

The space of manoeuvre for cities in the face of national or international forces is not great. Most cities do not enjoy the unparalleled autonomy that many European cities used post-World War II to build peace from the ground up. Nonetheless, the courageous examples of the Municipal Alliance for Peace (Palestinian and Israeli mayors who continue dialogue and try to develop concrete cooperation projects between their cities), and the Tuzla, Osijek, and Novisad triad of Balkan cities suggest that localities which practice peace at the local level can at least reduce the amount or intensity of armed violence within their boundaries, if not nationally. Primarily, therefore, cities can serve an intermediary role in conflict situations.

In what ways do urban features, such as active civil society, act as shock absorbers for countries teetering on the brink of conflict?

The symbolic power of cities cannot be underestimated, especially in the modern media-driven world. As one respondent noted:

If a city works well in the midst of surrounding conflict, it projects the image of an alternative and provides a sense of possibility for change. This sense of efficacy is often a spark for political action.

The choices of brave locally-elected leaders can have a galvanizing impact on peace. Certain cities are also key centres of cultural, historic, or religious status, such as Jerusalem, Baghdad, and Khartoum. While this can be a source of violence, progress in these cities can have a multiplier effect on peace efforts in a region or country.

Proximity to the people is another key local advantage. Local governments are able to involve a greater variety of people with different backgrounds — minority groups, socio-economic groups, genders — at a higher proportion than national or international governance structures. Moreover, city entities are able to engage their constituents at the most basic and concrete community level, rather than at the abstract national level. Where mayors and local representatives exhibit leadership, these figures are sometimes the first point of mediation between warring parties.

Mass communication is a distinct urban conflict resolution advantage. As one expert wrote:

The density and accessibility of urban populations, the accessibility and availability of public spaces, local media, organized civil