

# Ceasefires as a Part of the War and Peace Process, or a “No Peace, No War” Format<sup>1</sup>

Ekaterina A. Stepanova

Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences

**Abstract.** Ceasefires are increasingly relevant for contemporary conflicts and conflict management. During the first two decades of the 21st century, ceasefires also became the most widespread form of outcome for conflicts with any conclusive outcome. Half of all ceasefires, however, were either not part of a politically negotiated process to address the key contradictions that caused the armed conflict, or had no relation to any peace process at all. A ceasefire in its traditional interpretation – as a technical stage on the way to peace – increasingly becomes a ceasefire in the absence of peace and a pragmatic alternative to a stalled peace process. What are the goals and functions of ceasefires at different conflict stages, including, but not limited to, a peace process? What are the main types of ceasefires based on their key function in conflict and on the underlying goals and motivations of their parties? This article explores these questions at the theoretical/conceptual and empirical levels, on the basis of an analysis of available statistical data and drawing upon specific examples in various contexts, with special attention paid to the conflicts in Syria and Donbass. It offers an original functional-motivational typology of ceasefires classified into three types: ceasefires as part of hostilities; ceasefires “for the sake of peace” that aim to support and prepare conditions for peace negotiations; and ceasefires as an intermediate state of “neither peace, nor war,” including as a means of structuring this semi-frozen state to achieve a degree of stabilization. In practical terms, this typology helps clarify (a) the effectiveness (success or failure) of a ceasefire that should not be expected to advance or deliver one type of outcome if one or all of the parties deliberately seek to use it to achieve another type of outcome; and (b) the role of armed violence at the stage of a ceasefire that may achieve its main, underlying goals, even if it does not lead to a lasting cessation of hostilities.

**Keywords:** ceasefires; armed conflicts; peace processes; violence; functional-motivational typology

<sup>1</sup> English translation from the Russian text: Stepanova E. 2023. Peremirie kak komponent voyny, etap mirnogo protsessu ili format «ni mira, ni voyny». *Mezhdunarodnye protsessy* [International Trends]. 21(1). P. 43–74. <https://doi.org/10.17994/IT.2023.21.1.72.6>

Ceasefires are becoming increasingly relevant for today's armed conflicts and the ways of settling them. This fully applies to those few, but intense conflicts of the 2010s and early 2020s in which Russia was instrumental in settling, primarily the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine. Seventy-seven ceasefires had been declared in the internationalized civil war in Syria by 2023 (calculated from PA-X: Version 7), while a more detailed count of local ceasefires gives us over 140 ceasefires in 2011–2021 (Karakuş 2023). Ceasefires in Syria multiplied and spread not as part of a steady peace process involving the parties to the conflict, but amid the chronic failures of the Geneva peace talks under the auspices of the United Nations, a stable impasse in political settlement, and the increasing role that military stabilization methods and alternative negotiation formats played in decreasing the level of armed violence. Approximately fifteen ceasefires in Donbass declared between signing the Minsk Agreements of 2014–2015 and the new stage in the conflict in late February 2022 were formally part of the peace process. Yet, these ceasefires were regularly violated and in fact simply boiled down to temporarily downgrading the armed confrontation to the status of a “small conflict.”

Ceasefires are a typical and widespread phenomenon in modern armed conflicts and in conflict resolution. A large number of ceasefires were declared in various confrontations between 1989–1990 and the early 2020s. These included special agreements or ceasefire declarations and sections on a ceasefire in larger peace agreements. Depending on the counting methodologies, the number of ceasefires varies between a little under 1000 to over 2000.<sup>2</sup> Ceasefires are declared at different stages of conflicts and the transition to peace. The parties try to temporarily observe them at least in some degree. They can last for years and even decades, and are regularly prolonged. Sometimes they collapse or are breached, and sometimes they are renewed. This format has been steadily growing in importance in the first three decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, despite the persistent problems of its effectiveness, its complicated relationship with peace process, or lack of such a relationship at all.

Despite the importance of quantitative indicators, the biggest shifts have taken place in terms of the conceptual understanding of the qualitative content and evolution of ceasefires. Few studies written on the subject (before foreign scholars began to take an increasing interest in the topic in the late 2010s)<sup>3</sup> have traditionally defined ceasefires as agreed-upon or unilateral steps to stop violence (Chounet-Cambas 2011)

<sup>2</sup> Ranging from 926 ceasefires between 1990 and January 2023 (calculated by the author from PA-X: Version 7) to 2202 ceasefires between 1989 and 2020 based on the ETH/PRIIO CF data (Clayton et al. 2023: 1430–1431).

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the current scholarship produced outside Russia see (Clayton et al. 2023). In Russian political science, the subject of ceasefires has not been studied at the theoretical or specialized level. Russian-language studies mostly touch on ceasefires when discussing the settlement of specific armed conflicts and, with few exceptions (Davydov, Novichkova 2020; Dronova 2017), this issue is mostly broached by historians (for some recent studies see: Poliakova 2022; Bebesheko, Shipilin 2020; Ki Kvan So 2020).

and/or as a transitional stage from war to a peace treaty concluded as part of a peace process (Forster 2019: 2; Åkebo 2016). Generally, ceasefires were seen as ceasing or interrupting military hostilities regardless of whether it means an end to the war (Fortna 2004). The influential Uppsala conflict data program also treats ceasefires as a possible conflict outcome on par with peace treaties, one party's military victory, etc. (Kreutz 2021). It is important that social sciences and civilian expert analytics define and evaluate ceasefires and their effectiveness almost exclusively in terms of their ability to put an end to or curtail armed violence *on the way to peace*.

At the same time, the interrelation and interconnection between ceasefires and political settlement of conflicts through peace talks are not as obvious as they appear to be and are gravely under-researched. It is still not entirely clear what effect an observed or breached ceasefire, its success or failure, its temporal and substantive connection with talks on political settlement (Bara, Clayton, Rustad 2021: 336) have on the talks on settling the key differences between the parties to a conflict (i.e. the peace process).<sup>4</sup> Until recently, political science studies have virtually ignored the fact that ceasefires are not necessarily part of the peace process, that they can perform different functions in the conflict, and may have no obvious connection (or no connection at all) with attempts at a peaceful conflict settlement. Generally, there is no systemic evaluation of the effect of ceasefires on conflicts and the peace process.

One of the objectives of this article is to dispel the still widespread illusion that ceasefires, as a rule, are only part of, forerunners to, or a stage in a larger peace process. This objective is particularly relevant amid current trends and changes in the nature of conflicts as such and in the methods and forms of their settlement. These trends include a steadily shrinking share of both comprehensive, final peace agreements and military victories in conflict outcomes (UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset: Version 3-2021) amid growing number ceasefires, partial and local agreements (Badanjak 2022). Ceasefires traditionally understood as a technical stage *on the way to peace* are increasingly transformed into *cessesfires in the absence of peace*; they are becoming a pragmatic alternative to a stalling peace process or else they simply set down or formalize the endless state of “neither peace, nor war,” including so-called frozen conflicts. Ceasefires can also serve as a way of ordering a war itself and even as a process for exiting the war in the absence of any equivocal solution, either peaceful or military.

In a more applied sense, the traditional approach to ceasefires as technical steps towards ceasing fire is increasingly getting in the way of properly gauging the armed violence factor and working with it at the ceasefire stage. This interpretation, *first*, treats violence almost exclusively as a violation of ceasefire. *Second*, it implies that the cessation of violence as such is not merely the principal goal of a ceasefire, but the only goal of a ceasefire (without accounting for other goals it might pursue, including those that may lay deeper).

<sup>4</sup> The peace process is defined as “efforts to put an end to an armed conflict by a dialog (talks) between representatives of the principal parties to a conflict on key issues that are at the root of the armed confrontation” (Stepanova 2022).

What are the goals of ceasefires? What functions do they perform in conflict dynamics at different stages, including the peace process, but also beyond it? What effect do ceasefires have on these dynamics? What principal types of ceasefires can be identified based on their goals and functions in an armed conflict? What is the goal and meaning of the violence factor at the ceasefire stage and how does it depend on the functional and teleological type of ceasefire? This article searches for answers to these questions at the conceptual and theoretical levels, as well as at the empirical level based on an analysis of statistical data and specific examples from different contexts. The conflicts in Syria and the Donbass<sup>5</sup> were chosen because of the high incidence of ceasefires, because the conflicts represent the two macro-regions (the Middle East and Europe/Eurasia) where the most ceasefires have been declared since the 2010s, and because both cases are highly relevant for Russia.

### Ceasefires: Definition and Main Trends

Perhaps the best place to start is with a definition of the term “ceasefire” and a brief analysis of the principal trends and parameters of ceasefires in the context of current conflicts and their settlement. It would be proper to illustrate this problem not only with theoretical discussions based at best on the practice of regulating specific conflicts or a small sample of conflicts, but also to use the information from academic databases on ceasefires. The sheer variety of ceasefire trends and their main parameters identified using different databases can be explained primarily by the different methodologies used to define ceasefires.

The largest database on peace treaties, designed by the University of Edinburgh (PA-X) exhibits a particularly strong tie between ceasefires and peace processes. The developers of this methodology define ceasefire as the “commitment by parties to end all acts of aggression on land, at sea, or in the air, as well as any other activities that undermine the spirit of a ceasefire or ongoing peace talks” (Forster 2019: 2). That is, the “peace process” concept is part of the very definition of a ceasefire. They treat as ceasefire agreements only those texts that largely contain the parties’ commitment to cease violence, either temporarily, or for an unspecified period of time (Bell, Wise 2022: 389).

Corinne Bara, Govinda Clayton, and Siri Aas Rustad offer a broader and less formal approach that defines ceasefires as “arrangements in which conflict parties commit to temporary or permanent cessation of violence” (Bara et. Al. 2021: 332). This is a better definition since it: (a) is not directly tied to peace process; (b) covers not only

---

<sup>5</sup> The article uses data on ceasefires in Donbass between 2014 and February 2022, that is, before and during the Minsk peace process. This stage concluded with the launch of the Russian special military operation in February 2022, and with the conflict transitioning to an inter-country confrontation.

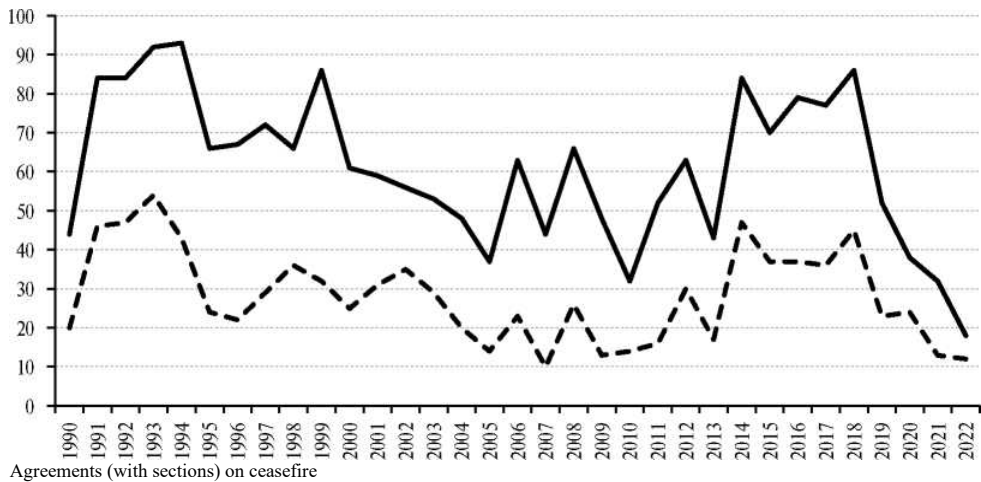
mutual (bilateral), but also unilateral and multilateral ceasefires; (c) does not require that a ceasefire be mandatorily set down in writing, i.e., this definition extends to oral agreements, and does not overrate written agreements.<sup>6</sup>

Malin Åkebo offers a more detailed definition of ceasefires as decisions to stop violence and the procedures related to these decisions: “the core premise of a ceasefire agreement is that the parties agree to stop fighting, but an agreement also defines the rules and modalities for such an endeavour” (Åkebo 2016: 3). These definitions are similar to the one used in the joint ceasefire database of ETH/PRIO CF (Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, ETH Zurich) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). This definition describes ceasefires as formats that include a declaration of a temporary or permanent ceasefire from a certain point in time by at least one party to the conflict (ETH/PRIO CF). This broad definition covers the full range of corresponding initiatives and agreements, from short unilateral oral statements to formal and detailed multilateral agreements. This article allows for any of these broader definitions to be used.

Definitions are important because they are projected onto ceasefire statistics and, therefore, influence the process of identifying existing trends. For instance, the figures in the three principal international databases vary greatly, sometimes several-fold, precisely because they proceed from different definitions of ceasefire and, consequently, sometimes track, count, and encode different phenomena. For instance, PA-X Version 7 with data for 1990–January 2023 (PA-X: Version 7) contains 2003 agreements and identifies 926 ceasefires or agreements with sections on ceasefires (Fig. 1). Since PA-X uses a narrower definition (only official written agreements), the number of ceasefires identified is less than half of that identified in the ETH/PRIO CF database for a slightly shorter period (2202 ceasefires in 1989–2020) (Clayton et al. 2023: 1430–1431). The same applies to specific conflicts: for instance, PA-X records only nine ceasefire agreements or agreements with ceasefire provisions for the Donbass conflict in 2014 – late 2021, while the present article alone uses information on 16 ceasefires.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> “On paper,” an average ceasefire agreement is no more than three pages long (Bell, Wise 2022: 391). Sometimes, a ceasefire agreement or a section on a ceasefire in a larger agreement is limited to one or two paragraphs or even to a few lines.

<sup>7</sup> Calculated by the author. Some experts count up to 20 ceasefires in Donbass between 2014 and 2021 (Matveeva 2022: 98).



**Figure 1. Peace agreements and agreements (with sections) on ceasefire, 1990–2022.**

Peace agreements Source: calculated by the author from PA-X: Version 7. 2023.

Definitions are important because they are projected onto ceasefire statistics and, therefore, influence the process of identifying existing trends. For instance, the figures in the three principal international databases vary greatly, sometimes severalfold, precisely because they proceed from different definitions of ceasefire and, consequently, sometimes track, count, and encode different phenomena. For instance, PA-X Version 7 with data for 1990–January 2023 (PA-X: Version 7) contains 2003 agreements and identifies 926 ceasefires or agreements with sections on ceasefires (Fig. 1). Since PA-X uses a narrower definition (only official written agreements), the number of ceasefires identified is less than half of that identified in the ETH/PRIO CF database for a slightly shorter period (2202 ceasefires in 1989–2020) (Clayton et al. 2023: 1430–1431). The same applies to specific conflicts: for instance, PA-X records only nine ceasefire agreements or agreements with ceasefire provisions for the Donbass conflict in 2014 – late 2021, while the present article alone uses information on 16 ceasefires.<sup>8</sup>

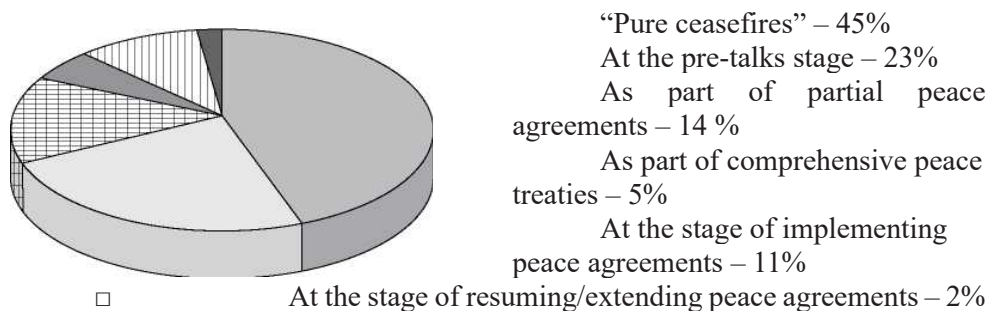
Even though it is preferable to adopt a broader definition of ceasefire in order to arrive at a better-quality analysis, the PA-X database is still our basic source for identifying quantitative trends in this area. The ETH/PRIO CF database is not open-access: all calculations based on it are done by its methodologists and ETH and PRIO analysts, while the data array itself is not accessible for outside researchers and thus cannot be subjected to independent analysis and verification. The database on peace agreements at Uppsala University (UCDP/PA) does not have a separate section on

<sup>8</sup> Calculated by the author. Some experts count up to 20 ceasefires in Donbass between 2014 and 2021 (Matveeva 2022: 98).



ceasefires and does not include “pure ceasefires,” listing only sections on ceasefires in larger peace agreements instead (UCDP/PA: Version 22.1, on the methodology see: Hogbladh 2022).

Out of 926 ceasefires or agreements with sections on ceasefires identified in PA-X in 1990–January 2023, a total of 412, or nearly 45% (44.5%) focus specifically on ceasefires and are also classified in PA-X as a separate stage of *a peace deal* (different from the pre-talks stage, the phases of concluding and implementing partial or comprehensive peace agreements, and other stages of *the peace process* (calculated from PA-X: Version 7). These are the so-called *pure ceasefires*, agreements on the form of a ceasefire and its technical aspects, agreements unconnected with the substantive part of the peace process, i.e. with talks and agreements on political and other key issues of the armed confrontation. Therefore, even given the incompleteness of data in PA-X (the low number of ceasefires owing to the narrow definition thereof) and the subjective prejudices of PA-X experts towards peace processes, nearly half of all ceasefires are concluded without any direct connection to the peaceful settlement process. The remaining 514 agreements contain only individual provisions or sections on ceasefires, i.e. they are primarily focused on other issues and tied to a single substantive or procedural stage in the peace process: the pre-talks stage, including agreements to engage in talks (roadmaps); the stage where partial or comprehensive peace agreements are reached; the implementation stage; the finalization or revision of their terms and conditions; or the stage of resuming or prolonging peace agreements (Fig. 2).

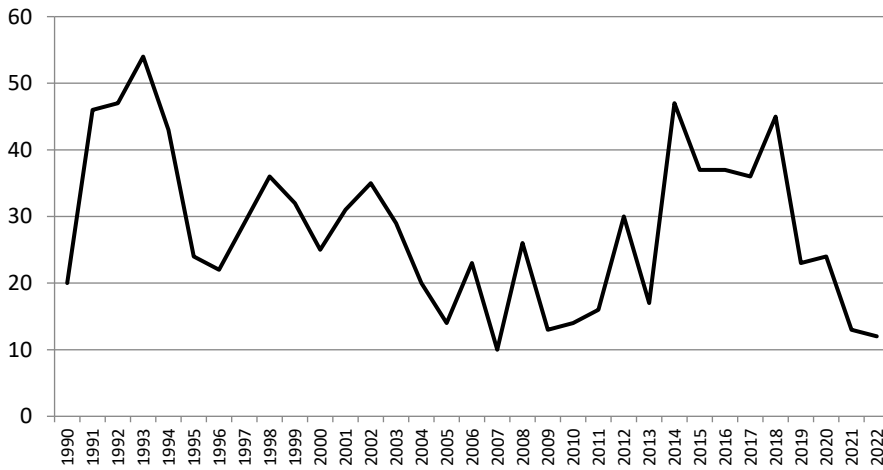


**Figure 2. Ceasefires and peace process stages, 1990–2022**

Source: calculated by the author from PA-X: Version 7. 2023.

For three decades after the end of the Cold War, ceasefires were concluded at a highly irregular pace (Fig. 3) that reflected the dynamics of armed conflicts as such, i.e. the surges, peaks, and drops in the numbers of agreements generally aligned with the dynamics of the number of global conflicts in a year. As for their regional distribution, most conflicts in the last 30 years were waged in Africa and Asia. If all ceasefires are taken into account (including those clearly tied to a particular stage in the peace process), Africa also is the leader in the number of ceasefires in 1990–2022, while the

Asia-Pacific is in Top 3 (following Europe/Eurasia).<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Europe/Eurasia leads in the number of “pure ceasefires” that are not directly tied to any peace process (114 ceasefires) followed by the Middle East and North Africa (107 ceasefires) (calculated from PA-X: Version 7). According to ETH/PRIO CF, these two macro-regions in the reverse order (the Middle East first and Europe second) are the leaders in terms of the total number of t ceasefires in the last full decade (the 2010s) (ETH/PRIO CF 2022: Fig. 2; Clayton et al. 2023: Fig. 3: 1440).



**Figure 3. Ceasefire Agreements or with sections on ceasefires, 1990–2022**

*Source: calculated by the author from PA-X: Version 7. 2023.*

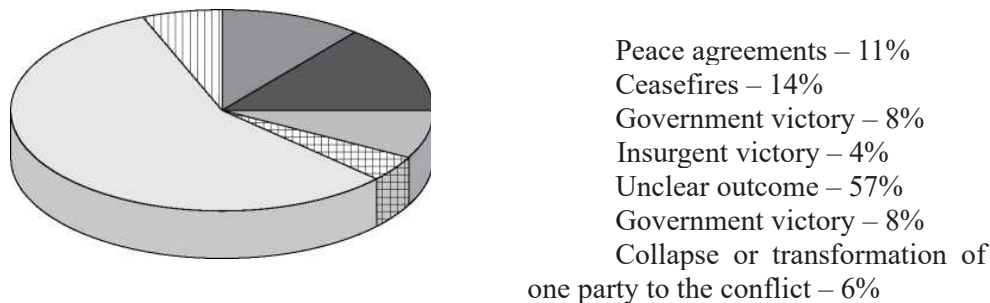
As we noted earlier, one advantage of the ETH/PRIO CF is its broader ceasefire coverage: 2202 ceasefires in 109 conflicts in 66 countries in 1989–2020 (on methodology see: Clayton et al. 2023). This database is also compatible with the principal international research database on armed conflicts at Uppsala University and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset). However, its main flaw so far is still that ETH/PRIO CF is not an open-access database, i.e. other researchers cannot work with it independently.<sup>10</sup> Data published by ETH/PRIO CF experts shows that half of all the conflicts in the world have had at least one ceasefire, and on average, about one third of conflicts have at least one ceasefire annually (ETH/PRIO CF). Nonetheless, ETH/ PRIO CF experts are forced to admit that they have so far failed to

<sup>9</sup> In this case, PA-X treats Europe and post-Soviet Eurasia as a single macro-region.

<sup>10</sup> Another methodological flaw of the ETH/PRIO CF database is that it only includes information on those ceasefires where at least one party is a state, thereby ignoring a large number of local ceasefires (i.e. all those that are concluded between armed non-state actors). Local ceasefires are partially included in the appropriate specialized database that is part of PA-X (PA-Local 2023), while local ceasefires were one of the most widespread forms of ceasefire in Syria, for instance.



systemically evaluate the effect ceasefires have on the course of these conflicts. This is partly because 70–76% of ceasefires provide no mechanisms for verifying compliance with their terms (Bara et al. 2021: 330; Clayton et al. 2023: Table 1: 1441).



**Figure 4. Conflict outcomes, 2001–2020.**

*Calculated by the author from UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset Version 3–2020. 1946–2020.*

Uppsala experts undertook the first, limited attempt to systemically compare armed conflicts and ceasefires using the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset (Fig. 4), their database on conflict outcomes. For the first time ever, conflicts with unclear outcomes started to dominate in the 21st century. In 2001–2020, some 57% of conflict outcomes boiled down to very low-key violence of the “neither peace, nor war” type in the absence of a clear military or diplomatic/agreement-based solutions. Against this background, and amid other more or less clear conflict outcomes, ceasefires (14%), for the first time ever, came out ahead of all other outcomes: peace agreements (11%); military victories of governmental armies (8%); or military victories of insurgent forces (4%) (calculated by the author from UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset: Version 3–2021).

Thus, in the 2000s–2010s, ceasefires turned into the most widespread type of conflict termination for those conflicts that did have some kind of a definable outcome. And that is despite the fact that the number of written agreements on ceasefires (agreements with sections on ceasefires) in 2001–2022 was 2.2 times smaller than the number of peace agreements (calculated by the author from PA-X: Version 7).

This still does not give us reason to claim that ceasefires are at the very least just as effective as an outcome and a means of conflict management as peace agreements. *First*, the fact that most ceasefires are not properly monitored means that it is very difficult to provide an independent quantitative assessment of the scope of their violations and their effectiveness in achieving a cessation of fire, especially amid continuing violence. *Second*, amid frequent, chronic violations and protracted series of regularly broken and resumed ceasefires, researchers in many conflicts increasingly question the traditional paradigm that judges ceasefires and their effectiveness solely based on compliance with their only function: cessation of fire (Clayton et al. 2021: 356, 359–360).

Unfortunately, the first attempts to go beyond this framework and classify ceasefires by their nature and objectives have been methodologically unsatisfactory. For example, out of the two new ceasefire typologies, the one proposed by ETH/PRIO CF in 2022 suggests categorizing ceasefires into those pertaining to the peace process and those connected with the humanitarian agenda, or else (timed to coincide) with holidays, elections, or other landmark events (Clayton et al. 2023: 1441–1442). The problem here is not so much that all these categories are not mutually exclusive (a ceasefire timed to coincide with elections scheduled to be held on a holiday can be a full-fledged part of the peace process and simultaneously contain humanitarian sections). ETH/PRIO CF experts appear to be even more biased in favor of “peace processes” than those of PA-X and are clearly unwilling to call a spade and spade: if ceasefires are not directly subordinated to the objectives of peaceful settlement, the experts believe that it is acceptable (politically, ideologically, ethically) to account only for their humanitarian, electoral, and holiday-related aspects. And they are also clearly unwilling to recognize the fact that ceasefires can have purely *military objectives* and that even humanitarian ceasefires can be used for military purposes and advance the peace process.

Generally, even though quantitative methods are indispensable in evaluating the immediate objective of a ceasefire – putting an end to armed violence – they are of little use in analyzing the context, the underlying motivation of the parties to the conflict, and the entire complex of strategic and tactical, overt and covert, declared and real purposes involved in establishing a ceasefire. Identifying these motivations, goals, and conditions requires subjecting ceasefires and their participants to qualitative analysis, and this process determines whether a ceasefire is part of the peace process or not.

### **Ceasefires: Between War and What?**

Ceasefire classifications and typologies have traditionally been purely technical: ceasefires were divided into formal (official) or unofficial, unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral, full or partial. The new ceasefire typology proposed by ETH/PRIO CF is similar. This is a utilitarian and technical typology clearly designed to aid (international) bodies sending observer missions to conflict zones. It proposes classifying ceasefires solely by the presence/absence of mechanisms for monitoring/verifying compliance therewith and steps for disarming/demobilization of the parties, even though they are completely absent in most cases (in 76% of ceasefires recorded by ETH/PRIO) (Clayton et al. 2023: Table 1: 1441).

Two more substantive traditional typologies which, due to their interconnectedness, are best considered together, classify ceasefires (a) by their spatial and geographical span (location), as well as their level, from local to international, and (b) by the type of the armed conflict itself, according to the essence and nature of the principal contradiction at the heart of the dispute.

In their scope and level, ceasefires can be international (in conflicts between states, for instance, between Ecuador and Peru, or between Ethiopia and Eritrea); nation-wide, i.e. apply to an entire country (the general ceasefires in the civil wars in Guatemala or Liberia); concluded with individual armed actors without being tied to a specific area (nation-wide, for instance, in Myanmar), or in a clearly defined area (Darfur/Sudan); or local (i.e. spanning a small territory and population, from individual blocks, suburbs, or even checkpoints to cities (in Bosnia Herzegovina, Syria, Lebanon) and areas (in Libya, on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines, in Sudan)).

Clearly, the geographical span and, to a lesser degree, duration of a ceasefire are connected with the nature of the contradiction at the heart of the dispute. For instance, purely separatist conflicts are waged in a relatively limited territory, and their participants (armed separatists and the central government) could be more willing to agree to a long-term cessation of fire and to freezing the conflict even when the key contradiction between them has not been settled. For instance, in over a third of separatist conflicts in 1989, ceasefires were long-term (Bara et al. 2021: 333). At the same time, long-term ceasefires are rare in full-scale civil wars that span a large or greater part of a country and involve disputes concerning nation-wide power issues.

At the same time, ceasefires are not a mechanical derivative of the nature of the conflict itself. The scale of the conflict and its key contradictions do not predetermine the functions, stability, and effectiveness of a ceasefire. This approach does not account for the *contextual specifics* of the armed actors in a given conflict, their *strategic goals*, and their tactical objectives at a certain stage of the confrontation. This approach also largely ignores the dynamics of a given conflict. If we take the above into account, substantive ceasefire typology should foreground (a) the underlying goals of the parties, and (b) the stage of the conflict to which ceasefires pertain and the way they are conceptualized by the parties – as a stage between the war and something else (between war and peace? between war and war? between war and some intermediary state of “neither war, nor peace”?).

Research on peace processes and ceasefires cannot really be said to have completely ignored the strategic goals of the parties to conflicts. Nonetheless, if such goals do merit some attention, it happens within a rigidly rationalist approach where every armed actor *must make and always does make* the most rational choice between different strategic options. Such “rational actors” adopt their strategic goals in a conflict to specific situations regardless of whether the goal is to achieve military superiority (victory), bolster their bargaining resource (position), or to move towards peaceful settlement; accordingly, such actors carefully weigh expected costs, gains, and their balance at a particular moment in time and can use ceasefires to achieve any of those goals, and change the main function of ceasefires as they change their goals. Such actors even can, as they attempt to better gauge the costs to gains ratio, use ceasefires simultaneously for military purposes and advancing the peace process (Sticher, Vuković 2021: 1284, 1286–1287).

Such a rigidly rationalist approach is less and less in alignment with the terms and types of conflict outcomes today. The concept of a rationalist actor always making an independent choice of goals between a military solution or peaceful settlement depending on the “costs/gains” balance runs contrary to the fact that both military solutions and solutions achieved via peace talks are generally an increasingly infrequent phenomenon: even taken together, they account for the smaller share of all conflict outcomes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In order to be resolved by one of those two means (by military force or by peace talks), or even by a combination/sequence thereof, the conflict itself should at the very least be clearly enough structured, tied to a certain territory, have a certain (preferably limited) number of parties with a definite military and political structure and with a limited of relatively clear and realistic set of goals. Many of today’s conflicts are complex and characterized by a high degree of fragmentation and by simultaneous trans(inter)nationalization and glocalization (intertwined trends both globalization and localization), and consequently, even those few of them that do have a clear international aspect are increasingly less aligned with these requirements.

In those rare cases where the nature and structure of a conflict generally allow for resolving it through military means, such a conflict, as a rule, is ultimately *resolved in that very way* (for instance, the separatist conflict in Sri Lanka). In other cases, it is frequently not so much a matter of the parties’ consciously choosing to engage in talks, as it is a matter of it being fundamentally impossible to resolve the conflict by military means. It does not, however, mean better prospects for a peaceful settlement: in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such conflict outcomes constitute a minority, while unclear outcomes of the “neither peace, nor war” sort, or frozen conflicts dominate. Generally, the orthodox theory of rational choice fails to completely account for empirical data on external circumstances and the nature of today’s conflicts, not to mention that it entirely lacks cultural relativism.<sup>11</sup>

### Between War and War: Ceasefires as Part of Warfare

Most civilian political scientists, conflictologists, and security experts for some reason staunchly ignore things that are obvious to military experts: the most natural, *standard*, as it were, function of ceasefires is their role as part of conflict dynamics, and this role is dictated by reasons of *military expediency*.

In other words, ceasefires are an integral part of war itself, and not only of preparing ways of exiting warfare via peace talks. As part of conflict dynamics, ceasefires can be used by parties to a given conflict to gain time, regroup, re-arm/re-stock their

---

<sup>11</sup> This theory denies the very possibility of alternative concepts of rationality, for instance, a religious concept. In particular, for armed Islamists, a ceasefire (*hudna* in Arabic) is fundamentally just a temporary break required to rebuild and consolidate capabilities to continue the armed confrontation.

weapons, and improve their military standing. Quite frequently, parties to a conflict (ceasefire participants) do not confine themselves merely to observing or periodically violating ceasefires, but find means of using ceasefires to advance their military and political goals and change the very nature of military hostilities (in Myanmar, Syria, Kashmir/India, etc.). Although some proponents of peaceful settlement at any cost admit that ceasefires can have “non-peaceful” goals and consequences, they label them as negative compared to the role of ceasefires as “a basic step to facilitate ‘real’ peace negotiations” (Karakuş, Svensson 2020).

It has already been indicated that the reasons prompting one or several parties to a conflict to declare a ceasefire can be military and tactical: these are primarily attempts to gain time to consolidate, regroup, manoeuvre, or re-arm and re-equip their forces, particularly when one party or other is under strong military, political, or other pressure (MacGinty 2006: 151; Haysom, Hottinger 2010; Sticher, Vuković 2021: 1284).

Another important function of ceasefires as a military expediency is using them to enshrine *the balance of forces at a particular stage of a given conflict*. In such cases, ceasefires serve as a means of consolidating warfare achievements, and ceasefire terms serve as the first chance to somehow formalize the right to a disputed territory (resources, population). Some agreements of this kind can *really* be mutually advantageous for both or all parties to a ceasefire, even if they do not intend to subsequently peacefully resolve the conflict. These are ceasefires that include provisions on exchanging swathes of territory and/or population (that supports a particular side or represents “their” ethnic or religious group in ethnopolitical or [ethno]denominational conflicts). Although swapping “one’s own” and “the other’s” population as part of a ceasefire could look like a purely humanitarian step, it is in fact frequently intended primarily to enshrine the outcomes of military hostilities and the current balance of forces. In complex, fragmented conflicts, particularly in civil wars involving many internal and external actors, ceasefires can serve and be viewed primarily as an instrument for establishing and/or consolidating control over particular areas and resources on the part of competing armed actors (for the example of the Syrian conflict see: Sosnowski 2020: 1396, 1398).

Tellingly, the larger part of standard terms and conditions of a ceasefire (including their humanitarian provisions and steps to build trust) could be subordinated to the development of the military hostilities and dictated by the logic of the conflict to the same degree as with ceasefires that are subordinated to searching for a peaceful solution: a temporary cessation or suspension of fire; establishing or employing communication channels between the rival parties, including “hotlines” at the level of military grouping (contingent) commanders; dividing or (partially) withdrawing troops, including beyond the reach of the artillery of a specific gauge; banning heavy armaments in populated locations and at civilian facilities; limited exchange of information on weapons systems and equipment, logistics, combatants, POWs, and civilians in the areas under control; and notifying each other in advance about moving

troops and equipment. “Dual purpose” provisions include ensuring humanitarian access, which is understood as security and movement guarantees for civilians, military personnel, humanitarian workers, and international observers; providing convoys and transportation for refugees and internally displaced persons; installing or removing checkpoints to regulate the movement of people and transportation (and taxation) of goods; evacuating civilians and the wounded; exchanging the bodies of those killed; and releasing prisoners, including with the mediation of the International Committee of the Red Cross. We can also include such steps as transferring to a particular side control over certain critical infrastructure facilities such as ports, airports, roads, and governmental buildings. All these measures provided for in ceasefire agreements or declarations may ultimately serve both to resolve a military conflict through military means and advance the objectives of its peaceful settlement depending on the conflict and the medium-term goals of its parties (ceasefire participants).

The same applies to partial and local ceasefires. For instance, the dynamics of widespread local ceasefires in Syria (“reconciliation agreements” in the Syrian interpretation)<sup>12</sup> primarily reflected the changing balance of forces between armed actors and were not precursors, pillars, or manifestations of the peace process. Even before the launch of the Astana Process in 2017 with Russia’s participation, there had been over 100 such ceasefires, including mutual arrangements.<sup>13</sup> Local ceasefires in Syria involving governmental forces, their allies and loyalist units, on the one hand, and armed opposition groups, on the other, varied from arrangements where opposition units retained some local security and governance roles to what was essentially their official surrender. Such surrenders frequently included relocating (expelling or evacuating) militants, and sometimes the local population that supported them, to other areas. As the conflict developed, the government was becoming progressively short on manpower and was losing capabilities to regain the territories controlled by the opposition by force. In this situation, the Syrian regime transitioned to the tactic of partial local deals with individual opposition units, primarily in those territories that directly bordered areas controlled by the government and their allies, where the opposition had concentrated particularly large forces. Such arrangements have from the very outset been not so much steps towards subsequently dividing up power via peaceful talks with the opposition as an element and extension of the military strategy amid a protracted, bitter, and greatly fragmented conflict where expanding control zones via military means was slow and gradual, if possible at all, while retaining the liberated/gained territory exclusively through military means was difficult.

<sup>12</sup> Arabic *itifaqaat al-musaalaha*.

<sup>13</sup> Dogukan Karakuş (Turkey), for instance, calculated that 141 mutual local ceasefires were concluded in March 2011–October 2021 during the Syrian conflict, including both written agreements and oral arrangements (for expanded version see (Karakuş 2023), for the original database see (Karakuş, Svensson 2020)).



Despite their name, “reconciliation agreements” had little to do with reconciling the parties, and the obligations often contained in them to preserve or ensure the decentralization of the local government or special privileges for local leaders, elites, and older notables, were eventually disavowed. Such local agreements were rather temporary “ceasefires of convenience” or veiled surrenders to the central government. Western experts have regretfully noted that unless such local agreements are integrated into a comprehensive peace settlement process, they will be mere war tactics used to neutralize one area, so fighting is easier elsewhere. Several observers have realized that this would precisely be the case since having achieved the upper hand on the ground at great cost, Assad has no interest in the concessions needed for a negotiated political transition (Hinnebusch, Imady 2017: 1, 3, 5).

When the Astana process was launched in 2017, it was believed to have, for the first time in the Syrian conflict, instituted a relatively long ceasefire at the level of international guarantors (Russia, Turkey, and Iran)<sup>14</sup> primarily as part of the so-called de-escalation zones.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, local “reconciliation agreements” were concluded, both as part of the process and on parallel tracks. Although such agreements can hypothetically be divided into “hard” and “soft,” both were forced arrangements whereby anti-government groups surrendered certain positions, rather than agreements achieved via talks. For the Syrian authorities, they primarily remained a way of gradually expanding their control over territories and the population. On the one hand, de-escalation zones enshrined a certain degree of decentralization (that was, as a rule, temporary)<sup>16</sup> and advanced the recognition of some local power centres. On the other hand, the dynamics of ceasefires and related de-escalation zones turned out to be merely a prelude to the Assad government and its allies regaining control over the larger part of Syria’s territory. Several experts generally believed that those ceasefires were “used [...] to successfully advance the aims of the wars’ most powerful players” (Sosnowski 2020: 1403, 1406).

In addition to ceasefires between governmental and opposition forces, a large number of ceasefires (particularly those concluded in the course of complicated, greatly fragmented and multi-level conflicts with a large number of parties) are concluded

<sup>14</sup> The Astana Process is the name used to refer to the negotiations on the Syrian settlement (since January 2017 and until the present time), co-sponsored and mediated by Russia, Turkey, and Iran, acting as intermediaries between the government and the more moderate part of the armed opposition, including Islamists.

<sup>15</sup> On May 4, 2017, a memorandum on the creation of temporary “de-escalation zones” was signed as part of the Astana Process (Memorandum on the Creation of De-escalation zones in the Syrian Arab Republic // Official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 06.05.2017. URL: [https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonKJE02Bw/content/id/2746041](https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonKJE02Bw/content/id/2746041) (accessed: 10.01.2023); Memorandum on the Creation of De-Escalation Zones in the Syrian Arab Republic. May 4, 2017 (PA-X 2023)). In September 2017, the number of de-escalation zones increased to four (Joint Statement by Iran, Russia and Turkey on the International Meeting on Syria in Astana 14–15 September 2017 // Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union. URL: <https://russiaeu.ru/en/news/joint-statement-iran-russia-and-turkey-international-meeting-syria-astana-14-15-september-2017> (accessed: 20.02.2023)); they were created in some sections of Homs Province, in Eastern Ghouta (a suburb of Damascus), in the northwestern province of Idlib on the border with Turkey, and in border regions in Syria’s southwest (creating this area took signing a special agreement on July 9, 2017 as part of talks involving Russia, Jordan, Israel, and the United States).

<sup>16</sup> Everywhere except the “Idlib” de-escalation zone.

not between the principal enemies (antagonists), but between different, often competing groups of the armed opposition in order to form coalitions fighting against the governmental forces; or such ceasefires can also be concluded between loyalist units in order to coordinate the anti-insurgent struggle. In Syria, such ceasefires between non-governmental actors pursuing military (military and political) goals were particularly widespread. Many such ceasefires were mostly concluded between opposition units fighting on the same side of a larger conflict. They included:

- ceasefires concluded between groups of the same or similar political, ideological, religious and political, or ethic and political persuasions (such as the ceasefires in Idlib between the radical Islamist group Ahrar al-Sham on the one hand, and the large umbrella jihadi group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham,<sup>17</sup> or its core and predecessor Jabhat Fatah al-Sham<sup>18</sup> [previously known as Jabhat al-Nusra],<sup>19</sup> or smaller groups like Jund al-Aqsa,<sup>20</sup> on the other; or ceasefires mediated by the Saudi religious leader Abdallah al-Muhaysini between ISIS<sup>21</sup> and several Syrian al-Qaeda-oriented jihadi groups,<sup>22</sup> or between different Kurdish factions in the north of Syria, including those concluded with the mediation of Masoud Barzini, the leader of Iraq's Kurds) (Karakuş, Svensson 2020);

- ceasefires between groups with (sometimes radically) different political(religious) and ideological views and goals that pooled their forces to fight the government, such as the local ceasefires around the city of Afrin<sup>23</sup> between Fatah Halab, a motley rebel coalition,<sup>24</sup> and the Kurdish Self-Defense Forces (YPG),<sup>25</sup> or between the jihadi Jaysh al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar that mostly included foreign militants, and several other groups, including the Shohada Badr, a faction of the Free Syrian Army, mediated by Sheik Abu Amir from Ahrar al-Sham.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Dated July 19 and 23, 2017. All local agreements are cited from the following databases: PA-Local: Second Ceasefire between Ahrar al-Sham (AAS) and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). 23.07.2017; Agreement between Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Ahrar al-Sham (AAS), Badia, Idlib. 19.07.2017 (PA-Local 2023). Hayat Tahrir al-Sham was declared a terrorist organization and banned in the Russian Federation by Ruling No. AKPI20-2755 of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation dated June 4, 2020, which entered into force on July 20, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Dated October 10, 2016. PA-X: Agreement between Ahrar al-Sham (AAS) and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (JFS) signed by al-Jawlani and al-Hamawi, 10.10.2016 (PA-Local 2023).

<sup>19</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra was declared a terrorist organization and banned in the Russian Federation by Ruling No. AKPI14-1424S of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation dated December 29, 2014, which entered into force on February 13, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Dated January 22, 2017, October 8, 2016. Agreement between Ahrar al-Sham (AAS) and Jund al-Aqsa, al-Fua'a, Idlib. 22.01.2017; Cessation of Hostilities between Jund al-Aqsa and Ahrar al-Sham (AAS) in Kansafra. 08.10.2016 (PA-Local 2023).

<sup>21</sup> The Islamic State or the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (IS/ISIL) was declared a terrorist organization and banned in the Russian Federation by Ruling No. AKPI14-1424S of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation dated December 29, 2014, which entered into force on February 13, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Qaeda ("the Base") was declared a terrorist organization and banned in the Russian Federation by ruling No. GKPI 03-116 of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation dated February 14, 2003, which entered into force on March 04, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Dated December 15, 2015. Agreement between Fatah al-Halab and the People's Protection Units on the Sheikh Maq-soud area and roads to Afrin. 15.12.2015 (PA-Local 2023).

<sup>24</sup> The coalition operated in Aleppo and included up to 50 units ranging from radical Islamists to relatively secular pro-western forces.

<sup>25</sup> *YekTneyen Parastina Gel* (YPG) in Kurdish.

<sup>26</sup> Dated February 16, 2014. Hurritan and Malah Ceasefire (PA-Local 2023).

In other words, many ceasefires, particularly local ceasefires, were concluded not for the sake of peace, but, on the contrary, to step up the armed struggle and make it more effective by essentially forming long tactical and sometimes even longer strategic alliances, pooling and coordinating military efforts against the same enemy. These efforts could be confined to the joint control of strategic roads, settlements, trade and smuggling flows (for instance, the oil trade), and could include joint military operations against the main enemy.

Along with ceasefires between the main parties to a given conflict or between armed non-governmental actors fighting on the same side of a larger civil war, ceasefire agreements may be concluded with armed units that are not directly involved in the conflict with the central authorities, but constitute a separate military political force with its own agenda and goals. Moreover, judging by the experience of Syria, such ceasefires have proven particularly stable and lasting. These are, for instance, intra-Syrian ceasefires involving armed units of local Kurds that are not among the antagonists fighting in the Syrian civil war. Some of the most stable ceasefire agreements concluded in the course of the Syrian conflict were those concluded: (a) between the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD)<sup>27</sup> and the oppositional Free Syrian Army (the first ceasefire of November 5, 2012);<sup>28</sup> (b) between different armed units of the Syrian Kurds themselves; and (c) between Syria's government and the PYD (the first ceasefire of August 23, 2016). Even though none of these ceasefires was part of the political settlement process, their greater stability is due precisely to the fact that the Kurdish military-political forces did not have antagonistic contradictions among themselves, nor with the Syrian central government (even though Syrian Kurds had many grievances against it, they largely were not separatists) or some of the non-jihadi armed opposition.<sup>29</sup>

The goals of a ceasefire that are not necessarily related to the peace process include the desire by a ceasefire party to demonstrate their military and political weight or potential to other parties to the conflict, rivals and/or outside actors. A party to a conflict may have different reasons for demonstrating its ability to comply with a ceasefire, including reasons that are not entirely peaceful. In particular, if one party intends to wage war until final victory, its ability to respect a ceasefire could unequivocally signal that its command and control system is effective, its leadership (command) can ensure

<sup>27</sup> *Partiya YekTtiya Demokrat* (PYD) in Kurdish.

<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, up to 15 factions of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) fought alongside the PYD, although many other factions of the FSA, primarily the pro-Turkey ones, were actively fighting against Syrian Kurds.

<sup>29</sup> Syrian Kurdish units occasionally entered into ceasefire agreements with their main opponents (for example, the ceasefire with Turkish invaders, which looked more like a partial surrender and was concluded with the participation and mediation of the United States on October 17, 2019; Turkey even refused to call it a "ceasefire"; or the local month-long agreement between the YPG and ISIL of November 27, 2017. Several Kurdish leaders even deny the very fact that such a ceasefire was ever concluded). These ceasefires, however, were brief and were rather exceptions than the rule. See: Turkey Agrees to Suspend Syria Offensive while Kurds Withdraw // France 24. 17.10.2019. URL: <https://www.france24.com/en/20191017-turkey-to-suspend-syria-offensive-after-talks-with-us> (accessed: 26.02.2023); Agreement between Syrian Defense Forces (SDF) and the Islamic State (IS). 27.11.2017 (PA-Local 2023).

that decisions made are carried out, and this group or side has a high degree of internal consolidation. For example, amid all kinds of speculation in military, political, and expert circles as to the degree of fragmentation in the Taliban<sup>30</sup> at a time when it was the principal driving force of the armed Afghan opposition, nothing attested to the high level of control its leadership had over the entire Taliban as the unilateral three-day ceasefire the Taliban leaders declared in June 2018, with which the Taliban warlords and rank-and-file alike complied without question.

### **Between War and peace: Ceasefires as Part of the Peace Process**

When it comes to ceasefires as precursors and part of the peace settlement process, we need to make an important qualification that narrows down all of the above-cited broad ceasefire definitions. In such cases, in addition to a party to a conflict unilaterally declaring a ceasefire with a view to subsequent peaceful settlement, the definition of a ceasefire covers only those talks and agreements that *really* did come out of *mutual arrangements* between the parties. If the ceasefire just looks like it is based on mutual or multilateral “arrangements,” but in fact it merely enshrines the military defeat of one of the parties or has been in its entirety imposed through outside pressure, whatever such a ceasefire is called and however it is tied to the process of political talks, this ceasefire does not belong in this category and should be considered as a ceasefire of the first type (see the preceding section) or the third type (see the next section).

Ceasefires themselves *do not contain* arrangements on resolving basic key contradictions that are to be resolved through a peace process (for instance, issues of the status and borders of a particular territory, the nature of the state system, the division of power and/or resources, political representation, or problems with protecting the identity of a large stratum of the population). At the same time, the provisions of ceasefires, particularly at the peace process stage, are often set down as sections or annexes to larger peace agreements, and not as separate documents. Generally, the importance of ceasefires for the peace process, particularly for a successful peace process – and the interrelation between them – are hard to overestimate, although these matters have been under-researched.

For starters, a party can join military hostilities not so much because it intends to win the war and achieve a decisive military victory, but because it hopes to finally achieve by way of negotiations those results that could not be reached without turning to military means (Slantchev 2003: 622). To put it simply, some wars are already started with a view to the “ceasefire – peace talks” combo.

<sup>30</sup> The Taliban was declared a terrorist organization and banned in the Russian Federation by Ruling No. GKPI 03-116 of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation dated February 14, 2003, which entered into force on March 4, 2003.

Practically speaking, ceasefires are frequently based on the basic needs and security exigencies of the warring parties who have decided to engage in face-to-face talks. For them, ceasefires also serve as military and political insurance against another party attempting to gain military superiority on the battlefield by taking advantage of the shift of attention to the talks and the breather they afford. Moreover, parties to a conflict frequently put forward ceasefires as a preliminary condition for peace talks, although in practice there is absolutely no need for it. At the same time, in those cases where a ceasefire is not a mandatory condition for peace talks, it may help defuse and stabilize the situation and make it easier to start and conduct such talks.

“Ceasefires for peace” have yet another function: they allow a party to a given conflict to demonstrate its goodwill. Ceasefires thus can contribute to establishing at least the minimal level of trust between the parties. And then there is no clearer signal of commitment to peaceful settlement than a unilateral ceasefire that a party has declared and observes, even if its opponent refuses to join the ceasefire.

Ceasefires can be dictated by the desire to seek political support in the course of political settlement from a particular group or a third interested party. Additionally, ceasefires can ensure broader popular support for the peace process and the parties involved. The population, especially in conflict zones, is forced on a daily basis to correlate peace talks, if they are underway, with the realities “on the ground” around them. If peace talks (particularly in a protracted peace process) are not buttressed by a ceasefire that is not a mere formality, but a reality, and if such talks cannot show people at least some changes for the better, then they rapidly lose popularity, trust, and support among the population (Sticher, Vuković 2021: 1289). One example is the sequence of ceasefires in Donbass after the second Minsk agreement of February 2015 (Minsk 2).<sup>31</sup> At the early stage (approximately before 2017–2018), they could somehow be classified as “ceasefires for peace.” Back then, the peace process still had some prospects, the level of violence in the conflict zone visibly decreased compared to the military campaigns of 2014–2015, and the local population had not yet lost hope for stabilization. Nonetheless, a spike in ceasefire violations (up to several hundred thousand (!) incidents a year in 2016–2017),<sup>32</sup> and the fact that violence had gradually become routine were the most powerful factors discrediting the peace process in the eyes of the local population, primarily in the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics (Matveeva 2022: 93–94, 99). Kyiv’s blockade of the republics and its failure to comply with the political and economic terms and conditions set forth in the Minsk Agreements made the peace process increasingly look like a dead-end. The same applies to the humanitarian situation. Although the humanitarian crisis in Donbass generally was not quite as acute as

<sup>31</sup> Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements. 12.02.2015. See: Full Text of the Minsk Agreements // RIA Novosti. 12.02.2015. URL: <https://ria.ru/20150212/1047311428.html> (accessed: 10.01.2023); Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements (Minsk II). 12.02.2015 (PA-X 2023). Two ceasefires were declared in 2015, and three ceasefires were declared each year in 2016–2018.

<sup>32</sup> OSCE Records over 400,000 ceasefire violations in Donbass in 2017 // TASS. 12.01.2018. URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/4870226> (accessed: 20.02.2023).

during the first two military campaigns, the situation in 2016–2017 had deteriorated in some humanitarian aspects, for instance, with respect to the population's food security (primarily in the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics amid the financial, economic, and humanitarian blockade by Kyiv).<sup>33</sup>

In the meantime, improving the humanitarian situation for the civilian population and building trust between the parties through a series of de-escalation measures are the key objectives and results of successful "ceasefires for peace," as they create and expand the space for political talks. In addition, when it comes to a party to a given conflict being truly interested in achieving a peaceful settlement, its ability to ensure compliance with a ceasefire is also an effective way to gain or to bolster its international recognition, or legitimacy.

Another basic connection between ceasefires and peace process is that they regulate the military conduct of parties to the conflict during peace talks. Local ceasefires, for instance, not only help expand hostility-free areas, but, in the long-term, form the grass-roots, public and civil components of the peace process.

There are also a number of negative aspects to the relationship between ceasefires and peace processes. The main downside is linked with *the armed violence factor and the possibility of its resumption*, which can never be ruled out, and in most cases is highly likely or virtually guaranteed.

Ceasefires constitute one of those stages in the peace process where it is most frequently interrupted and can even collapse owing to the resumption of violence, particularly if violence is regular and massive. Violence in breach of a ceasefire that has not been repealed is one of the main types of armed violence that is characteristic of the peace process. Researchers and analysts have dubbed armed actors that violate ceasefires at the peace process stage "spoilers" (Stedman 1997; Stepanova 2006). Although not all ceasefire violations take the form of armed violence, the two main violence-related categories are: (a) military action; and (b) violations connected with ensuring the protection of peaceful population and non-combatants in general.

Violations of a ceasefire concluded to support peace talks do not merely result in war casualties, they can push back or significantly reduce the chances of the conflict being resolved peacefully.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, unlike the ceasefires of other types, "ceasefires for peace" are crucially focused on those objectives that reduce the risk of full-scale armed violence resuming. These objectives include raising the costs of offensives for one party (or all parties) to the conflict, reducing the level of uncertainty, and preventing armed incidents that can deliberately or unintentionally result in the escalation of violence.

<sup>33</sup> The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that the number of people in Donbass whose food security was endangered had doubled in 2016–2017. See: Ukraine Humanitarian Response Plan 2018. UN Country Team in Ukraine // UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance Report. December 2017. P. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Ceasefires and the Dynamics of Violence in War Zones. Project Overview // Department of Peace and Conflict Research. Uppsala University. URL: <https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/research-themes/conflict-dynamics/ceasefires-and-the-dynamics-of-violence-in-war-zones> (accessed: 18.02.2023).



The larger part of specific terms and conditions or provisions of ceasefire agreements and (including all the provisions listed in the previous sections, along with humanitarian considerations) are equally applicable to ceasefires “for war” and ceasefires “for peace.” Nonetheless, some provisions are specific to or particularly characteristic of those ceasefires that are concluded with the goal of subsequently stepping up political negotiations or supporting a peace process that is already underway. The main provisions in this respect concern complete or partial *demobilization, disarmament, and re-integration* of the armed units (forces) of the parties locked in conflict. These provisions can envision merging the forces of the conflicting parties (in Angola, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan); cantonizing the armed forces of both the state and non-state combatants (for instance, in Burundi and Mali); collecting and surrendering weapons, ammunitions, and explosives; placing heavy armaments of the parties under control and monitoring of a third party (in Bosnia and Herzegovina); withdrawing heavy armaments beyond the range capability, 25 km or more (in the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia); creating demilitarized zones, humanitarian corridors, and security areas (in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Guinea Bissau); demilitarizing political parties, movements, and associations (in Burundi and the Republic of the Congo); redeploying security forces or bringing them back to specific areas (South Ossetia/Georgia); or re-integrating former participants to military hostilities into peaceful life (the Republic of the Congo).<sup>35</sup> Generally, ceasefires with provisions on demobilization that are part of a larger peace process intended to resolve the basic contradictions between the sides produce longer periods of cessation of fire than ceasefires that do not meet these conditions (Clayton et al. 2023: 1445).

Theoretically, agreements on a “ceasefire for peace” should be more likely to have provisions on monitoring and verifying compliance therewith. Monitoring should help prevent, or at least reduce, the intensity of acts of violence. At the same time, there is so far no unequivocal empirical confirmation of this theory. On the one hand, there is data that suggests ceasefires with monitoring procedures are more stable than other ceasefires, both in civil wars and in international conflicts (Bara et al. 2021: 334–335; Clayton et al. 2023: 1445). On the other hand, these conclusions have been drawn either from individual cases of dubious representativeness, or by means of quantitative analysis of statistics that had been collected mostly automatically, i.e. without accounting for specific contexts.

For instance, neither the data on Syria, nor the data on Donbass confirm such conclusions. And let us not forget that these are not merely (a) the two most intense conflicts of the 2010s in the Middle East (including North Africa) and Europe, respectively, but also conflicts that (b) had the largest numbers of ceasefires in their respective

<sup>35</sup> For a more detailed list of all the kinds of ceasefire statutes on demobilization, disarmament, and integration registered in the PA-X database, see an overview by an expert affiliated with the database (Forster 2019: 4).

regions, and (c) made their regions global ceasefire leaders of the 2010s. Additionally, a large-scale long-term ceasefire monitoring international mission operated throughout the Minsk process in Donbass, although its operations did encounter certain hindrances and obstacles. This is not entirely typical even for those 17% of ceasefires that, according to ETH/PRIO CF, did have some kind of monitoring or verification of compliance (Clayton et al. 2023: Table 1: 1441). The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) had a Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) in Ukraine, the largest field mission run by the organization and the operative component of its involvement in the Minsk process.<sup>36</sup> The OSCE SMM's role in monitoring the ceasefire regime in Donbass was codified in the Minsk Agreements and repeatedly confirmed and ascertained in subsequent agreements and ceasefire declarations, and the number of international observers alone reached 700 people (not counting other personnel).<sup>37</sup> Although some experts did believe that the OSCE SMM "raised the threshold for resuming violence" (Zagorski 2022: 121), the OSCE SMM's monitoring only ensured that armed and other violations of the ceasefire were recorded (although, for a number of both objective and subjective reasons, in an incomplete manner), but it did not in any noticeable way reduce or influence (and could not influence) the unprecedentedly high level of such violations.<sup>38</sup> Available contextualized data on local and others ceasefires in Syria also do not confirm that monitoring had any effect on their effectiveness (Karakuş, Svensson 2020).

"Ceasefires for peace" also use so-called *trust-building measures* such as regular exchanges of information and prisoners and jointly controlled measures (the joint running of checkpoints and joint patrolling) more actively and regularly than other types of agreements on the cessation of fire. According to available data, trust-building measures in Syria included in the ceasefire agreements not only increased the chances for complying with the cessation of fire regime, but also proved to be the only factor that positively correlated with ceasefire compliance, particularly with respect to local ceasefires (Karakuş, Svensson 2020). This, however, shows that only specific conflict circumstances are conducive to the success of ceasefires. For instance, trust measures can be used and are more frequently employed by rivaling forces, but are far less likely

<sup>36</sup> It included the role of the OSCE chairman-in-office in the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine (alongside Ukraine and Russia) that served as the main venue for specific talks on stabilizing the situation, including those that involved members of the Donbass republics, and the OSCE's special monitoring mission at checkpoints on the Russian border along the territory controlled by the DPR and the LPR.

<sup>37</sup> The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission operated between March 14, 2014 and March 31, 2022 and included monitoring by ground patrols, specially installed cameras, short-, medium-, and long-range drones, and communications with members of different social groups (executive authorities of all levels, civil society, ethnic and religious groups, and local communities).

<sup>38</sup> The same applies to the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination on ceasefire and stabilization of the demarcation line (JCCC) established by the Trilateral Contact Group to support ceasefires and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission. The Centre included Ukrainian and Russian military personnel and operated between September 2014 and December 2017; its operations ultimately boiled down to observer functions.

between rigid, complete antagonists (especially in high-intensity conflicts with ideological underpinnings and/or related to identity issues, such as, for instance, in the Russia–Ukraine armed conflict since 2022). In such conflicts, some trust measures, such as regular exchange of POWs and the periodic exchange of the war dead, including unilaterally giving the enemy’s dead back to them, are most frequently part of ceasefires of the first type (ceasefires as warfare element).

“Ceasefires for peace” have another important characteristic: not all the violence that takes place in the course of the peace process breaches the ceasefire and is intended to undermine it. Some ceasefire agreements specifically provide for the kinds of armed activities that do not constitute a breach of ceasefire. They include, for instance peace-keeping operations carried out by designated forces (Mindanao in the Philippines); police actions including: preventative patrols; investigations; arrests; search and seizures to deter criminality, piracy, robbery, cattle rustling, kidnapping, smuggling, and terrorist attacks (in Liberia and Mindanao); steps intended to protect the civilian authorities, population, and critical infrastructure or a particular side; and self-defense using necessary and proportionate force (Forster 2019: 7).

Finally, we should emphasize that, with respect to “ceasefires for peace,” we are talking about their *interconnection* with the peace process. In other words, not only do ceasefires serve the subsequent or ongoing peace process, but there is also an inverse connection between the peace process and the ceasefire regime. In some cases, concluding a ceasefire was not only not required to launch unofficial Track II consultations and then official peace talks under the auspices of the United Nations, but it only became possible *after* progress was achieved at peace talks, while the armed opposition was structured and united its forces (to engage in negotiations). As an example, we can cite the Gharm protocol signed by the war lords of Tajik governmental and opposition forces in September 1996 after several years of unofficial and official peace talks on the inter-Tajik settlement. Generally, more stable ceasefires are concluded not before peace talks, but at one of their later and more advanced stages.

### **Ceasefires as a State of “Neither Peace, Nor War”**

Thus, ceasefires can play a purely military role and also can serve the goals of supporting and creating conditions for peace talks. Within a single conflict, the role and type of ceasefires can change depending on the evolution of the goals of the parties to it. As long as participants in an armed conflict are set to resolve it through military means, ceasefires remain part of its military dynamics. Yet if the goals of the combatants change for some reason (for instance, because of a military impasse that has lasted several years or because they mutually realize that they cannot defeat the opponent through military means), the role and meaning of ceasefires in such a conflict can change to support a solution through talks.

At the same time, depending on their goals, the functions and types of ceasefires cannot be reduced to these two traditional categories, i.e. stopping, suspending, or reducing violence (a) for military purposes, or (b) to support and lay the groundwork for peace talks. We can identify at least one more broad type of ceasefire using the context of their use, particularly in the 21st century, and the objectives they achieve, as criteria.

Within the framework of conflict dynamics (generally speaking, on the path from war to peace), ceasefires do not necessarily pursue only purely military or peaceful goals, and they should not necessarily be associated only with the stages of “war” or “peace process.” In practice, ceasefires frequently get stuck at the *intermediary stage* that can be defined as a state of “*neither peace, nor war*,” and become its hallmark and format. At this stage, ceasefires can serve as a stable framework for so-called *frozen conflicts* for years or even decades, including against the backdrop of endlessly protracted, prolonged, or unpromising peace processes (post-Soviet examples alone include the Georgia–Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts in the South Caucasus, the Transnistria conflict, and the conflict in Donbass in the Minsk Process, at least at the stage lasting from the late 2010s to late February 2022). A ceasefire can also be a process and form of a specific *ordering* of the military and political situation and management system in the conflict, and even a means of *stabilizing* the situation up to putting an end to large-scale military hostilities in some areas or in almost an entire given country (for instance, in Syria), in the absence of both an unequivocal and complete military victory of one party and a full-fledged and effective peaceful settlement.

The two basic variants, or stages, of ceasefires of this type have specific features of their own, but they are not mutually exclusive, can develop simultaneously and in connection with each other within the same conflict.

In the first variant, ceasefires frequently become the main format of frozen (or, more frequently, “frostbitten” or low-grade) conflicts in the “neither peace, nor war” circumstances. In some current (post-)conflict areas, the state of “neither peace, nor war” can be seen even in the absence of any ceasefire or amid/following its failure; as we have noted above, such contexts account for over a half (!) of the unpronounced outcomes of today’s conflicts. At the same time, many “frostbitten” conflicts (including those that remain such for years and decades) are still set down in some ceasefire or a series of ceasefires. These could be:

- Ceasefires concluded in the absence of a peace process or ceasefires that do not quite qualify as a peace process (they are not used as an opportunity to launch discussions on a peaceful political settlement; the parties declare and/or sign and then frequently extend and/or violate their obligation to stop the violence without seeking or attempting to resolve the key contradictions underlying the conflict between them).
- Ceasefires amid an ineffective, stalling, or imitative peace process. Such ceasefires can be connected with a process (such, as for instance, the many ceasefires in the course of the Minsk process in Donbass), or can take place on some parallel track, without a direct relation to the peace process, or without any relation to it at all, like many local and humanitarian ceasefires in Syria, Libya, and Yemen.

In both cases, ceasefires essentially become formalized mechanisms for *regulating* frozen or frostbitten conflicts. Moreover, given that ceasefires, even if not fully complied with, reduce the cost of waging a war for their participants, and can even *weaken* internal and external (international) stimuli for the parties to the conflict to engage in talks. In other words, the parties may be really interested in concluding and complying with a ceasefire and in enjoying the degree of stabilization it affords when there is no desire to move along the path of a full-fledged peace settlement of the conflict.

The starkest example of the transformation of the main role and function of ceasefires as the ceasefire regime gradually slips into the “neither peace, nor war” stage is the situation in Donbass in the nominally interbellum period (2015–2021). At the start of this period, despite ceasefires regularly failing and being violated, they could still be considered as an instrument subordinated to the attempts to launch a true peace process (“ceasefires for peace”), but starting in approximately 2017 (and until full-blown warfare was resumed in February 2022), the situation in Donbass was hard to describe in any other terms than “neither peace, nor war.” On the one hand, with the peace process even more clearly stalling and getting stuck in an impasse when none of the basic provisions of the Minsk Agreements were complied with, the periodically resumed ceasefire remained the only part of the Minsk arrangements that formally continued to be in force and was regularly approved by the sides. On the other hand, in such circumstances, the main functions of the ceasefires now *de facto* consisted in preventing escalation of the non-stop armed violence and in achieving minimal stabilization of the situation into the “neither peace, nor war” kind. In February 2018, Ukraine officially declared Russia an “aggressor” in the Law on Integration, and in May 2018, Kyiv officially transitioned from the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) regime to the joint command military operation regime. This development unequivocally reflected the essence of events: Ukraine was increasingly intending to resolve the Donbass problem via military means. Regardless of the periodic, yet increasingly meaningless, negotiations, these developments put paid to the Minsk Process as a path towards real peaceful settlement long before it finally collapsed in early 2022.

For six years before the start of the new stage in the conflict, security in Donbass had the four principal signs of the “neither peace, nor war” paradigm: (1) a lack of major offensive operations and campaigns; with (2) very short “regimes of silence” before they were majorly or repeatedly breached; (3) a number of annual ceasefire violations which went through the roof (unprecedented in this case); and (4) an unvaryingly grave humanitarian situation and non-compliance with the humanitarian provisions of the ceasefire. Even though the security situation in Donbass had improved compared to the intense military campaigns of 2014–2015, it remained shaky and balanced on the edge between war and peace. Given the military impasse, none of the sides expanded the areas of their territorial control and did not gain clear military superiority, even though the civilian and military damage for the DPR and the LPR was higher (Matveeva 2022: 94, 99, 103). The first ceasefire concluded after the revision of the Minsk Agreement of February 15, 2015 did not last even half an hour; the longest a ceasefire



between 2016 and August 2020 lasted three weeks (for example, the “regime of silence” declared on October 1, 2019 lasted for only 24 hours). Virtually all ceasefires (with the partial exception of the ceasefire of August 2020–February 2021) did not significantly reduce armed violence, which steadily remained low-grade through all the years.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, the number of ceasefire violations recorded by the OSCE SMM after 2016 sky-rocketed: the OSCE SMM’s Principal Deputy Chief Monitor Alexander Hug said that over 320,000 (320,130) ceasefire violations were recorded in 2016, with the number surpassing 400,000 (401,336) in 2017. Violations were mostly connected with the use of weapons, but also included thousands of cases of deploying weapons systems in violation of the Minsk Agreements (over 3000 in 2016 and over 4000 in 2017), restricting the observers’ freedom of movement (approximately 2000 incidents in 2016 and nearly 2500 in 2017), and so on.<sup>40</sup> Even though the armed violence dropped somewhat in the following years, the level of violations of the cessation of fire regime remained so high (from 153,000 to over 200,000 incidents in 2019–2020, including up to 50,000 explosions annually) that it would be reasonable to ask the question of what should be seen as the norm in such circumstances: ceasefire violations or compliance with the cessation of fire regime. If we apply the criterion of ceasefire failing over armed violence as proposed by the ETH/PRIO CF methodologists (Clayton et al. 2023: 1443) to the situation in Donbass, then all the ceasefires throughout the nominally interbellum period<sup>41</sup> easily exceeded the “average” admissible violence threshold (25 casualties a year), while most ceasefires also easily exceeded the “high” threshold (100 casualties), and some violations exceeded it manifold.

Amid such conditions, instead of a bridge between war and peace, ceasefires in practice become a means of enshrining the distribution of forces and power between armed actors and the means of influencing this distribution. This influence should be stable and affect the outcome of the conflict and the nature of the post-conflict peace. This brings us to the second variant: ceasefire as a process of ordering and stabilizing a conflict in the absence of a peace process or in the absence of peaceful settlement progress. This type of ceasefire can pursue the following objectives:

- shaping and establishing the outlines of a wartime order in the complex and frequently highly fragmented military and political circumstances;
- primary state-building and restoring or establishing minimal basic administrative functions (both for state and non-state actors with such ambitions);
- enshrining and further redistributing local power and influence.

<sup>39</sup> According to the criteria used by the Uppsala Conflict Database (between 25 and 1000 combat casualties within a calendar year; everything above that number is considered a large-scale conflict or war).

<sup>40</sup> TASS 2018. Although such a large number of violations partially reflects the OSCE findings according to which every single incident is regarded as a violation (an explosion, a mine going off, an attack, sometimes even a single shot), the SMM’s monitoring was incomplete (that is, they did not record all violations), which, on the contrary, was a decreasing coefficient.

<sup>41</sup> With the exception of individual and seasonal ceasefires (“harvest,” “school,” “Christmas,” etc.) that are short by definition.



In handling these objectives, ceasefires not only serve as derivatives of the nature, type, and dynamics of a given conflict, but themselves begin to form these dynamics. In the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the most notable example of handling all three objectives was the Astana process on Syria. It merits special attention in this connection even though this example is not the most typical, as the Syrian conflict is particularly complicated, highly fragmented, and combined with deep regionalization and expanded trans-nationalization and internationalization. It is also atypical because of the specific features of the ongoing process of exiting the Syrian war.

On the one hand, compared to most local ceasefires and the so-called safety areas in various conflicts and regions, the features of de-escalation zones and local ceasefire agreements concluded as part of the Astana process lay in the fact that measures intended to help advance the cessation of fire had absolute supremacy over all other specific ceasefire functions, including purely humanitarian considerations. On the other hand, the Astana process was from the outset conceived by its principal designers, primarily Russia and Turkey, as a format for coordinating and ensuring a long-term ceasefire in support of political settlement in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations (that is, it was conceived as a “ceasefire for peace”). At the same time, with the Geneva peace talks stalling, and with the fragmented armed confrontation “on the ground” continuing, the Astana process went far beyond the standard ceasefire regime. In fact, it became both a key factor in the dynamics of the conflict, and a means of building the emerging (post-)conflict order both locally and throughout Syria. Since the late 2010s, the situation in Syria manifested a combination of: (a) many Syrian regions partially emerging from the state of armed conflict due to ceasefires and the government gradually retaking and extending its control (including the success of three out of four de-escalation zones); and (b) there still being armed enclaves that have not been brought under control by the central government in Idlib, some Kurdish areas, and in the areas occupied by Turkey and the United States, with some armed groups, including ISIL, continuing their activities. Given this, the absence of both an unequivocal and comprehensive military solution and a coherent peace process, has essentially turned the Astana process into a format and a tool for ordering the “neither peace, nor war” situation.

Generally, when considered in the intra-Syrian context, the Astana format advanced consolidation and expansion of the central government’s control in areas formerly occupied by the armed opposition. The process also prompted some opposition leaders and groups to align with the government (although the Astana process simultaneously gave a boost to some local self-defence forces and other semi-autonomous pro-governmental militarized units and allowed for the preservation of the opposition enclave in the Idlib zone). At the same time, the Astana process bolstered the influence of those external actors who co-sponsored it, especially the role of Russia in diplomacy and security and Turkey’s military territorial control in the north of Syria.

When a ceasefire essentially codifies, documents, and orders a long-term “neither peace, nor war” regime, a certain level of armed violence is, *first of all*, virtually inevitable, and *second*, determined by other factors and manifests the kind of dynamics that is different from acts of violence that breach (or support) an active peace process or an already concluded peace agreement. Accordingly, such formats in fact not so much prevent (to the greatest possible degree) armed incidents that breach the ceasefire and the peace process, as they routinely regulate violence at acceptable levels and attempt to prevent it from spiralling out of control and resulting in a large-scale escalation. In other words, regulating armed violence under a “neither peace, nor war” ceasefire requires *a different set of tools* than under ceasefires that constitute part of a full-fledged peace process.

The positive feature here is that “neither peace, nor war” ceasefires are generally *more resistant to being breached* in the form of armed violence. They are also more difficult to destabilize even through pre-determined, pointed acts of violence, including terrorist attacks, and the violations themselves do not automatically threaten to destabilize a larger peace process, since it is either absent or at an impasse (that is, politically speaking, there is nothing much to destabilize). Nonetheless, the negative effect of such ceasefires is that they are not subordinated to the interests and logic of conflict settlement through military or peaceful means. At most, such ceasefires can be expected to provide a temporary, even if lasting, suspension of, or decrease in, violence without resolving its principal, underlying contradictions and without achieving any clear, pronounced, or stable outcome.

\* \* \*

When the Cold War ended, ceasefires began to play a progressively greater role in the course of armed conflicts and in the process of transitioning from war to peace. Although, the number of peace agreements proper from the period starting in 1990 was 2 or 2.5 greater than the number of ceasefire agreements (and sections on ceasefires in larger agreements), in the early 21st century, ceasefires as conflict outcomes far outstripped both peace agreements and military conflict resolutions. Thus, if a clear, pronounced, and relatively stable conflict termination was recorded in the 2000s–2010s, that outcome was most likely a ceasefire.

Although ceasefires are directly intended to put a temporary or more enduring end to military hostilities, this does not necessarily mean that they are automatically intended to achieve a peace settlement or are tied to a peace process. Our analysis has demonstrated that nearly half of all ceasefires concluded worldwide are either not yet part of a peace process (i.e. they do not set the goal of creating conditions for peace talks, even if such talks do begin sooner or later), or have no connection at all with the process of achieving the political settlement of the main substantive contradictions at the heart of the armed conflict. Moreover, some ceasefires could overtly or covertly set such main goals that are contrary to the objective of peaceful conflict settlement.

Hence the need to supplement the existing technical ceasefire typologies with a more substantive typology connected with ceasefire motivation and teleology (the underlying goals of the parties) and with the specific conflict stage at which a given ceasefire was concluded. This typology divides ceasefires into three principal kinds: (1) ceasefires as part of military hostilities (a tactical breather or a break taken to handle military objectives, or enshrine a balance of power in the course of an armed conflict); (2) ceasefires for peace (as a way of creating conditions for peace talks or advancing the peace process at the stage between war and peace); and (3) ceasefires as an intermediate condition of “neither peace, nor war,” as, among other things, a means of ordering the conflict up to stabilizing it to some degree (amid a frostbitten, frozen, or gradually flagging conflict and in the absence of an unequivocal, pronounced solution, either military or peaceful).

At the same time, one conflict can have simultaneous or consecutive ceasefires of different categories, sometimes of all three categories at once. For instance, the Syrian conflict had several nation-wide ceasefires that were concluded with international mediation or by external actors (including ceasefires recorded in UN Security Council resolutions) and officially tied to the peace process under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva. However, there were simultaneously many ceasefires of a more local nature “on the ground,” particularly between different armed opposition groups that were purely military and aimed primarily to make the armed struggle more effective.

Moreover, these categories may partially crisscross and overlap. For instance, parties to one and the same ceasefire regime can in practice use it for different end goals, as was the case of the sequence of ceasefires under the Minsk Peace Process in Donbass or the approaches of Damascus (and Tehran to some degree) and Moscow to the Astana process, particularly at its earlier stages. The real goals and functions of a ceasefire regime can also gradually change. For instance, the Astana process was originally conceived by its principal co-sponsors, primarily Russia, as a regime of cessation of fire in support of a political peaceful settlement under the auspices of the United Nations. Nonetheless, as the Astana process was developing and strengthening amid the continuing stalling of the Geneva peace talks, the ceasefire regime in practice became a means of ordering a state of “neither peace, nor war” and of gradually stabilizing the situation in the larger part of the country in the absence of an unequivocal and final peaceful or military resolution of the conflict.

Thus, at different conflict stages and in different contexts, ceasefires may pursue *different* principal goals and objectives. Understanding that not all ceasefires can always be reduced to ensuring a cessation of fire in order to lay the groundwork for peace talks, and that not all of them even set themselves the goal of reducing or ending violence has *very specific practical significance*.

This significance lies, *first*, in clearing up somewhat the matter of whether a ceasefire is effective (whether it is a success or a failure) depending on its context and on the real goals of the parties at a specific stage of a conflict. There is no point in expecting a ceasefire to produce a certain result when one, two, or all of its parties are from

the outset deliberately, overtly or covertly, working to achieve another result. Wrongly classifying a ceasefire under one of the three types indicated can significantly distort the assessments of its effectiveness. For instance, tens and even hundreds of thousands of ceasefire regime violations, even when the ceasefire being tied to a certain peace process (as in the case of the ceasefires in Donbass under the Minsk process), could evidence not so much an inability to ensure the proper level of security for advancing the peace process, as the fact that this ceasefire regime has transformed into a relatively structured intermediate format of “neither peace, nor war” with one or several parties lacking (possibly temporarily as well) conditions and capabilities to work towards a military resolution of the conflict or a real peaceful settlement of it.

There should be no *a priori* expectations of “ceasefires for peace” to be more effective (compared to ceasefires of other types) in achieving a cessation of fire just because such ceasefires are tied to some peace process. Tying ceasefires in Donbass between 2014 and early 2022 to the Minsk peace process did nothing to change the fact that the ceasefire regime became one of the most frequently violated in the world (which rather speaks volumes of the flaws in the peace process itself than of ceasefires as such). All nation-wide ceasefires in Syria concluded internationally under the auspices of the United Nations or as declarations of non-regional powers (the United States and Russia) failed. Against this backdrop, ceasefires concluded as part of the Astana process (that staked no claims to comprehensive peaceful political settlement at the level of the United Nations) and several local ceasefires that had no connection with the process were more successful in advancing true cessation of fire on the ground.

*Second*, consequently, armed violence amid ceasefires of different motivational and teleological types at different stages of a given conflict is used for *different purposes*, and, therefore, requires *different approaches* that prompt further detailed research. On the one hand, armed violence rarely stops, much less completely, when a ceasefire is declared. Accordingly, one of the principal tasks of the parties and guarantors of ceasefires of any type is exercising control over violence when the cessation of fire regime is already in place. In particular, “ceasefires for peace” should envisage such built-in mechanisms and trust measures that would not allow accidental or deliberate acts of armed violence to interrupt or undermine the peace process for an extended length of time.

On the other hand, the opposite is true as well. If an armed conflict continues at the ceasefire stage, it does not necessarily mean that the ceasefire has failed or is on its way to failure. Even after peace talks start, the early stages of a peace-making process *typically* involve an alternation of ceasefires and resumed armed action or skirmishes. Moreover, a combination of a temporary ceasefire and spikes in armed violence is generally a *norm* for most conflicts today regardless of whether peace process is underway, and a ceasefire that can be described as “neither peace, nor war” fundamentally means only a drop in violence (compared to the active military hostilities stage) and a certain control over it, and not a cessation of it. On the whole, depending on the context and underlying goals of the parties, a ceasefire may achieve its objectives even if it does not result in a complete cessation of fire.

### About the Author:

**Ekaterina A. Stepanova** – Doctor of Political Sciences, Head of Group, Group on Peace and Conflict Studies, Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 23, ul. Profsoyuznaya, Moscow, 117997, Russian Federation. E-mail: stepanova@imemo.ru

### Conflict of interest:

The author declares the absence of conflicts of interest.

### References:

2021. ETH/PRIO Civil Conflict CeaseFire (ETH/PRIO CF). Center for Security Studies, Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zurich (ETH), Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO). 1989–2020. URL: <https://css.ethz.ch/en/research/datasets/civil-conflict-ceasefire.html#:~:text=The%20%20oE2%20o80%20o9CETH%20o2FPRIO%20Civil%20Conflict,civil%20conflicts%20across%20o2065%20countries> (accessed: 20.01.2023).
2021. UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset. Version 3–2021. 1946–2020. Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University. URL: <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/index.html#termination> (accessed: 21.01.2023).
2023. PA-Local: Peace Agreement Dataset (Local Agreements). 1990 – January 2023. Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh. URL: <https://www.peaceagreements.org/lsearch> (accessed: 19.07. 2022).
2023. PA-X Peace Agreements Database and Dataset, Version 7. 1990 – January 2023. Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh. URL: <https://www.peaceagreements.org> (accessed: 20.01.2023).
2021. UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset (UCDP/PA). Version 22.1. 1975–2021. Uppsala Conflict Data Program. Department of Peace and Conflict Research. Uppsala University. URL: <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/index.html#peaceagreement> (accessed: 21.01. 2023).
- Akebo M. 2016. *Ceasefire Agreements and Peace Processes: A Comparative Study*. Abington: Routledge. 230 p.
- Badanjak S. 2021. The PA-X Peace Agreement Database: Reflections on Documenting the Practice of Peacemaking. *Pathways to Peace and Security*. 2(61). P. 24–42. DOI: 10.20542/2307-1494-2021-2-24-42
- Bara C., Clayton G., Rustad S. A. 2021. Understanding Ceasefires. *International Peacekeeping*. 28(3). P. 329–340. DOI:10.1080/13533312.2021.1926236
- Bell C., Badanjak S., Beujouan J., Epple T., Forster R. et al. 2020. *PA-X Peace Agreements Database and Dataset, Version 4*. Edinburgh: Political Settlements Research Programme. University of Edinburgh. 71 p.
- Bell C., Wise L. 2022. Peace Processes and Their Agreements. In: R. MacGinty, A. Wanis-St. John, eds. *Contemporary Peacemaking: Peace Processes, Peacebuilding and Conflict*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. P. 381–406.
- Bebeshko E. V., Shipilin P. I. 2020. Diplomatija peremiriya: vopros zaversheniya sovestso-fin-skoi i nachala laplandskoi voyny [Ceasefire Diplomacy: The Issue of Ending the Soviet-Finnish War and Starting the Lapland War]. *Uchonyie zapiski Krymskogo Federal'nogo Universiteta: Istoricheskiye nauki* [Research Notes of Crimean Federal University: History]. 6 (72). P. 3–16. (In Russian).
- Chounet-Cambas L. 2011. *Negotiating Ceasefires: Dilemmas and Options for Mediators*. Mediation Practice Series. Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. 40 p.
- Clayton G., Nathan L., Wiehler C. 2021. Ceasefire Success: A Conceptual Framework. *International Peacekeeping*. 28(3). P. 341–365. DOI: 10.1080/ 13533312.2021.1894934

Clayton G., Nygard H. M., Rustad S. C. A., Strand H. 2023. Ceasefires in Civil Conflict: A Research Agenda. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 67(7–8). P. 1279–1295. DOI: 10.1177/002200272221128300

Clayton G., Nygard H. M., Strand H., Rustad S. C. A., Wiehler C., Sagard T., Landsverk P., Ryland R., Sticher V., Wink E., Bara C. 2023. Introducing the ETH/PRIO Civil Conflict Ceasefire Dataset. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 67(7–8). P. 1430–1451. DOI: 10.1177/002200272221129

Clayton G., Sticher V. 2021. The Logic of Ceasefires in Civil War. *International Studies Quarterly*. 65(3). P. 633–646. DOI: 10.1093/isq/sqab026

Davydov O. V., Novichkova M. N. 2020. Mirnyi protsess na Koreiskom poluostrove: problemy i puti razvitiya [Peace Process on the Korean Peninsula: Problems and Prospects]. *World Economy and International Relations*. 64(1). P. 56–63. (In Russian). DOI: 10.20542/0131-2227-2020-64-1- 56-63

Dronova S. Y. 2017. Vzaimootnosheniya mezhdru Stranoi Baskov i Madridom posle ustanovleniya peremiriya s ETA [Relations between the Basque State and Madrid Following a Ceasefire with ETA]. *Obschestvo: politika, ekonomika, pravo* [Society: Politics, Economics, Law]. No. 2. P. 26–29. (In Russian).

Forster R. 2019. *Ceasefire Arrangements*. PA-X Peace Agreements Database Spotlight Series. Edinburgh: Political Settlements Research Programme. University of Edinburgh. 15 p.

Fortna V. P. 2004. *Peace Time: Cease-Fire Agreements and the Durability of Peace*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 264 p.

Haysom N., Hottinger J. 2010. *Do's and Don'ts of Sustainable Ceasefire Agreements*. Presentation revised for use by Peace Appeal in Nepal and Sri Lanka; initially presented to the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) Sudan Peace Process Workshop on Detailed Security Arrangements in Sudan During the Transition. URL: [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/DosAndDontofCeasefireAgreements\\_HaysomHottinger2010.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/DosAndDontofCeasefireAgreements_HaysomHottinger2010.pdf) (accessed: 02.02.2023).

Hinnebusch R., Imady O. 2017. Syria's Reconciliation Agreements. *Syria Studies*. 9(2). P. 1–14.

Högbladh S. 2022. *UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset Codebook Version 22.1*. Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University. 14 p.

Karakuş D. C. 2023. Resolution of Local Conflicts Involving Armed Islamists: The Syrian Civil War, 2011–2021. *Pathways to Peace and Security*. 1(64). P. 58–75. DOI: 10.20542/2307-1494-2023-1-58-75

Karakuş D. C., Svensson I. 2020. Between the Bombs: Exploring Partial Ceasefires in the Syrian Civil War, 2011–2017. *Terrorism and Political Violence*. 32(4). P. 681–700. DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2017.1393416

Ki Kvan So. 2020. Sovestko-kitaisko-severokoreiskie konsultatsii po viprosu of zakluchenii peremiriya v Koreiskoi voine [Soviet-Chinese-North Korean Consultations on Ceasefire in the War in Korea]. *Voprosy istorii* [History Issues]. 10(3). P. 274–287. (In Russian). DOI: 10.31166/Voprosy-Istorii202010 Statyi47

Kreutz J. 2021. *Uppsala Conflict Termination Dataset Codebook. v.3*. Uppsala: Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University. 13 p.

MacGinty R. 2006. *No War, No Peace: The Rejuvenation of Stalled Peace Processes and Peace Accords*. Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies Series. Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 230 p.

Matveeva A. 2022. Donbass at Limbo: Self-Proclaimed Republics in The Inter-War Period (2014–2021). *Pathways to Peace and Security*. 1(62). P. 92–106. DOI: 10.20542/2307-1494-2022-1-92-106

Polyakova Y. Y. 2022. Irlandiya v gody voyny za nezavisimost': ot peremiriya k mirnomu dogovoru [Ireland During the War for Independence: From Ceasefire to Peace Treaty]. *Novaya i noveishaya istoriya* [Modern and Contemporary History]. No. 5. P. 120–130. (In Russian). DOI: 10.31857/S01303864002 0639-0



Slantchev B. L. 2003. The Principle of Convergence in Wartime Negotiations. *American Political Science Review*. 97(4). P. 621–632.

Sosnowski M. 2020. Negotiating Statehood Through Ceasefires: Syria's De-Escalation Zones. *Small Wars and Insurgencies*. 31(7–8). P. 1395–1414. DOI: 10.1080/09592318.2020. 1829872.

Stedman S. J. 1997. Spoiler problems in peace processes. *International Security*. 22(2). P. 5–53. DOI:10.2307/2539366

Stepanova E. A. 2022. Mirnyy protsess: k sodержatel'nomu opredeleniyu [Peace Process: On Substantive Definition]. *World Economy and International Relations*. 66(9). P. 5–18. (In Russian). DOI: 10.20542/0131-2227-2022-66-9-5-18

Stepanova E. 2006. Terrorism as a Tactic of Spoilers in Peace Processes. In: E. Newmann, O. Richards, eds. *Challenges to Peacebuilding: Managing Spoilers During Conflict Resolution*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press. P. 78–104.

Sticher V., Vukovic S. 2021. Bargaining in Intrastate Conflicts: The Shifting Role of Ceasefires. *Journal of Peace Research*. 58(6). P. 1284–1299. DOI: 10.1177/0022343320982658

Zagorski A. 2022. The OSCE, Ukraine, and Peace Process. *Pathways to Peace and Security*. 1(62), P. 121–132. DOI: 10.20542/2307-1494-2022-1-121-132