11 Conclusion: 
International Mediation in Context 
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INTRODUCTION

Mediation has been practiced for as long as two people have fought while a third tried to bring their fight to an end. And as the case studies in the present volume make clear, mediation in international relations has not only been practiced frequently, but has emerged as an important instrument of international diplomacy. Almost any individual, group, organization, or state – whether formally or informally engaged, invited or uninvited, more powerful or less powerful than the disputants themselves, engaged on a temporary or ongoing basis, etc. – can, indeed has, mediated an international conflict at one time or another.

Despite the frequency and importance of international mediation, however, a gap remains between the practice of mediation and efforts to understand systematically the nature and consequences of such intervention. Mediation in International Relations has tried to fill that gap by inviting experts not only to describe a case of intervention but also to reflect on the limits and opportunities conferred by the particular form of mediation in question. It is the purpose of this concluding chapter to begin the work of pulling together the general lessons to be learned from the preceding analyses.

In order to do so requires that there be some shared understanding of who the mediator is. Given the diverse array of third-party roles described in this volume, it would appear to be all but impossible to make sense of the ways in which these roles differ from one another systematically. How can one reasonably compare the intervention of a private individual (Chapter 3) or the so-called scholar/practitioner (Chapter 4) with the work of a regional organization (Chapter 6) or a state (Chapters 9 and 10)? Such comparison is likely to fail unless one can agree on some common reference point or standard.

Such a standard does exist. No matter how complex, powerful, or
formal the organization responsible for intervention in international conflict, the work of mediation is eventually carried out by individuals – who, as described in Chapter 1, act in a surprisingly similar manner. Chapter 6 may have focused on mediation by regional organizations, but it is Algerian Foreign Minister Ben Yehia who was the mediator in question. Similarly, it was Lt-General Ensio Siilasvuo who served as mediator during the talks between Israel and Egypt at Kilometer 101 (Chapter 8), even though he spoke with the authority (or lack thereof) of the international organization that he represented: the United Nations.

In order to compare the different mediation roles described in this book, then, it may be useful to imagine the following. You have been invited to meet with a group of mediators, each of whom may be able to offer some assistance in an upcoming or ongoing international dispute. You enter a room and find seated around a large table most of the characters described in this volume’s different case chapters. As an exemplar of a ‘private individual’ as mediator (Chapter 3) you see none other than Professor Paul Hare. Next to him is seated another distinguished academician, Professor Herbert Kelman, representing the world of ‘scholar/practitioners’ (Chapter 4). Next comes Singapore Ambassador Tommy Koh, fresh back from his years of work as a ‘formal’ mediator at the Law of the Sea negotiations (Chapter 5). To your surprise, Algerian Foreign Minister Ben Yehia is wearing two hats(!), one as the representative of the Organization of African Unity who intervened in the ongoing conflict between Libya and Chad (Chapter 6), and the other as the small state representative who helped mediate an end to the Iranian hostage crisis (Chapter 9); that man gets around! His Eminence the Pope is there, having just returned from his long and difficult mediation of the Beagle Channel dispute between Argentina and Chile (Chapter 7). Lt-General Ensio Siilasvuo is also seated around the table, having represented the United Nations at the Kilometer 101 talks between Israel and Egypt (Chapter 8). And rounding out this interesting assembly of mediators is none other than President George Bush or President Mikhail Gorbachev (take your pick), representing the superpowers (Chapter 10). As the following comparative analysis of the different forms of mediation unfolds, it may be useful to picture these individual mediators, to imagine that each is willing, under some circumstances, to intervene. Our challenge, then, is to decide who to invite to intervene, and in what sequence, in order to produce the most effective negotiated settlement.