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Between Peace and Power: A Critical Analysis of the Role of USA as an International Mediator

Abstract

This paper examines the USA's role as a mediator in international conflicts. The case studies cover two regions: South Asia (the India-Pakistan conflict in 2025) and Eastern Europe (the Russia-Ukraine conflict). Through these case studies, the research explores the mechanisms the U.S. government uses to resolve issues while balancing its status as a global mediator. It seeks to analyse whether the United States is emerging as a global mediator and whether its involvement meets the legal definition and standards of a mediator under international law. It further analyses the techniques used by the USA, including shuttle diplomacy, economic pressure, tariff threats and military assistance. The study evaluates whether the mechanisms used by the USA reflect the neutrality and voluntariness fundamental to mediation, or instead reflect strategic state interests. This research offers insights into the nature, limits and legal ramifications of U.S. mediation efforts in major international conflicts.

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Introduction:

What Constitutes Effective Mediation?

In the scholarly literature on conflict resolution, mediation is defined as a confidential, voluntary and non-binding process which is used to resolve disputes between states, organizations or individuals in which a third party without authority to impose a settlement assists disputants to reach a mutually acceptable agreement¹. Mediation helps the conflicting states to reach out any mutually acceptable agreement and encourages dialogues and negotiations.² It facilitates to make suitable settlement rather than imposing any binding outcome. The process of international mediation is flexible but structured which aims to resolve complex cross-border disputes without using force or litigation.

The mediation has emerged as a preferred mechanism for dispute resolution under Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations after the cold-War scenario³. It shifted the states interests to resolve disputes by using mediation as it encourages peaceful settlement of disputes. Moreover, it reduces the court burdens, avoid escalation, and preserve diplomatic relations. There are different conventions which are used by the countries to resolve disputes; one of them is *Singapore Convention on Mediation* which entered into force in 2020.⁴ It was adopted by the United Nations Conventions to establish a uniform framework for cross-border commercial settlements. It allows the signatory states to directly enforce mediated agreements without initiating fresh litigation. Similarly, the *UNCITRAL Model Law on International Commercial Conciliation* and the *Hague Convention on Choice of Court Agreements*

¹Lex Mundus & Cencla, "What Is International Mediation?," *Lex Mundus & Cencla*, accessed March 2, 2026, <https://lexmunduslaw.com/what-is-international-mediation/>

²United Nations. 2026. *Charter of the United Nations, Chapter VI: Pacific Settlement of Disputes*. Accessed March 2, 2026. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-6>

³United Nations. 2026. *Charter of the United Nations, Chapter VI: Pacific Settlement of Disputes*. Accessed March 2, 2026. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-6>

⁴ Singapore Convention on Mediation, *About the Convention*, accessed March 2, 2026, <https://www.singaporeconvention.org/convention/about>



also used for mediation. These conventions strengthen the international community's confidence in mediation.

No doubt that mediation is used to resolve conflicts and other issues of the states but it is very important that mediation must be natural and mediator must not be biased towards any party.

The present study is divided into two distinct sections. In one section, the conflict of India-Pakistan is studied to reveal or understand the role of USA as a mediator. Further, it also highlights the mechanism used by USA government to meet its agenda. While, in the other section, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is examined to highlight the role of USA as a mediator through the mechanisms which it used during settlement.

Research Methodology

The present study examines the role of the United States as an emerging mediator in international conflicts. It is based on qualitative desk-based research methods. This research mainly relies on secondary sources such as Newspapers, books academic journal articles and reports published by international organizations and well-known think tanks. Relevant literature on U.S.A as international mediator, third-party dispute resolution and conflict management is reviewed to build the theoretical and conceptual background of the study. Additionally, reports and analytical briefs from reputable think tanks are examined to understand different viewpoints and criticisms regarding the role of the United States in recent mediation efforts. These sources provided a link between theoretical discussions and practical mediation. The selected materials were analyzed to identify common patterns and themes related to U.S. mediation objectives, strategies, and outcomes.

Role of United States as a Global Mediator

The United States has, since the conclusion of World War II, occupied a singular position in the architecture of international order — simultaneously a principal protagonist in global affairs and a self-proclaimed arbiter of international disputes. From the Camp David Accords brokered by President Jimmy Carter in 1978 to the Dayton Agreement that ended the Bosnian War in 1995, the US has cultivated an institutional and reputational identity as the indispensable mediating power. This identity is not merely rhetorical; it is embedded in the structures of international institutions, treaty frameworks, and the material capabilities that underpin American geopolitical influence.

Yet the nature, quality, and impartiality of American mediation has always been contested. Critics from across the political and scholarly spectrum have argued that US mediation efforts are rarely divorced from strategic self-interest, alliance obligations, domestic electoral politics, and the imperatives of maintaining hegemonic dominance. The post-Cold War era, in particular, revealed the tensions inherent in a single power simultaneously claiming the role of neutral broker while maintaining deep, asymmetric alliances with parties to many of the world's most intractable conflicts.

These tensions reached a new level of visibility and intensity under the presidency of Donald J. Trump. Trump's approach to international diplomacy has been widely characterized as 'transactional,' prioritizing bilateral deals, personal relationships with foreign leaders, and the projection of American economic power over multilateral processes and established diplomatic norms.

India–Pakistan Conflict: U.S.A as a mediator

The conflict between India and Pakistan is one of the most continuing rivalries in international politics. Their conflict had roots dating back to 1947 when both countries emerged as an independent state. They witnessed several wars such as in 1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999, each conflict seeking international attention. Their Relations have never remained static and fluctuated over time. In 2025, another series of tensions persisted when militants attacked Indian tourists in Pahalgam. They killed twenty-five Indian civilians and one Nepalese citizen. After this incident, the Indian government blamed Pakistan and accused that Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba is involved in this matter. But Pakistani government denied instantly and did not take the responsibility. Following the attacks, both countries suspended

diplomatic and economic measures, including closing airspace, borders, and suspending the Indus Waters Treaty.⁵

Moreover, the governments of India and Pakistan did not rely on suspension of diplomatic and economic measures merely but they also entered into a four-day military confrontation. Before it, the United States did not interfere in their matters and took it as their internal issue. But after military confrontation, President Donald Trump intervened by giving a statement On 25 April 2025 and suggested that India and Pakistan would resolve the matter themselves. The officials of U.S.A did not play any high-level visits or strong presidential statements which signaled that U.S.A is not taking or monitoring actively. However, USA showed active diplomatic engagement when India launched military strikes into Pakistan on 6 May 2025 which escalated the risk of nuclear confrontation. On 8 May, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio contacted the Indian and Pakistani officials to restraint and de-escalates their activities. Moreover, Senior American officials were also engaged directly with both sides. Shortly after this mediation, both countries announced a ceasefire. After it, Washington publicly claimed credit for helping broker the ceasefire, although New Delhi denied any formal U.S. mediation role while Islamabad acknowledged American involvement.⁶

Initially, the USA involved in this conflict by issuing statements but in May 2025 when India–Pakistan engaged in full fledges war which lasted for four days; the USA government took this matter seriously. According to an analysis from the Journal of Media Horizons (Samad et al., 2026), the United States utilized a range of diplomatic methods to prevent further escalation between the two nuclear-armed states. U.S. involvement was primarily crisis-management oriented and relied on both traditional and modern diplomatic tools rather than military intervention. The USA government adopted shuttle diplomacy to resolve the issue; American diplomat's facilitated continuous back-and-forth communication between India and Pakistan rather than arranging direct meetings. By keeping separate, private channels with both sides, U.S. allowed leaders to de-escalate without appearing weak to their domestic audiences, offering a crucial diplomatic “off-ramp”, preventing a dangerous spiral.

Additionally, High-level executive involvement also played an important role. Urgent, direct telephonic communication from the U.S. President and Secretary of State to Indian and Pakistani leadership highlighted the serious consequences of continued escalation. Direct leader-to-leader communication serves as a classic, high-level diplomatic mechanism to signal serious intent, apply immediate political pressure, and encourages de-escalation. Another critical strategy of deterrence communication and nuclear risk signaling was used by the USA government. As tensions rose, particularly after reported strikes near sensitive military locations, Washington issued clear warnings against crossing the nuclear threshold. Through a combination of strategic signaling, private diplomacy, and intelligence assessments, the U.S. aimed to prevent escalation.

The U.S. also utilized multilateral coordination, engaging partners like the United Kingdom, Gulf States and other international actors to amplify calls for de-escalation and apply joint diplomatic pressure. This coalition approach enhanced legitimacy and avoided the risks of appearing as unilateral interference, which is a sensitive issue in South Asian diplomacy. Managing the crisis required a delicate balance between public and backchannel diplomacy. Beyond issuing formal calls for restraint, officials engaged in private deliberations and used the timing of public disclosures, most notably the ceasefire, as a strategic lever to build international momentum and encourage compliance. Controlling the information landscape was equally important, as misinformation and nationalist narratives across media threatened to inflame the tensions further. Consequently, U.S. officials had to carefully and meticulously craft their statements to maintain an appearance of neutrality between India and Pakistan.

Through a combination of shuttle diplomacy, high-level communication, nuclear deterrence signaling, multilateral coordination, and strategic messaging, Washington engaged in comprehensive crisis management to prevent Indo-Pakistani tensions from escalating. While these actions successfully

⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, *Conflict Between India and Pakistan*, Global Conflict Tracker, updated May 12, 2025, accessed March 2, 2026, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-between-india-and-pakistan>

⁶ Sandeep Bhardwaj, “The United States’ Role in the Recent India-Pakistan Crisis” (ISAS Brief No. 1242, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, May 30, 2025), accessed March 2, 2026, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/the-united-states-role-in-the-recent-india-pakistan-crisis/>

secured a ceasefire, analysts argue that they acted as a temporary patch rather than a solution to the underlying deeper structural issues in the Indo-Pakistani conflict.⁷

Critical analysis

After examining the case study of India-Pakistan, it can be concluded that U.S did not intervene between India-Pakistan conflict and took this conflict as their internal matter stating that they would solve this matter on their own, being neutral in the conflict. After some days USA intervened the conflict by applying the shuttle diplomacy, by facilitated continuous back-and-forth communication between India and Pakistan. Until this back-and-forth communication, the US was neutral and it can be said that it was following the principles of mediation. But when the tensions rose between both the countries, particularly after reported strikes near sensitive military locations, reports suggest that Washington issued clear warnings against crossing the nuclear threshold. Along with this, economic measures were employed by the United States to influence the May 2025 India–Pakistan crisis. By imposing extremely high tariffs 250% on both India and Pakistan. USA pressurized both countries to agree on ceasefire by using Economic threats.⁸ This policy diverts from the fundamentals of international mediation as United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation⁹ stresses that mediation should be voluntary and all the parties should have the freedom to accept or reject proposals of the mediation without the threat of punishments. Economic retaliation functions as a mechanism to narrow the range of choices available to the parties, shifting the attention from acceptable beneficial outcomes towards mitigating economic damage. As given by Thomas c. Schelling in his coercion theory That power is not only about the ability to destroy but to influence another actor's choice through credible threat and limited force. According to this theory when economic tools like tariffs are used to influence behavior, the process resembles coercive diplomacy rather than neutral mediation.¹⁰

Russia–Ukraine Conflict: U.S.A as a mediator

The government of USA has claimed that they had played an active role in Russia-Ukraine conflict to assist both countries to resolve their issues. The USA government stated that they had arranged high-level negotiations in 2025-2026 to settle down the issue. Further, the USA claimed that they had arranged trilateral talks between Russian and Ukrainian representatives to find out the peaceful settlement. They discussed cross border peace settlement, long-term diplomatic relations, ceasefires and post-war reconstruction in many fields of life in both countries.

But the USA government did not rely merely on peace talks, it also pressurized the countries to show their serious involvement in talks by giving them threats of delaying in their trade such as the sale of Russian energy assists were delayed to pressurize it. The USA used mechanisms, economic threats and diplomatic negotiations to settle the conflict.¹¹ In addition to the direct negotiation, the U.S. has used a “dual-track” strategy, which combines the diplomacy with economic pressure.

Background history

The Russia–Ukraine conflict has deep-rooted origin. It began in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and supported separatist groups in eastern Ukraine, particularly in Luhansk and Donetsk. These developments followed Ukraine's 2014 Revolution of Dignity which led to the removal of President Viktor Yanukovich and a significant decline in relations with Moscow. Subsequent clashes between

⁷ Amin Abdus Samad, Rabia Iqbal, and M. Sohail Hassan, “From Pahalgam to Post-Conflict Power Plays: U.S. Shuttle Diplomacy in Indo-Pak Relations Following the May 2025 Conflict,” *Journal of Media Horizons* 7, no. 1 (2026): 109–122, accessed March 2, 2026, <https://jmhonzons.com/index.php/journal/article/view/1293>

⁸ Reuters, “Trump Says He Averted India-Pakistan Clash With 250% Tariff Warning,” *Reuters*, October 29, 2025, accessed March 2, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/trump-says-he-averted-india-pakistan-clash-with-250-tariff-warning-2025-10-29/>

⁹ United Nations, *United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation*, annex to the Report of the Secretary-General on *Strengthening the Role of Mediation in the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes, Conflict Prevention and Resolution*, A/66/811 (New York: United Nations, July 21, 2012), <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/document/files/GuidanceEffectiveMediationEN.pdf>

¹⁰ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 3–6.

¹¹ Anadolu Agency, 2026. “Talks between US, Ukraine Begin in Geneva.” *Anews*, February 26, 2026. <https://www.anews.com.tr/world/2026/02/26/talks-between-us-ukraine-begin-in-geneva>

Ukrainian forces and Russia-supported separatists caused sustained violence and instability in the eastern regions of the country. In February 2022, situation took a dramatic turn when Russia launched a full scale invasion of Ukraine and started targeting both civilian and military infrastructure. It led to significant humanitarian crisis including tens of thousands of casualties and millions of displaced persons. This invasion triggered widespread international condemnation and western countries including the U.S. and members of the European Union, responded by providing large scale economic, military and humanitarian support to Ukraine.¹²

The United States did not initially act as a mediator between Russia Ukraine war. Rather, her primary focus was to strengthen Ukraine's defense capabilities by providing Ukraine large scale military assistance, intelligence sharing, financial aid¹³ and imposing economic sanctions against Russia.¹⁴ Through the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, the United States worked closely with NATO allies to facilitate continuous weapons deliveries and trainings for Ukraine. During this phase US officials framed that their primary goal was to uphold Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, rather than facilitating direct negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv.

Thus, between 2022 and 2024, the U.S. acted as a strategic coordinator, not a neutral mediator. This distinction is vital for understanding how Washington's diplomatic mechanism evolved in the subsequent phase.

Diplomatic engagement of U.S. since 2025

By 2025, the United States became more visibly involved in diplomatic initiatives to manage the disputes and finding potential resolution. U.S. Officials presented peace frameworks and coordinated with European capitals, such as Paris and Landon, to shape international strategies to end the war. The 2025 Landon Summit on Ukraine provided a platform for NATO, EU, and allied leaders, to deliberate on international approaches to ending the conflict and long term de-stabilization. Between late 2025 and early 2026, trilateral negotiations involving U.S., Ukrainian, and Russian representatives took place in Geneva and Abu Dhabi. The main focus of these meetings was to discuss or to address ceasefire mechanisms, humanitarian concerns, reconstruction planning, and possible peace agreements. The conflict between both the countries is still ongoing and further trilateral meetings are expected to be conducted in Abu Dhabi.

Russian Stance on U.S. Involvement

Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs asserts that United States is not a neutral actor but she actively supports Kyiv which Moscow characterizes as a proxy war. Russian officials argue that U.S. is functioning as a co-belligerent through military assistance, intelligence sharing and training. Moscow has referred reports from U.S. officials, including CIA Director William Burns, highlighting extensive intelligence cooperation between U.S. and Ukraine and as evidence of operational involvement, asserting that these actions violate the essence of mediation which is neutrality as given under international law.¹⁵

Current Developments and Ongoing Challenges

As of early 2026, diplomatic efforts continue despite ongoing hostilities, with U.S. and Ukrainian officials convening in Geneva to discuss reconstruction and economic cooperation, followed by statements from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stating that further trilateral meetings are

¹²Council on Foreign Relations. 2026. "Conflict in Ukraine." *Global Conflict Tracker*. Accessed March 2, 2026. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine>

¹³ The Associated Press, "State Department Approves \$322 Million in Proposed Weapons Sales to Ukraine," *AP News*, February 26, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-weapons-pentagon-sale-missiles-russia-waracc67f34ae81c90aaf9e96b594f036>.

¹⁴ Mayer Brown. 2024. "US, EU and UK Adopt New Russia Sanctions and Export Controls as Ukraine War Hits Two-Year Mark." *Mondaq* (March 7, 2024). <https://www.mondaq.com/unitedstates/export-controls--trade--investment-sanctions/1433386/us-eu-and-uk-adopt-new-russia-sanctions-and-export-controls-as-ukraine-war-hits-two-year-mark>

¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Statement by the Russian Foreign Ministry Regarding Military Aggression of the United States and Israel Against Iran," February 28, 2026, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/themes/id/1895553/

expected to be conducted in Abu Dhabi.¹⁶ At the same time, the U.S. has used strategic economic pressure on Russia, including delaying the sale of Russian oil assets, intended to maintain leverage in the negotiation process.¹⁷

Analysis: U.S. Mediation in the Context of International Theory

The Role of the United States in the Russian Ukraine war shows a strategic model of a context-based mediation, where there is a combination of diplomatic strategies with political, economic and military instruments. Contrary to the classical mediation-based on neutrality, voluntariness, and facilitative dialogue, U.S. involvement is shaped by problems of regional stability, commitments to allies and broader geopolitical interests. From the perspective of interpretation law mediation is defined as a confidential, voluntary, non-coercive and a neutral process where the mediator facilitates both the parties to resolve their conflict without being biased.¹⁸ Although the United States has facilitated dialogues between both the countries and trilateral meetings were held and peace framework was proposed. The USA simultaneously provided military and economic aid to Ukraine against Russia which adds a strategic layer to its involvement. This approach aligns with the concept of "interest driven" or "strategic" mediation¹⁹, where mediator has his own security or political objectives, besides the resolution of conflict.

The strategy used by U.S. to resolve the Russian Ukraine conflict can also be understood by the "coercive diplomacy" illustrated by Thomas C. Schelling, which explains that power can be applied not only through threats but by shaping an adversary's decision. This strategy explains that contemporary high level conflict mediation combines diplomatic negotiations with broader strategic objectives.²⁰ This dual approach of United States' involvement in Russian-Ukraine conflict shows how modern mediation is inseparable from broader security interest. While international mediation focuses on neutrality, U.S. involvement in Russia-Ukraine conflict shows a mixture of diplomatic facilitation with strategic, political and economic tools.

Conclusion

Overall, it can be concluded that U.S.A has played her role as a mediator between the conflicting parties to resolve their disputes. The evidence of this paper does not support the characterization of US diplomacy as effective conflict mediation and the emerging role of USA as a mediator cannot be understood in simple terms. When we examine the case studies of these conflicting states by analyzing sources such as books and articles, newspapers, columns and reports we can say that USA deviates from the fundamentals of mediation and often play a meaningful mediating role in interstate crisis. U.S.A uses different mechanisms to force her opinion on the countries by applying different strategies such as economic pressure and military threats. In the conflict of India-Pakistan the U.S.A relied on shuttle diplomacy, high level negotiation, and tariff threats. In contrast, in the Russian-Ukraine conflict U.S.A did not use these methods instead U.S.A combined diplomacy with sustained economic and military support to one party i.e. Ukraine, making a hybrid of pressure and negotiation. By applying the theory of coercion of Thomas C. Schelling, it can be said that elements of coercion are present in U.S.A's dispute resolution mechanisms. This does not make the efforts of negotiation ineffective, but it does raise serious concerns about the voluntariness and impartiality and long-term sustainability of peace agreements between the conflicting countries.

¹⁶ CGTN, "Ukraine, U.S. Talks End without Progress; Trilateral Talks Set in March," February 27, 2026, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2026-02-27/Ukraine-U-S-talks-end-without-progress-trilateral-talks-set-in-March-1L65RKW8Fhu/share_amp.html.

¹⁷ Reuters, "U.S. Extends Deadline for Potential Buyers of Lukoil Assets to April 1," February 26, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/us-extends-deadline-potential-buyers-lukoil-assets-april-1-2026-02-26/>

¹⁸ United Nations Peacemaker, "Mediation and Process Design," accessed March 2, 2026, <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/areas-of-work/mediation-process-design>

¹⁹ Ida Bary, *Low-Leverage States in International Mediation: A Comparative Case Study of Norway and Qatar* (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2022), <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/12784/7/Bary2022PhD.pdf>

²⁰ Thomas C. Schelling, *Coercion Theory: A Basic Introduction for Practitioners* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966).

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