

Is it Good to be Bad? Ethical Dilemmas in Peacemaking¹

This article poses the question, “at which point, if ever, should a peacemaker decide that it is acceptable to do something ‘in the name of peace’ that they normally wouldn’t do?”

That is, the creation of a durable peace – which almost every peacemaker implicitly or explicitly actually aims for – is no easy feat and sometimes to accomplish such a feat there may be certain norms that the peacemaker has which must be set aside for obtaining the larger goal of achieving peace (assuming, of course, that the peacemaker does not decide to walk away from the process or hand it off to another peacemaker when faced with such a dilemma). In other words, “does the end justify the means?”

More specifically, some example dilemmas a peacemaker may face include the following:

- Signing a peace deal with a war lord which would in effect give them immunity for past atrocities committed. In other words, making questionable trade-offs for peace.
- Promoting a knowingly-unfair and/or flawed ceasefire agreement, which while providing a temporary cessation to the violence and allowing time for negotiating a full peace agreement, might also inadvertently backfire thus creating even more intense fighting than before. In other words, taking a gamble for peace.
- Authorizing the use of force in order to pressure one or more of the parties to the negotiating table. In other words, killing for peace.
- Propping up and/or siding with the weaker party to ensure that they can negotiate from a stronger, more equal position. In other words, compromising neutrality and impartiality for peace.

I. William Zartman in the book *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques* has identified a number of different dilemmas the field of peacemaking currently faces, including the following:²

¹ This article was originally published online here: <http://www.prio.no/Peaceethics/PeacE-Discussions>

² *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques* (revised edition) edited by I. William Zartman. 2007. Washington: United States Institute of Peace.

1. The Dilemma of Legitimacy. Can third party interventions be justified even if they run against the goals and interests of the conflicting parties?
2. The Dilemma of Justice. Peace and justice rarely go hand-in-hand. Rather, one is often traded-off at the expense of the other.
3. The Dilemma of Conflict Management versus Conflict Resolution. Managing the conflict by working to reduce violence may actually prolong the conflict or counter efforts to resolve the conflict.
4. The Dilemma of the Use of Force. Conflict resolution, leading to a durable peace, may at times involve the use of force. Peacemakers have not yet resolved the question of when and how much force to apply.
5. The Dilemma of Power. The use of power by peacemakers to temporarily block or alter a party's actions without actually addressing the underlying motives for their actions risks creating a temporary change only – one that can come back to cause problems later because the peacemaker has used their power to force a postponement of the resolution of the conflict.

Clearly, there is no doubt that peacemaking is fraught with ethical dilemmas that must be resolved on an ongoing basis as the process unfolds. The question that this article poses, however, is what criteria can be used by peacemakers to decide whether to choose a certain course of action over another.

One answer that comes to mind is to simply do anything and everything that is in support of peace. In other words, using this justification, lying to one of the parties about true intentions and/or withholding information (manipulating them) would all be justified.

The problem, of course, with such an approach is that the process itself runs the risks of becoming tainted. That is a “bad process” is used to create a good outcome and while initially this might not seem to be a problem, it could prove to be counter-productive in the long run. For example, will the parties choose to honor an agreement that they were manipulated into reaching? Some research suggests that the most durable agreements are those that stem directly from the parties themselves, and that in order to help the parties reach these types of agreements, the peacemaker should act as a facilitator only by assisting the parties with their own negotiation efforts.

A far more superior approach, however, would be to use a good process to create a good outcome. Under this approach, it is desirable to have a set of guidelines or principles to follow to ensure the process remains a good one.

Some initial guidelines for creating a good process might include the following:

1. The process will respect and observe the basic human rights and fundamental freedoms of all.
2. The process will only use force as a last resort when all other reasonable nonviolent methods have been exhausted. Strict rules of engagement, including the rule of proportionality, will be applied if force is going to be used. All parties will be notified as far in advance as possible that the use of force is being considered and they will be allowed an opportunity to change their behaviour or otherwise comply with the peacemaker's demands in order to avert the use of force.
3. Allowing for the use of limited force as described above, the process will at all other times strive to do no harm to the parties' physical, emotional, or mental well-being.
4. The process will aim to create a durable peace that also adequately addresses and balances justice issues and concerns. Peace, if it benefits all, will trump short-term justice issues; however, injustice will not be traded-off for peace and if justice issues must be overlooked in the short-term to create peace, they will be re-addressed later on once peace has been established.

In sum, peacemakers are faced with numerous ethical dilemmas as they fulfill their mandates and while struggling with the question of whether the ends justify the means, they'd be well-advised to adopt a set of principles to follow to help ensure that their process will be a good one that results in a good outcome. Similar guidelines are already well established for medicine, the delivery of aid, and the conduct of war itself – certainly it is time that peacemakers develop their own set of guidelines too and it is hoped that this article will help initiate a new conversation on this topic.

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