator of causality. In light of these limitations, this research will nevertheless aim to accumulate sufficient empirical evidence that would provide sufficient support about the indication of causality that occurs in a specific case.

According to Yin, in case study research there are six sources of evidence: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts (Yin 2003, 85). Given the nature of present research, evidence will be primarily traced using

various types of documentation. Documents include: agendas, memoranda, communiqués, announcements and minutes of the meetings, and other written reports of the events. They also include administrative documents (such as proposal, progress reports, and other internal records) and formal studies or evaluations of the same "site" under study (Yin 2003, 86). Weaknesses of using documents as sources of evidence are various types of bias that might emerge (the unknown bias of the report's author, biased selectivity) and a limited accessibility to specific documents. Thus instead of relying on a single source of evidence, this research will employ different forms of triangulation - development of converging lines of inquiry - in order to strengthen the support for the existence of evidence. It will employ triangulation of data sources and of deferent evaluators (primarily using other empirical studies of the same phenomena).

3.3.3 Variables (Conditions)

Interests refer to a set of a mediator's preferences regarding both the dynamics of the undergoing conflict and the wider context which might include relations with other (potential) mediators and regional/global strategic concerns. As explained previously, interests are rarely formulated within a single and easily traceable document. The closest formats of such kind are various "doctrines" that are associated to numerous states, which reflect on a set of strategic concerns and preferences that states have regarding a wider geo-political context (either global or regional). In relation to the particular conflict areas, these formulations include (previously indicated) aspects such as: proximity to vital economic resources and corresponding infrastructure, economic relations with specific actors (most likely governments of the involved state), proximity to the source of global or regional instability, past relations and ideological compatibilities, proximity to rival and/or partner states, and a historical record. Such formulations have been under serious academic scrutiny. Therefore, these studies will represent one of the crucial insights into mediators' preferences. At the same time, this research will aim to trace additional information that indicates the nature of a mediators' preferences in a particular conflict, by looking into available official statements issued by a relevant actor. These could include public statements by officials that either addresses the particularities of the conflict or the

actor's wider geo-political preferences.

Convergence of Interests. This research hypothesized that potential convergence of interests might occur under three conditions. *Geo-political shift* represents the first condition under which convergence of interests might occur. Such shifts can be identified in official documents and/or in statements by officials that emphasize an imminent political rapprochement between two or more actors on the international level. The second hypothesized condition for the achievement of convergence of interests is represented through the *costs of supporting the ongoing warfare*. While such costs could be calculated and present in official actor's documents, there is no actual threshold which would represent a turning point in an actor's preferences. This condition is more in line with a perceptive dynamic present in ripeness theory (Zartman 1989), where an actor endures a continuous "pain" by baring the costs of war without gaining expected pay-offs. Since it is a perceptive matter, this condition will rely primarily on indications of a trend of increased costs. Finally, this research hypothesized that convergence of interests could be achieved if *mediators negotiate a solution amongst themselves*. This condition is present only once the actors commit to employ what was mutually agreed on. A mere indication of willingness, without actually committing to it, does not represent sufficient indication of the condition's achievement.

Cooperation. This research will use the previously illustrated definition of cooperation by Zartman and Touval, who define cooperation as "a situation where parties agree to work together to produce new gains for each of the participants that would be unavailable to them by unilateral action, at some cost" (Zartman and Touval 2010, 1). As the definition suggests cooperation is only achieved once parties perceive it to be compatible with their interests and start working together. There are rarely any clear indicators, in a form of official documents, which could point toward the dynamic of cooperation. The condition is nevertheless more observable while it unfolds as actors show signs of managing the conflict through a joint effort. These signs can be traced in public statements by actors' representatives and/or empirical studies that provide sufficient support for indicators of actors' willingness to work together and subsequent joint engagement in managing the conflict.

Coordination. This research defined coordination as a method of synchronized usage of different leverages and resources that each me-

diator has at its disposal in the process in order to create necessary incentives for resolution that would have been unavailable through a single mediator. It occurs only once there is sufficient indication that supports the achievement of cooperation among actors. The process of coordination is also difficult to locate within an official document and even in a public statement by an actor's official. It is rather a condition which is traceable by actors' behavior, in which mediators start leveraging the actors toward an agreement. Leveraging can be observed by the use of "carrots and sticks" that alter the attitudes of conflicting parties and induces them to compromise.

This will now be tested systematically by an in-depth analysis of five case studies.