

Blessed are the Peacemakers?
Sant'Egidio's Role in Transnational Conflict Mediation

Paul Rockower

5/11/09

PUBD 515 Final (2,000 words)

PUBD 515 Mid-Term-Revised

In the realm of transnational diplomacy and global security, Sant'Egidio illustrates the role that Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) perform as peacemakers. Given the extraordinary role that this nongovernmental body played mediating an intergovernmental agreement, the author will examine the factors enabled Sant'Egidio's success in brokering peace. This paper will analyze the dynamics associated with Sant'Egidio's work in Mozambique; UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali termed the group's methods, the "Sant'Egidio Formula," this paper will examine the aforementioned formula and how this formula exemplifies the course concept of "polylateralism." (Wiseman, 2004)

While focusing on Sant'Egidio's role in Mozambique, it will also examine the organization's efforts in mediating Algeria's civil war. This focus on other mediation efforts is to offer contrast for the group's work in multiple conflict situations, and to address whether Sant'Egidio's work marks a new paradigm in international peacemaking, or was merely a "one-off." In examining Sant'Egidio's efforts as a model, and "Sant'Egidio Formula" as a blueprint for transnational actors conducting conflict mediation, the working hypothesis is whether Sant'Egidio's Mozambique efforts may, unfortunately, be the highpoint for the organization's diplomacy work.

The U.N. of Trastevere

The Community of Sant'Egidio was founded in Rome in 1968 by a group of students seeking to work with the dispossessed in the Italian capital's impoverished neighborhoods. Named for the church that serves as its headquarters in the Trastevere

district of Rome, the volunteer community expanded its services and scope by taking on humanitarian aid projects throughout Europe and also Latin America and Africa.

A Catholic movement and lay association with links and lines of communication to the Holy See and Italian government, Sant'Egidio exists as an independent organization from both. Related to Schmitz (2004) conceptions of NGOs functioning similar to a state, Sant'Egidio is able to maintain its independence because it behaves in fashions akin to a state. Since it remains solely accountable to its volunteer membership base, Sant'Egidio possesses latitude to stray from the traditional mores of the Catholic Church, while still being influenced by church dogma and doctrine (Ryall, 2001, p.54-55). This independence has augured well in the community's forays into conflict mediation.

In assessing the role of transnational actors in the "high politics" of peacemaking, the benefits and limitations of such actors in conflict mediation require review. Sant'Egidio carries out "track-one-and-a-half diplomacy" in which unofficial actors arbitrate with official government representatives towards a peaceful mediation of conflict via either direct mediation or consultation as impartial facilitator (Chigas, 2007, p.555-6). NGOs participating in conflict mediation receive accolades for their ability to develop more expansive ideas and methods to address multifaceted conflicts that involve concerns beyond state interests and state borders. NGOs are considered to bring "flexibility, expertise, rapid responses, and commitment to local environments" as they pursue conflict mediations in a changing international landscape. However, problems arise from various and sometimes-competing agendas, lack of accountability of NGOs, and occasional grandstanding for political purpose (Chigas, 2007, p.553). These noted

strengths and weaknesses are relevant for NGOs generally, and NGOs participating in conflict mediation specifically.

Success in Mozambique

Following Mozambique's independence from Portugal in 1975, civil war soon broke out between the ruling Marxist-oriented Frelimo and the right-wing Renamo insurgency movement—backed first by the white-minority Rhodesian regime and later by the apartheid South African government. The civil war caused tremendous destruction, dislocation and devastation on Mozambique, leaving nearly 1 million people dead, 1 million refugees in neighboring countries and 2 million internally displaced Mozambicans (Msabaha, 1995, p.210).

Sant'Egidio became involved in Mozambique in 1976 through contacts with Don Jaime Gonçalves, the archbishop of Beira. Initially, Sant'Egidio facilitated dialogue between the leadership of the Italian Communist party and Frelimo to ease religious restrictions, and served as intermediaries between the Vatican and Mozambique Catholic leaders with the Frelimo government. Sant'Egidio later opened lines of communication with Renamo to free kidnapped missionaries and facilitated high level contacts for the rebel group with the Catholic Church and Italian government. As drought and famine caused humanitarian crises in Mozambique during the 1980s, Sant'Egidio worked to provide Mozambique with thousands of tons of humanitarian aid, and exposed Mozambique's plight in Europe, and set up humanitarian services to help orphans, widows and others affected by the war (Hume, 1994, p.15-19).

Through its extensive network of contacts on both sides of the conflict, and based on the trust engendered through its humanitarian work, Sant'Egidio found itself in position to carry out conflict mediation. Vines (1998) noted, "Sant'Egidio's involvement with the Mozambican peace process was made possible by the informal and flexible networks of relation it developed in the country" (p.32).

Moreover, the changing regional and international landscapes helped create a reality that made reconciliation possible. Chigas (2007) noted, "unofficial intermediaries can play valuable roles where official mediators are unavailable, uninterested, or seen as biased" (p.562); the Mozambique conflict suffered from the latter two points. Although both parties in the conflict received tacit support and backing from the Cold War superpowers, Mozambique was not deemed as vital as other contentious areas in the superpower chess match and did not receive the same attention as Angola, Nicaragua or Afghanistan. Meanwhile, by the early 1990s, the changing situations in Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe and apartheid South Africa curtailed the level of regional support offered to Mozambique's belligerent parties (Alden & Simpson, 1993). Although various Southern African nations attempted to mediate the conflict, all proved unsuccessful because of perceived biases towards one party.

The relative disinterest of the Soviet Union and United States, the inability for either belligerent party to accept a subjective regional mediator and the changing dynamic with the Cold War's conclusion and shifting situation in Southern Africa allowed Sant'Egidio to venture into conflict mediation. Moreover, contrary to the notion that more attention to a problematic situation is positive, the disinterest in Mozambique proved beneficial as it allowed for innovation in mediation methods, and space for

Sant'Egidio to operate. Bartoli (1999) noted, "Mozambique did not fall under the international spotlight. The Mozambique negotiations, therefore, provided the perfect opportunity to experiment in a very original way with innovative conflict resolution methods." (p.260)

Given Sant'Egidio's contacts with both sides from its extensive record of humanitarian assistance and intermediary work, the organization fostered a perception of neutrality that allowed it to broker mediation activities between the adversarial parties; its perceived neutrality and independence was a boon for getting the belligerents to the negotiating table at a similarly neutral country—Italy, at a neutral venue— its headquarters in Rome. Similar to another transnational actor, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Sant'Egidio benefited from its perceived neutrality, and kept the parties at the negotiating table through its similar style of quiet diplomacy and discretion.

Beginning in July 1990, and continuing for the next 27 months, the Sant'Egidio-led mediation team utilized a conflict mediation strategy based on patient, discreet and informal negotiations through "synergies" that aligned governmental and nongovernmental actors together in the peacemaking endeavor. UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali would christen this model of flexibility, informality and discretion involving governmental and non-governmental actors as "the Sant'Egidio Formula," noting the organization: "practiced its techniques characterized by confidentiality and informality, together an in harmony with the official work of international governments and inter-governmental organizations." (Martinelli, 1998)

The Sant'Egidio Formula is quintessential "polylateral diplomacy" in conflict mediation. Sant'Egidio was able work on varying levels with state and nonstate actors through informal, discreet dialogue to bring rapprochement to the warring parties in Mozambique; the questions remains whether the example marks a paradigm shift in peacemaking or simply a high-point in polylateral diplomacy.

Failure in Algeria

With the bloody civil war that began following the Algerian Army's overturning of results in the 1991 election, Sant'Egidio attempted to bring all parties together for dialogue in Rome in late 1994. As in Mozambique, Sant'Egidio held long-standing ties and contacts in Algeria through its humanitarian work, and from interreligious dialogue initiatives. Yet the Algerian government refused to participate in Sant'Egidio's initiative, and the Algerian ambassador in Rome denounced Sant'Egidio's interference in Algerian affairs; meanwhile Italian and Holy See ambassadors in Algiers were summoned to the Algerian Foreign Ministry to report on Sant'Egidio's initiative, to which both distanced their respective governments from the community's work.

Contrasting with the Mozambique situation, the refusal of Algeria's governmental participation made it diplomatically problematic for other states to participate, hence while Italy played a major role in the Mozambique negotiations, it could only send observers to the Algerian negotiations (Martinelli, 1998). Although Sant'Egidio was able to bring the Algerian opposition parties together, including the Islamist FIS (Islamic Salvation Front), and create a program of agreement under the Rome Platform, its work was rejected by the Algerian regime as an outside intrusion (Quandt, 1998, p.70).

When the Rome Platform was issued in January 1995, the Algerian regime rallied against the initiative as outside interference, and set the government-sponsored press on rounds of denunciations claiming Sant'Egidio as "the Vatican's Fifth Column" and "servants of the CIA," while also holding public demonstrations against the initiative (Martinelli, 1998). The Algerian government also used its opposition to Sant'Egidio's interference as a campaign slogan in the 1997 elections: "yes to peace, no to St. Egidio." (Giro, 1998)

Although Giro (1998) noted that charges of outside interference became the *leitmotiv* of reaction of the Algerian government to any party attempting to intervene, Italy's Ambassador to Algeria Franco de Courten (2003) questioned the appropriateness of Sant'Egidio's efforts in Algeria, writing after the failure of the Rome Platform: "St. Egidio has continued in all ways and in every community to re-launch the idea and to seek dialog and negotiation. Perhaps at Trastevere....the community fails to see the circumstances that Algerians find hard to accept when a Catholic organization interferes in the internal affairs of an Islamic country!" (p.424)

Moreover, as Simmons (1998) comments, "Even legitimate, well-established groups sometimes seize on issues that seem designed to promote their own image and fundraising efforts than to advance the public interest"(p.90). Akin to Greenpeace's grandstanding over its 1995 denunciation of the Royal Dutch/Shell-Brent Spar oilrig incident, De Courten (2003, p.424) derides Sant'Egidio's full-frontal push to insert itself into mediating the Algerian conflict as stemming from the group's desire to win a Nobel Peace prize.

In Algeria, Sant'Egidio's efforts failed because it could not gain acceptance for their mediation role by the singular most important party involved—the Algerian government, therefore could not implement its formula of polyilateral mediation effectively. Moreover, the Algerian government's refusal to accept Sant'Egidio as a mediator hampered the ability for other states such as Italy to play a serious role in the nonstate actor's mediation work.

Conclusion: The Romance of Sant'Egidio

In the pantheon of global civil society literature, Sant'Egidio's work is often mythologized in a similar fashion to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines Treaty (ICBL), insofar as the ICBL Treaty is held up to show the power of transnational actors shaping the workings of global civil society; yet neither are truly emblematic cases as the level of success has yet to be fully replicated.

Sant'Egidio was rightly praised for its diplomatic innovation that brought closure to Mozambique's war; however the confluence of events in the changing international landscape, discretion and inattention available given Mozambique's obscurity and the unanticipated nature of Sant'Egidio's role all contributed to success in the aforementioned venture.

Following's Mozambique zenith, Sant'Egidio has remained involved in conflict mediation, but to more limited success. In Algeria, Sant'Egidio's efforts proved unsuccessful, as they were deemed an unwelcome intrusion by the Algerian government. The Algerian case serves as a reminder that in transnational conflict mediation, nonstate actors still require a "buy-in" by state actors to create a feasible process and cannot stage-

manage a mediation process even when based on sound formulas. Although Sant'Egidio was part of the solution in Mozambique, its role in Algeria made it part of the problem.

Sant'Egidio deserves praise for its peacemaking, and offers a successful model for conflict mediation for transnational actors, but its sanctification is premature. While failure in Algeria illustrated that the Sant'Egidio Formula is not a panacea for conflict management, it does not discount that Sant'Egidio has demonstrated a niche capability for transnational actors in conflict mediation.

Annotated Bibliography

- 1) Alden, C. & Simpson, M. (1993). Mozambique: a Delicate Peace. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 31 (I), pp. 109-130
This article offers good insight into the power dynamics regarding the parties in the Mozambique civil war, and surrounding the regional and global players in the conflict in Mozambique. It offers a good assessment of the geo-political and geo-strategic factors at play.
- 2) Armon, J., Hendrickson, D. & Vines, A., eds. (1998). The Mozambican peace process in perspective. *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*. 3 London: Conciliation Resources.
A comprehensive look at all the parties involved in bringing the Mozambique civil war to a close. The pamphlet features analysis from a variety of perspectives, with assessments of regional diplomacy, church mediation, financial factors and the healing and reconstruction process. It also features primary documents, including the General Peace Agreement.
- 3) Bartoli, A. (1999). Mediating Peace in Mozambique. In Crocker, C., Hampson, F. & Aall, P. (Eds), *Herding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World* (pp. 245-273). Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.
Bartoli outlines the role of Sant'Egidio in mediating the Mozambique conflict. His piece offers history related to the conflict and how Sant'Egidio became involved. Moreover, he succinctly describes Sant'Egidio mediation strategy and how it was implemented amid complex multiparty mediations.
- 4) Chigas, D. (2007). Capacities and Limits of NGOs as Conflict Managers. In Crocker, C., Hampton, F. & Aall, P. (Eds), *Leashing the Dogs of War* (pp.553-581). Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.
This article offers terrific academic theory and understanding for NGO involvement in conflict mediation. It helps shape the theoretical structure and rubric of NGO involvement in conflict resolution.
- 5) De Courten, F. (2003). *Algeria Diaries: 1996-1996*. Cantanzaro: Rubbettino CF Sandro Magistor. St. Egidio and Algeria: An Ambassador's Disturbing Revelation. From: <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/7005?&eng=y>
An iconoclastic insight into the role of Sant'Egidio from a high-level perspective that is critical of the group's meddling. An important work, as it gives pushback for the praise often heaped on the group.
- 6) Giro, M. (July-September 1998). The Community of Saint Egidio and its Peace-Make Activities. *The International Spectator*, XXXIII (3).
This article is offers a clear look at Sant'Egidio's character and mission from the inside, and offers the Community's objectives, perspectives and experiences in three case studies (Mozambique, Algeria and Guatemala).

In addition, it outlines the role of non-governmental organizations in conflict resolution.

- 7) Hume, C. (1994). *Ending Mozambique's War*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.
A clear description of the various players in Mozambique's civil war, as well as a documented detailing of the numerous mediation meetings conducted in the Mozambique peace process.
- 8) Martinelli, M. (March 1998) Mediation Activities by non-State Actors: an Account of Sant'Egidio's Initiatives. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Peace Research Institute.
This article outlines the differences in formal and informal diplomacy, and the theories behind Track II diplomacy. It also gives an in-depth account of Sant'Egidio's mediation experience in Mozambique and Algeria.
- 9) Msabaha, I. (1995). Negotiating an end to Mozambique's Murderous Rebellion. In Zartman, W. *Elusive Peace* (pp.204-230). Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
This article is a thorough examination of the overall mediation process, mediators and proposals in the long-simmering conflict that plagued Mozambique.
- 10) Quandt, W. (1998). *Between Ballots and Bullets: Algeria's Transition from Authoritarianism*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
An authoritative look at the Algerian civil war by the distinguished Middle East scholar at the University of Virginia; this book provides key background to the conflict in Algeria.
- 11) Ryall, D. (2001). The Catholic Church as a Transnational Actor. In Josselin, D. & Wallace, W. (Eds.) *Non-State Actors in World Politics* (pp. 41-58). New York: Palgrave.
This article offers an academic understanding of the transnational capabilities and practices of the world's oldest and largest transnational actors, the Catholic Church.
- 12) Schmitz, H. (2004). Being (Almost) like a State: Challenges and Opportunities for Non-Governmental Activism. In Hermann & Sundelius (Eds). *Comparative Foreign Policy Analysis. Theories and Methods*, unpublished manuscript.
This article gives a clear and detailed outline of how non-State actors mimic and adopt similar institutions to that of State actors. Related to Schmitz "Almost a state" notion, Sant'Egidio organization maintains a membership base (population) that is upwards of 50,000 members (www.santegido.org) and functions with a hierarchical and professional structure (governance); its vast network of contacts offers independent

research capabilities (intelligence); pursues its own independent goals (foreign policy) and engages in mediation activism (diplomacy).

- 13) Simmons, P.J. (Fall 1998). Learning to Live with NGOs. *Foreign Policy*
This article is well-written, sober piece that discusses the realities behind NGOs playing a role in global affairs.
- 14) Wiseman, G. (2004). 'Polyilateralism' and New Modes of Global Dialogue. In Jonsson, C. & Langhorne, R., *Diplomacy*.(pp.36-57) *III*, London: Sage
This piece offers a clear and practical definition of the course concept of polyilateralism. It provides the understanding and background for the theories of polyilateral diplomacy and innovation and how it relates to global civil society.