

KEY CONCEPTS - CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES

CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES

A cessation of hostilities is an agreement between the conflict parties to stop fighting for an extended period. It tends to be broader and more formal than a humanitarian ceasefire, a truce and other conflict mitigation and battlefield management agreements.

Cessation of hostilities agreements are normally:

- Agreed in writing.
- Inclusive of provisions on proscribed participant behaviour.
- Contain a declaration from one of both parties that they will suspend fighting.

SCOPE OF A CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES AGREEMENT

Generally temporary:

- Does not attempt to permanently conclude hostilities.
- No formal commitments nor agreed monitoring and verification process.
- Declared for a specified, generally short, period (although they may extend into longer periods where conflict parties benefit from the suspension of violence but are unwilling to progress to more permanent, formal arrangements)
- Aims to create space for wider negotiations.

CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES AGREEMENTS IN A PEACE PROCESS

Conflict management:

- Attempt to control, contain, or limit violence for a specific period, without resolving underlying issues.
- Parties remain willing to return to conflict.

- Often signals a party's intention to move towards agreement and assess the intentions of opponent(s).
- Can provide opportunities to build connections between conflict parties, often focusing on technical rather than political issues.
- When successful, they can provide confidence building measures upon which future negotiations can build.

However, engaging in a cessation of hostilities agreement does not necessarily signal a desire for peace, and there are various reasons parties may enter a cessation of hostilities agreement:

- If a party's political goals are best served through a peace process, then a cessation of hostilities agreement can support the peace process.
- However, if the opposite is true, a party may use a cessation of hostilities to advance their political and military position, rather than pursuing peace.
 - Parties may seek out cessations in order to re-arm and re-group, or consolidate territorial control.
 - Parties may also seek out cessations to manage or resolve conflict or serve a humanitarian purpose, but may still seek to benefit militarily from the break in hostilities.
 - Parties may also enter such agreements to relieve domestic or international pressure, without genuine commitment to the cessation of hostilities.
- Concerns regarding an opponent's ability to re-arm and re-group during such agreements poses a major impediment to their implementation.
- Whether a party enters such agreements for genuine reasons or not, violations remain common, agreements are not designed to last indefinitely, and generally lack provisions to monitor and verify compliance, and de-escalate the battlefield hostilities.