



**Makers or Breakers of Peace**  
**The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Resolution**

August 2014

Democratic  
Progress  
Institute



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## **The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Resolution**

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## Foreword

Scholars and policy makers have tended to characterise diaspora members as *peacebreakers* because of their ability to perpetuate conflict by supporting rebel actors economically and politically. In recent years, however, the discussion has shifted to the different ways diaspora members can act as *peacemakers* in mediation and reconstruction efforts. While diaspora members may act as both spoilers or supporters of peace, it is necessary to understand that their role in conflict is subjective and fluid. They may be viewed as peacemakers by some and as peacebreakers by others, and they may redefine themselves as one or the other as a conflict unfolds.

Last year, DPI published a report which aimed to present the perspectives of Turkey's diaspora communities in relation to recent developments in Turkey, focusing in particular issues of language rights and constitutional reform and examining the role that diaspora can play in the resolution of the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey. The focus of this paper is also the role that diaspora populations can play, if any, in the resolution of conflict, but explores the question from a global perspective, examining the various ways in which diaspora groups have intervened in conflict and contributed to conflict resolution and democratisation processes internationally. The cases of Sri Lanka, Liberia, Somalia and Rwanda are considered, among others, with a view to investigating the influence diaspora populations from these conflict affected countries have had on reconciliation processes.

The Democratic Progress Institute aims to create an inclusive

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environment in which different parties are able to participate in frank, structured discussions on peace and democracy in Turkey and the wider region. Our work provides opportunities for state and civil society actors to share their ideas and concerns, meet with experts from Turkey and abroad, and learn from comparative experiences of conflict and conflict resolution. In these forums, DPI strives to reinforce collaboration between academics, civil society, and policy-makers in an effort to identify common priorities and devise new ways to promote peace and democracy.

To enrich these discussions, DPI conducts research on a wide range of strategic and relevant topics, including constitutional reform, governance models in conflict societies, cultural and language rights, political participation and representation, the role of women in conflict resolution, and transitional justice. Our innovative model combines research and practical approaches in order to broaden bases for wider public involvement in the promotion of peace and democracy.

With special thanks to Caitlin Collis for her contribution to the research of this report.



Kerim Yildiz

**Director**

**Democratic Progress Institute**

*August 2014*

## Introduction

The aim of this report is to assess the role of diasporas in conflict resolution, and to provide an overview of the ways in which diaspora members can contribute to, and ultimately enhance, the peacebuilding process. The term ‘diaspora’ comes from the ancient Greek *diaspeirō*, which translates as ‘to sow or scatter from one end to the other.’<sup>1</sup> While scholars have extensively debated exactly who and what constitutes a diaspora, the term may be broadly defined as ‘a self-identified ethnic group, with a specific place of origin, which has been globally dispersed through voluntary or forced migration.’<sup>2</sup> The impetus to move away, be it because of some economic incentive or the threat of violence, is far from a modern drive. Advancements in telecommunications and the relative ease of modern travel, however, have dramatically altered the extent to which those who leave can remain connected and, should they so desire, involved in the affairs of their homelands.

The manner in which a diaspora is created is believed to influence the way in which members of the diaspora continue to relate to their homeland. Scholars have argued that diasporas created by conflict ‘have a specific set of traumatic memories and hence retain highly salient symbolic ties to the homeland.’<sup>3</sup> As a result, they may

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1 S. Vertovec, “Diasporas Good? Diasporas Bad?” University of Oxford, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (2006), p. 3.

2 S. Vertovec, “Diasporas Good? Diasporas Bad?” University of Oxford, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (2006), p. 3.

3 Terrence Lyons, “Transnational Politics in Ethiopia: Diasporas and the 2005 Elections,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2006), p. 266.

be more likely to become involved in homeland politics, to assume a radical stance on issues, and to contribute to the continuation of violence. This was the premise on which much of the early research on diasporas and conflict was based. Scholarly interest in the role of diasporas in conflict resolution came to a head towards the end of the twentieth century as the world witnessed a sudden proliferation of intra-state wars and secessionist movements. These conflicts not only created a number of new, largely involuntary diaspora populations, but innovations in technology made it easier for these communities to remain connected to the conflicts at home. Researchers and policy makers honed in on the potentially destructive influence of diasporas, specifically, on their ability to raise money and political support for rebel actors. Diaspora populations became generally classified as ‘long-distance nationalists’ and criticised for their tendency to incite violence from afar with little risk to themselves.<sup>4</sup>

In recent years, however, an effort has been made to acknowledge the more ambiguous role played by diasporas, and to consider the positive contributions diaspora members can make to their homelands. Rather than try to fit diaspora populations into the mould of peacemakers *or* peacebreakers, it is necessary to understand that their role in conflict is both subjective and fluid. They may be viewed as *peacemakers* by some and as *peacebreakers* by others, and they may redefine themselves as one or the other as

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<sup>4</sup> Osman Antwi-Boateng, “The Political Participation of the U.S.-Based Liberian Diaspora and Its Implication for Peace Building,” *Africa Today*, vol. 58, no.1 (2011), p. 4.

a conflict unfolds. It must also be noted at the outset that ‘most existing diasporas are not tightly knit homogenous entities that collectively pursue a single strategy.’<sup>5</sup> Diaspora members may have varied interests and motivations, and the diaspora as a whole may reflect many of the same fractures and divisions as the homeland population. This report seeks simply to illustrate the kinds of roles diaspora groups can assume in the conflicts in their homelands.

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5 Gabriel Sheffer, “Diasporas and Terrorism,” in *The Roots of Terrorism*, ed. Louise Richardson (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 128.

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## Chapter 1: Evaluating the Role of Financial Contributions from Diasporas

Much of the early anxiety around the role of diasporas in conflict was related to their ability to perpetuate violence by funding rebel actors. In a seminal 2004 study by the World Bank on the causes of civil war, it was concluded that ‘a large diaspora considerably increases the risk of repeat conflict.’<sup>6</sup> Scholars reasoned, ‘... the finance provided by the diaspora can offset the depreciation of rebellion-specific capital, thereby sustaining conflict risk.’<sup>7</sup> When migration is a viable option, migrants typically move from *developing* to *developed* countries. The incomes they receive in their hostlands are likely to far surpass the incomes on offer in their conflict-ridden homelands. Thus, any financial contribution they send back to their homeland will be of considerable relative value. As will be evidenced in the case studies below, however, it would be a mistake to view wartime remittances simply as spoilers to peace. While remittances *can* indeed add fuel to the fire when sent to fund rebel actors, they ‘can also act as a brake on violence and mitigate destabilising socioeconomic tensions and divisions within a society’.<sup>8</sup>

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6 Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers* vol.56 (2004), p. 575.

7 Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers* vol.56 (2004), p. 575.

8 M. Berdal, “Beyond Greed and Grievance – and Not Too Soon,” *Review of International Studies* vol. 31 (2005), p. 694-695.

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## **Diasporas as Deliberate Detractors: Case Study of Sri Lanka**

The case study of the Tamil diaspora from Sri Lanka provides an extreme example of the extent to which diasporas can fuel conflict from afar with their financial contributions. The contemporary Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora is the result of more than two decades of intense ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. The conflict can be traced to 1983, when Tamil guerrillas killed 13 state soldiers in an ambush in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Retaliatory attacks by the Sri Lankan military sparked a bloody civil war between state security forces and Tamil separatists, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The onset of violence solidified the ethnic divide in Sri Lanka and resulted in the exodus of some 700,000 Tamils over the course of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>9</sup> Most of these evacuees came to reside in Tamil communities in Canada, the United Kingdom, India, France, Germany and Australia.<sup>10</sup> Rather than wait for fractures to form, the LTTE quickly harnessed the collective energy of its newly realised transnational community. In countries where sizeable numbers of Tamils settled, the LTTE established front organisations to coordinate the resources and contributions of diaspora members. These organisations typically served two key functions: to streamline and disseminate LTTE propaganda, and to raise funds for the LTTE in Sri Lanka.

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9 Peter Chalk, "The Tigers Abroad: How the LTTE Diaspora Supports the Conflict in Sri Lanka," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 9, no.2 (2008), p. 98.

10 Peter Chalk, "The Tigers Abroad: How the LTTE Diaspora Supports the Conflict in Sri Lanka," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 9, no.2 (2008), p. 98.

In Sri Lanka, the duration of the conflict has largely been directly attributed to the financial contributions the LTTE received from the Tamil diaspora. In the mid-1990s, it was estimated that 80 to 90 per cent of the military budget for the LTTE came from overseas sources, including LTTE-owned businesses and investments, as well as direct contributions from diaspora members.<sup>11</sup> While Tamil leaders within the diaspora community deny the claim, the Sri Lankan government has estimated that the LTTE raised approximately \$80 million a year from its overseas networks.<sup>12</sup> The volume of funds received from abroad should not be taken as a testament to the unity of the Tamil diaspora, however. The LTTE were known to use coercive methods to extract remittances from diaspora members, and there are a sizeable number of LTTE dissenters within the international community. Furthermore, while the LTTE derived a substantial amount of their money from a legitimate business empire that includes real estate investments, jewellery shops and a deep-water shipping fleet, they are also reportedly involved in various transnational criminal activities, most notably trafficking in both humans and drugs.<sup>13</sup>

## **Diasporas as Unintentional Funders of War:**

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11 F. Cochrane, B. Baser, and A. Swain, "Home Thoughts From Abroad: Diasporas and Peace-Building in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 32, no. 8 (2009), p. 690.

12 F. Cochrane, B. Baser, and A. Swain, "Home Thoughts From Abroad: Diasporas and Peace-Building in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 32, no. 8 (2009), p. 690.

13 F. Cochrane, B. Baser, and A. Swain, "Home Thoughts From Abroad: Diasporas and Peace-Building in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 32, no. 8 (2009), p. 690.

## Case Study of Liberia

While remittances from diaspora populations may indeed exacerbate conflict, those who send them are not necessarily ‘long-distance nationalists’ or deliberate detractors. Diaspora members may send money to an actor in the conflict, and fully believe that that actor is committed to peace and the cessation of violence. How those diaspora members view peace, however, may be entirely different from how those in the midst of the violence view it. When trying to evaluate the intent behind wartime remittances, it is necessary to remember that ‘one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter’. The actor the diaspora believes best suited to achieve peace may be viewed as a malicious warlord by the individuals who live with the daily reminders of his wrath.

To complicate the situation further, one man’s freedom fighter may *evolve* into a terrorist in the course of the conflict. This was the reality that Harvard-educated Liberian President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson was forced to reconcile in the wake of two consecutive civil wars that left her country in shambles. In 2009, Sirleaf publicly admitted to giving \$10,000 to Charles Taylor for his rebel group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) while she was abroad in the diaspora. In a statement before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, she conceded: “I will admit to you that I was one of those who did agree that the rebellion was necessary.”<sup>14</sup> Two decades earlier, Taylor launched a rebellion that would see then President Samuel Doe tortured and executed on a

14 “Sirleaf ‘sorry’ she backed Taylor,” *BBC*, 12 February 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7887117.stm>

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beach in Monrovia.<sup>15</sup> The power vacuum that followed resulted in a bloody seven-year war in which more than 150,000 people were killed and more than half of the population displaced.

In 2003, Taylor was indicted on 17 counts (later reduced to 11 counts) for his role in the civil war in nearby Sierra Leone. His crimes included acts of terrorism, murder, sexual slavery and the use of child soldiers. In her statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson ultimately claimed to have been 'fooled' by Taylor into offering her support.<sup>16</sup> This was not the first time the diaspora chose the 'wrong' side in Liberia and contributed to instability in the homeland. A few years before Charles Taylor launched his rebellion, Thomas Quiwonkpa tried his hand at a military coup. Despite receiving \$75,000 to finance his operation from Liberian dissidents in the United States, Quiwonkpa failed and lost his life in the process.<sup>17</sup> In both cases, members of the Liberian diaspora believed they had the best interest of the country in mind. In both cases, however, their financial contributions only enhanced the state of unrest.

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15 Anne Penketh, "Charles Taylor: Liberia's Former President Finally Faces Punishment for His Horrific War Crimes," *The Independent*, September 27, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/charles-taylor-liberias-former-president-finally-faces-punishment-for-his-horrific-war-crimes-8845092.html>.

16 Sirleaf 'sorry' she backed Taylor," *BBC*, 12 February 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7887117.stm>

17 Osman Antwi-Boateng, "The Political Participation of the US-Based Liberian Diaspora and Its Implication for Peace Building," *Africa Today*, vol. 58, no.1 (2011), p. 7.

## Role of Remittances in Reconstruction

While remittances sent to rebel groups may perpetuate conflict, money sent from diaspora members to their families in the homeland can also have an invaluable *stabilising* influence in countries riddled with violence. In recent years, much has been made of the role of remittances as a tool for economic development. In 2005, the European Commission formally recognised diasporas as ‘actors of home country development.’<sup>18</sup> When war makes paid labour too dangerous or difficult to procure, remittances may keep a family from starving or a disenfranchised son from enlisting in the military. The role of remittances in countries recovering from the devastation of war cannot be understated. In the aftermath of armed conflict, ‘the problems facing the vulnerable do not disappear and, indeed, they often increase: the number of female-headed households grows; returnees find themselves without the wherewithal to rebuild or recover economically; fragile post-conflict states are unable to bring benefits to their citizens.’<sup>19</sup> Remittances can sustain families in the wake of war, and ultimately kick start a debilitated economy. In post-conflict Liberia, for example, diaspora remittances accounted for 26 per cent of Liberia’s annual GDP, approximately \$149 million per year. This number only reflects the formal sector. The inclusion of the in formal sector yields a remittance flow of around \$300 million or more.<sup>20</sup>

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18 European Commission, “Migration and Development: Some Concrete Orientations,” *Communication from the Commission* (2005), p. 6.

19 Patricia Weiss Fagen and Michah N. Bump, “Remittances in Conflict and Crises: How Remittances Sustain Livelihoods in War, Crises, and Transitions to Peace,” *The Security-Development Nexus Program* (2006), p.2.

20 Osman Antwi-Boateng, “The Political Participation of the US-Based Li-

## Chapter 2: Evaluating the Role of Diasporas as Conflict Mediators

In recent years, the focus on diasporas has shifted from their role as funders of conflict to their possible role as *facilitators* in peace talks. Diaspora members, it has come to be understood, can offer the mediation process a highly desirable combination of locally derived knowledge and internationally obtained contacts and skills. As one scholar notes, ‘Being from outside the conflict zone but having a connection to it might provide diaspora groups with specific abilities as third party actors in pre-negotiations or even in formal talks over a political settlement.’<sup>21</sup> While diaspora members can contribute a unique and valuable perspective to the process, it must be remembered that they are themselves stakeholders with their own priorities and underlying objectives. The inclusion of diaspora representatives in mediation efforts defies the conventional belief that mediators must be neutral and unbiased. Impartiality, however, may not be the only determinate of acceptability. Diaspora members are often able to secure the trust of key actors simply by virtue of being from the country in question but distinctly removed from the conflict. They can also give international mediators valuable insights to ‘the local issues, historical complexities, and personal characteristics of the group leaders.’<sup>22</sup>

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berian Diaspora and Its Implication for Peace Building,” *Africa Today*, vol. 58, no.1 (2011), p. 10.

21 Feargal Cochrane, “Civil Society Beyond the State: The Impact of Diaspora Communities on Peace Building,” *Global Media Journal: Mediterranean Edition* vol. 2, no. 2 (2007), p. 21.

22 B. Baser and A. Swain, “Diasporas as Peacemakers: Third Party Mediation in Homeland Conflicts,” *International Journal on World Peace* vol. 25, no. 3,

## Case Study of Somalia

The Somali diaspora has been involved in various capacities and with varying levels of success in the ongoing peace process in Somalia. The diaspora was particularly active in the 2003 peace talks in Nairobi, which brought together eight major internal parties to the conflict, including representatives of the Transitional National Government, different clans, warlords, and regions.<sup>23</sup> Each faction invited a contingency of experts from the diaspora to offer recommendations on the agenda. In this advisory role, the diaspora may have simultaneously contributed to *and* undermined the peace process. While diaspora members can infuse realistic recommendations into a peace process, a highly factionalised diaspora may exacerbate the conflict by reinforcing the interests of individual actors. Furthermore, where diaspora members *have* been involved in the process in Somalia, there has been some debate on the overall value of their contribution. It has been widely noted that diaspora delegates ‘fly in to meetings held outside of Somalia, frequently get ‘per diems’ from international donors, and can simply return abroad if things do not ‘work out’ back home.’<sup>24</sup> Safely removed from the everyday realities of war, diaspora members may be less committed to a swift resolution to the conflict, particularly when they derive some individual benefit from the peace process itself.

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(2008), p. 19.

23 Wolfram Zunzer, “Diaspora Communities and Civil Conflict Transformation,” *Berghof Research Center for Constructive Civil Conflict Management: Berghof Occasional Paper* vol. 26 (2004), p. 33.

24 Markus V. Hoehne, “Political Representation in Somalia: Citizenship, Clanism and Territoriality,” in *Whose Peace is it Anyway? Connecting Somali and International Peacemaking*, eds. Mark Bradbury and Sally Healy (2010), p. 35.

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## Case Study of Afghanistan

The Afghan diaspora has played a similarly ambiguous role in the peace process in Afghanistan. The 2001 UN-backed Petersburg talks saw a ‘pluralistic spectrum of Afghans from major factional groups, both from Afghanistan and from different Afghan diaspora communities’ come to the table.<sup>25</sup> Like in Somalia, however, diaspora representatives attended the talks in support of particular factions rather than as a unified third party. The four main groups in attendance were ‘the Northern Alliance, or United Front, controlling Kabul and much of the rest of the country; the delegation of the former king, Zahir Shah from Rome; a Cyprus grouping of exiled intellectuals, who were supported by Iran...and the Peshawar grouping, with its constituency mainly among Peshawar’s Pashtun refugees.’<sup>26</sup> The talks ultimately led to the formation of a transitional government under Hamid Karzai, himself a former member of the diaspora.

Despite the divisions in the diaspora community, a number of initiatives have been implemented by international actors to involve the Afghan diaspora in reconstruction efforts. These programmes reveal the various ways in which diaspora members are believed to be able to contribute to peace processes. The World Bank established a \$1.5 million fund to provide competitive salaries to

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25 Wolfram Zunzer, “Diaspora Communities and Civil Conflict Transformation,” *Berghof Research Center for Constructive Civil Conflict Management: Berghof Occasional Paper* vol. 26 (2004), p. 34.

26 Wolfram Zunzer, “Diaspora Communities and Civil Conflict Transformation,” *Berghof Research Center for Constructive Civil Conflict Management: Berghof Occasional Paper* vol. 26 (2004), p. 36.

professionals from the diaspora who return to work in Afghanistan. The World Bank also created the *World Bank Afghanistan Directory of Expertise*, which serves as a database of Afghan professionals, as well as non-Afghan professionals with considerable experience in the country. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) launched a Return of Qualified Nationals programme, which supports members of the diaspora who wish to temporarily return to the country to assist with training and capacity building. Finally, the Swiss Peace Foundation has established an internet forum to foster dialogue between civil society, government agencies and the diaspora.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Wolfram Zunzer, “Diaspora Communities and Civil Conflict Transformation,” *Berghof Research Center for Constructive Civil Conflict Management: Berghof Occasional Paper* vol. 26 (2004), p. 37.

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## Chapter 3: Evaluating the Role of Diaspora Return in Conflict Resolution

In addition to the destruction of vital infrastructure, war typically leads to a ‘brain drain’ as members of the skilled labour force take what resources they have and run. In the wake of war, the lack of educated workers can hinder reconstruction initiatives and any possibility of a democratic transition. As the case study above illustrates, the international community has exhibited tremendous interest in programmes that encourage diaspora members to return to their homelands to assist with reconstruction.

### Case Study of Rwanda

Rwanda reveals both the benefits and challenges of welcoming back diaspora members after a conflict. To summarise an incredibly complex tragedy, ethnic tensions between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda resulted in a massacre of some 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu sympathisers at the hands of Hutus over the course of 100 days in 1994. In its efforts to restore a nation devastated by violence, the Rwandan government actively reached out to members of the diaspora. The 2003 constitution assures Rwandan nationals that they can regain their nationality, and promises freedom of movement to and from Rwanda.<sup>28</sup> The Rwandan government indicated early on, however, that they only desired returnees of a particular type, specifically, those who fled as a result of unrest

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28 R. Shindo, “The Hidden Effect of Diaspora Return to Post-Conflict Countries: the case of policy and temporary return to Rwanda,” *Third World Quarterly* vol. 33, no. 9 (2012), p. 1690.

between 1959 and 1994. In the version of history promoted by the state, the period between 1959 and 1994 is remembered as a time when Tutsis, and Tutsis alone, faced persecution.<sup>29</sup> From this, one could conclude that only Tutsis are welcome in the new Rwanda. As one scholar explains, while ‘the term ‘Hutu’ never appears in the Rwanda Diaspora Policy, the Tutsi-Hutu dichotomy is implicit in the depiction of Tutsi as a desirable diaspora group. Rwandan diasporas therefore face the danger of being identified as un/desirable based on their ethnic affiliation.’<sup>30</sup> In a country where ethnicity is at the root of conflict, the privileging of a particular ethnic group in formal state policy risks a return to violence. It should also be noted that the privileging of diaspora members more generally (regardless of their ethnicity or political affiliation) risks the rise of new class-based tensions, which could in turn lead to conflict.

To counter the highly politicised nature of state-sponsored diaspora return in Rwanda, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) launched its Migration for African Development (MIDA) programme in Rwanda in 2001. MIDA seeks out qualified Rwandan nationals from overseas to assist with short-term initiatives or ‘missions’ in Rwanda. Those interested in the programme never have to reveal their ethnicity or the date they

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29 R. Shindo, “The Hidden Effect of Diaspora Return to Post-Conflict Countries: the case of policy and temporary return to Rwanda,” *Third World Quarterly* vol. 33, no. 9 (2012), p. 1691.

30 R. Shindo, “The Hidden Effect of Diaspora Return to Post-Conflict Countries: the case of policy and temporary return to Rwanda,” *Third World Quarterly* vol. 33, no. 9 (2012), p. 1694.

left Rwanda – information that could indicate their ethnic or political affiliation.<sup>31</sup> If selected, programme participants spend no more than two months on a mission. The highly temporary nature of their return enhances their neutrality. As Shindo explains, ‘Diasporas simply come and go...this creates the perception that they are ‘outsiders’, and therefore are detached from the political context of Rwanda.’<sup>32</sup> MIDA ultimately enables Rwandans from the diaspora to lend their expertise and skills to the country without pledging their loyalty to the current government and compromising their own neutrality. Carefully constructed diaspora return programmes can contribute to the economic development of post-conflict countries, and ultimately reduce the likelihood of a return to conflict.

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31 R. Shindo, “The Hidden Effect of Diaspora Return to Post-Conflict Countries: the case of policy and temporary return to Rwanda,” *Third World Quarterly* vol. 33, no. 9 (2012), p 1695.

32 R. Shindo, “The Hidden Effect of Diaspora Return to Post-Conflict Countries: the case of policy and temporary return to Rwanda,” *Third World Quarterly* vol. 33, no. 9 (2012), pp. 1695-1696.

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## Chapter 4: The Evolution of a Diaspora

The above case studies all illustrate the ambiguous nature of the role played by diasporas in conflict and in conflict resolution. Remittances sent from overseas can be used by rebel actors to purchase ammunitions or by local families to put food on the table. Diaspora representatives can infuse realistic recommendations into peace talks or they can lend their support to individual factions and refuse to compromise. The return of diaspora members to the homeland can spark class-based tensions or precipitate economic growth. The Northern Ireland case study provides an example of a diaspora that underwent a transformation from a *detractor* to peace to an unequivocal *peacemaker*. The Irish diaspora has since come to be heralded as a model of the positive role diasporas can have in peace processes.

In the early years of the conflict in Northern Ireland, the Irish diaspora in the United States acted as an inhibitor to peace. From across the Atlantic, the diaspora largely assumed a militant stance and openly funded various Northern Ireland separatist groups. In 1970, the Irish diaspora in the United States founded the Irish Northern Aid Committee (popularly known as Noraid), which endorsed the ‘armed struggle’ of the IRA and sent remittances to Sinn Féin, a fiercely Republican political party. While the Irish National Caucus, which was formed in 1974, was less militant than Noraid, it was openly critical of British government policy in Northern Ireland.<sup>33</sup> Their firmly anti-UK stance alienated

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33 F. Cochrane, B. Baser and A. Swain, “Home Thoughts from Abroad: Dia-

the government of the United States, which maintained close diplomatic ties with the United Kingdom.

Over the course of the next two decades, however, the Irish community became increasingly well established in the United States. In economic terms, the diaspora evolved 'from blue collar working class to middle class corporate well-networked communities.'<sup>34</sup> Economic security afforded the diaspora a greater sense of belonging to the hostland. As the United States became more and more like home, the attitude of the Irish-American community towards the conflict in Northern Ireland was transformed. As one scholar explains, "The evolution of the Irish diaspora resulted in a sense of confidence, the pain of leaving was replaced with feelings of success and the wish to re-engage and accept the peaceful compromise."<sup>35</sup> To reflect this shift, a new lobby group called Americans for a New Irish Agenda (ANIA) was established in the early 1990s with the financial backing of a number of wealthy and well-connected Irish-Americans. ANIA lobbied then President Bill Clinton to take an interest in the situation in Northern Ireland while he was still a presidential candidate. Where earlier lobbying groups had demanded support for a controversial *outcome*, the ANIA offered non-partisan policy options and emphasised the

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sporadic and Peace-Building in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32 (8) (2009), pp. 689.

34 Feargal Cochrane, "The Potential of Diaspora Communities in Peace Building: The Irish Case" presented at *Diaspora and Their Involvement in Peace Processes*, Uppsala University, Sweden (2007).

35 Feargal Cochrane, "The Potential of Diaspora Communities in Peace Building: The Irish Case" presented at *Diaspora and Their Involvement in Peace Process*, Uppsala University, Sweden, June (2007).

importance of a peace *process*. By simultaneously lobbying officials in the United States and applying pressure to the separatist forces in Northern Ireland, the Irish diaspora was able to create the conditions necessary for peace talks.

President Bill Clinton, largely in response to the lobbying efforts of the Irish diaspora in the United States, appointed former Senator George Mitchell to serve as Special Envoy to Northern Ireland. Without any affiliations or ties to the conflict in Ireland, Mitchell was able to earn the trust of the various factions involved in the violence. It has been noted that ‘the presence of an independent impartial mediator is often reassuring to parties to a conflict during discussions, and can be instrumental in assisting parties to engage in dialogue and to agree to mutually acceptable principles.’<sup>36</sup> Mitchell ultimately chaired the talks that led to the landmark Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which formally ended more 30 years of civil war. The Northern Ireland example illustrates the extent to which a highly organised diaspora can channel its resources and social capital to positively influence a process towards peace.

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36 Kerim Yildiz, “Turkey’s Kurdish Conflict: Pathways to Progress,” *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, no. 4 (2012), p. 167.

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## Conclusion

The labels *peacebreaker* and *peacemaker* fail to capture the highly nuanced and largely subjective nature of the roles played by diaspora groups in and after conflict. Actions or behaviours that could be construed by some as harmful to the resolution of a conflict may be viewed by others as vital to the peace process. What is most clear in the examples above is the transformative influence diaspora populations can have on countries in conflict. Diaspora members have the resources, skills, and contacts to alter the course of events in their homelands. While these resources may be used to perpetuate conflict, they could just as easily be redirected to support peace and reconstruction. Every effort should thus be made to recognise diaspora members as key stakeholders and to incorporate them in public dialogues on peace and democracy.

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