

ADVICE TO PRINCES IN THE GLOBAL AGE

Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars

Edited by I. William Zartman

Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, 1995, 346 pp., indexed.

Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts

By Timothy D. Sisk

Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996, 118 pp.

Reviewed by Anthony Wanis St. John

Conflict resolution, as a new field of inquiry, has emerged over the last two decades from the social sciences collectively—if perhaps unwittingly. Built upon an eclectic group of foundation fields, including, but not limited to, economics, political science, psychology, sociology, anthropology and mathematics, the field of conflict resolution has evolved to deal with the complex problems of international and civil wars. As a discipline, it seeks to explore the nature and evolution of human conflicts from the personal, social and global perspectives and then to propose approaches to their management. As the technological means to utilize organized violence have grown in the last 50 years, so has the necessity and motivation to manage these conflicts in a new way.

As an emerging academic field, conflict resolution has faced a grave identity crisis; its many scholars have pulled it in diverse directions, making theory difficult to contextualize and classify. A recent article by Marieke Kleiboer argues that it is possible to perceive four emerging “proto-theories” in inter-

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national conflict management. These proto-theories view international mediation as, variously, a means of power brokerage, a means of political problem-solving, a means of reestablishing social relationships or a means of domination.¹ According to this framework, I. William Zartman, the author of *Elusive Peace: Negotiating An End to Civil Wars*, would fit squarely into the first category, while a scholar-practitioner like Timothy D. Sisk, author of *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts*, would fit into the second. The work of the late Professor Jeffrey Z. Rubin, of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and Herbert C. Kelman, a social psychologist at Harvard, would also fall into the second category.

Kleiboer argues that the analysts in the first category work to "identify and

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sharpen the general principles governing international mediation and to check their explanatory and productive performance across a wide range of conflict situations. In the process of doing so, crucial contingency factors determining the success or failure of international mediation attempts can be identified."² The scholar-practitioners, who occupy the problem-solving niche of this field, share several assumptions articulated by Kelman: "All of them call for a non-adversarial framework for conflict resolution, an analytical approach, a problem-solving orientation, direct participation by the parties in conflict in jointly shaping a solution, and facilitation by a third party trained in the process of conflict resolution."³

Recent events have pointed to one of the key challenges of this field in the coming years, the proliferation of "internal conflicts." Internal conflicts within sovereign states usually take one of two forms: either the purpose is to secure autonomy, secession, or expanded rights for an "ethnic" or other self-defined group, or to replace the central government on ideological grounds. While these sorts of struggles are hardly new, the removal of the Cold War bipolar context has redefined the expectations of the international community, as well as the role of superpowers. It has also given rise to new lines of inquiry among theorists and scholar-practitioners of conflict resolution. Questions concerning what strategies are useful for *preventing* the escalation of conflicts and for the construction of a stable coexistence after prolonged conflict have been neglected in the past and are only beginning to be addressed in the literature of conflict resolution.

It is this theoretical void that the two works examined here seek to fill: *Elusive Peace: Negotiating An End to Civil Wars* and *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts* are two recent examples of literature that address the internal or intra-state dimensions of conflict. Both Zartman and

Sisk explore practical strategies for managing internal and ethnic conflict, but their work contrasts two important general perspectives in this field—the *realpolitik* academic and the activist scholar-practitioner.

In *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*, Zartman, a professor at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, who is perhaps best known for his “ripeness” theory, asks: why is internal conflict so resistant to negotiation? The introductory and concluding chapters offer provisional answers arising from his analysis of the post-Cold War system and the potential for various negotiation strategies to replace armed strife as a way of achieving goals. The rest of the volume examines 11 cases of recent internal conflict from the perspective of 15 authors who are experts either in a particular geographical area or in the field of conflict resolution. The chapters fall into two categories: regional conflicts and centralist conflicts. The former generally refer to secessionist or autonomy-seeking, ethnicity-driven insurgencies, while the latter refer to movements to topple central government on primarily ideological, rather than territorial or ethnic grounds.

Zartman begins by noting several distinctions of internal conflicts: only 25 percent of internal conflicts find their way to the negotiating table and two-thirds of internal conflicts end in the surrender or elimination of one side, an outcome that occurs in only a quarter of inter-state conflicts. One of Zartman’s underlying assumptions is that embattled governments are actually interested in meeting the needs of their people and that insurgencies are simply trying to get their message across to an intransigent government so that the government redresses their grievances. This assumption, which should not be accepted lightly, seeks to simplify the ambiguities of international and internal politics by boiling down lethal conflicts to a mere incompatibility of interests.

Zartman’s hypotheses seem more solid when built on his own previous work. He long ago observed that, in classical conflicts between states, attempts to reduce power imbalances result in a stalemate that is mutually damaging and leads to a condition that is “ripe” for negotiation, since neither party is able to impose its preferred solution. Internal conflicts, in contrast, are characterized by a grave asymmetry that does not lead to this “hurting stalemate.” Instead of seeking negotiation as a way forward, they pursue a conflict-based *modus vivendi*. Zartman’s view is that it is up to the insurgency to balance commitment to war with desire for redress of grievances rather than to pursue the conflict for its own sake. Only then will negotiations be possible. He also describes the four phases of an internal conflict: articulation, mobilization, insurgency and warfare. Only during the first and last phases are negotiations likely to take place (pp. 12-16).

The complexities of asymmetrical internal conflicts, along with the inability of the parties to break out of a zero-sum mentality, point to the need for third-party mediation. Despite the fact that third-party intervention is rarely welcomed, most of the cases examined involved some degree of mediation, a process which “necessarily interferes in the internal affairs of the government” (pp. 20-21). According to Zartman, the most likely candidate for this role is a

neighboring country with direct interests or one with leverage to pressure a "client" party. These assertions echo his earlier arguments on the utility of a mediator with "bias" actually favoring negotiated outcomes.⁴

Zartman also posits that, for it to be successful, the negotiations must encourage the commitment of the insurgents and be extraordinarily manipulative in order to change cost-benefit calculations, intensify the stalemate and "sweeten the proposed outcome" (pp. 20-21). He argues that the success of

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mediation and negotiation is predicated on the promotion of solutions that return the parties to "normal politics," including "the integration of the insurgency into a wider body politic" (pp. 20-21). This may ultimately require the creation of an entirely new political system. Interestingly, he notes that segments of each side will be left out in order to reach a settlement, and the size of the excluded segments is actually the subject of a tactical judgment that negotiators must make.⁵

Zartman offers this advice to modern princes: stalemate is a potentially creative force which must be taken advantage of through recognition of the insurgents and dialogue over reasonable demands while battling the extremes. Ceasefires, in the context of asymmetry, are a deceptive panacea—while they may be a

confidence-building measure, to require them as a precondition to talks only encourages strategic behavior by extremists willing to derail negotiations. Harnessing the commitment of insurgents and channeling their energy into a new political system is essential. He optimistically posits that, if insurgents retain the potential to disrupt a new political arrangement and governments act in awareness of this, then political arrangements may be adhered to by all (pp. 334-338).

The chapters focusing on specific conflicts offer some valuable analytical insight into why certain negotiations and mediations have succeeded or failed. These case studies, much like the academic field they contribute to, represent a diversity of perspectives and are of varying quality. The chapters themselves are not forward-looking in terms of formulating prescriptions for the policymaker. Rather, they serve as a test for the hypotheses Zartman sets forth in his introduction.

The chapters on regional conflict include Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the Sudan. Perhaps the most interesting piece is "Sudan's Conflict of Identities," by Francis Mading Deng. Deng focuses on the underlying causes of that conflict: the concept of conflicting national identity and long chains of broken agreements. Interwoven with this dynamic is the assertion that the negotiations involved hidden agendas concerning the issue of identity. The author uses this platform to ask several more general questions: does Zart-

man's mutually hurting stalemate signify that the "nation bleeds to a dangerous point" or that "the leaders themselves feel a threat to their political survival?" (pp. 99-100). Unfortunately for the Sudan, the author reasons that, regardless of national suffering, it is the leadership that must feel a threat to its existence in order to move toward conflict resolution.

In terms of "centralist" conflicts, the volume includes chapters on Lebanon, South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Colombia and the Philippines. The two most significant chapters are those on Lebanon and South Africa. In the first, the authors focus on the changing nature of the conflict in Lebanon, noting that, in contrast with other conflicts, Syrian mediation *preceded* military intervention. The authors claim that Syria's increasing control over various actors in the conflict contributed to the escalations of violence. A parallel and competing factor in the Lebanese conflict was the drive for Lebanese political reform. While it can hardly be denied that Israel's military activities against Palestinian militancy created a further context for Syrian intervention, this chapter concentrates almost exclusively on Syria's role and says nothing about Israel's creation of a proxy army, its occupation of South Lebanon, its recurring invasions or its political interventions. The authors also underplay the role of the PLO's military and political impact on Lebanese politics.

Zartman's own chapter concerning the South African negotiations is also a significant contribution to the volume. While neglecting and almost dismissing the role of the National Peace Accord, which was South Africa's home-grown instrument of conflict management, Zartman takes note of the government's clandestine complicity in the social violence that accompanied the negotiated dismantling of apartheid. In his theoretical discussion, the author notes that "unless commitment is worn down to some extent on both sides, the two (or more) ideal outcomes can never be brought into harmony" (p. 168). He cautions that, despite the "miraculous" transformation of the internal conflict, the process was embittering to both Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Clerk and further warns that "the multilayered composition of parties and their negotiations" keeps open the possibility of permanent rupture until the country arrives at a final transformation (p. 169).

In essence, Zartman's volume offers analytical insight into past conflicts and then moves toward forming and testing several hypotheses rather than making concrete proposals for dealing with future conflicts. It is a fine addition to this field's literature and its hypotheses and conclusions can only benefit from further testing. While the cases make instructional connections between recent world events and conflict resolution theory, it is useful to note the many unresolved cases not discussed here: India's conflict with Kashmir,

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Israel's conflict with Palestine, Russia's conflict with Chechnya, and so on. Zartman's volume also neglects the proposition that justice seeking may be the only alternative in certain conflicts. The role of the mediator or negotiator, if it *imposes* a settlement, may involve the implementation of an unjust solution that may ultimately have negative implications for the longevity of the settlement. This theme is taken up by the author of the second book examined here.

Sisk, a scholar who has focused on violence in the resolution stages of ethnic conflict, particularly in South Africa, makes the jump into the evaluation of policies that address incidences of ethnic conflict in *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts*.⁶ Attempting to bridge the gap between foreign policymaking and scholarship, he notes that existing and past policies designed to promote power sharing have been woefully uninformed by scholarly activity. Unlike the Zartman volume, this work focuses on power-sharing arrangements as a category of potential solutions to internal conflicts. Sisk's definition of power sharing refers to "political systems that foster governing coalitions inclusive of most, if not all, major mobilized ethnic groups in society" (p. 4). His primary concern is the viability of such arrangements and the circumstances under which they might ameliorate ethnic conflict.

Sisk's concise and highly readable volume accomplishes more, in less than 120 pages, than have many monumental works. The author proceeds on the assumption that, ideally, ethnic group claims to self-determination should be accommodated in a democratic framework within existing states.⁷ He then undertakes a summary but highly insightful survey of theories of ethnic conflict. He underlines the work of other authors regarding the centrality of conflicting ethnic groups' perceptions of each other and the importance of changing antagonistic perceptions. The role of the existing government is also important; whether it stands above the conflict or is dominated by one of the ethnic groups is an important determinant of its amenability to power sharing.

Noting that democratic governance as majoritarianism is not especially conducive to settling ethnic conflicts, Sisk proposes *consociational* and *integrative* approaches to constructing democratic institutions and practices. He distinguishes systems in which ethnic groups are seen as distinct social building blocks and systems that seek coalition participation in democratic institutions, in transcendence of ethnic differences. Sisk dedicates an entire chapter to elaborating the kinds of practices that would fall under each rubric, illuminated by an analysis of historic examples of the various structures. He also briefly examines how peace processes interact with moments of transition in ethnic conflicts, and how they can be either positively harnessed or left to deteriorate. Most notably, Sisk concludes that the degree of unity of parties and the ability of leadership to persuade followers to "buy-in" to the peace process are key variables. In this regard, Sisk contrasts the persuasive abilities of F. W. de Clerk in South Africa and Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres in Israel.

Turning to the main thrust of his thesis, Sisk discusses in depth the dynamics of international intervention in ethnic conflict. He addresses the artificiality of existing border arrangements and asks policymakers not to consider

borders "sacrosanct" (p. 89). He discusses the short-sighted and uninformed emphasis policymakers can place on the holding of democratic elections, while at the same time identifying them as potential turning points that can either polarize or ameliorate ethnic conflicts (pp. 108-114). Sisk also promotes the idea of "linkage," or the reliance on the desire of multiethnic societies' to join collective security and global trade arrangements in order to promote "conflict mitigating practices" (p. 105).

He notes a paradox regarding power sharing: if it is proposed too early, the ethnic groups in conflict may not have formulated the desire for power or capacity to exercise it, or their intentions may be to actually perpetuate their own power. Conversely, if offered too late, the divisions and enmity may become too deep to encompass coexistence arrangements, as events in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere demonstrate. This leads to a renewed emphasis on timing and Sisk discusses the merits of early intervention by the United Nations or other international actors to craft electoral arrangements that best support power sharing. One example of a late power sharing arrangement that did work, according to Sisk, is the Cambodian process engineered by U.N. Special Representative Yasushi Akashi.

Sisk recommends a blending of "scholarly and policymaker knowledge in reaching conclusions about whether any given power sharing practice will have a potentially adverse effect on a given ethnic conflict" (p. xiv). Sisk also proposes that the international community abandon the Cold War idea that ethnicity should not be a factor in international and intrastate affairs. Instead, identity politics must be managed through innovative solutions carried out at optimal points in the life of the conflict. He concludes by proposing that the success of power sharing arrangements is determined by a number of factors: The existence of moderate elites with a shared sense of common destiny on both sides, power sharing arrangements that are flexible and sensitive to changing demographics and external environments, equitable resource distribution that results without creating further grievances, arrangements that are indigenous and not externally imposed, and progress toward more integrative solutions rather than consociational ones (pp. 117-118).

This eminently practical treatment of a complex problem ties together the most important variables that must be considered regarding the security and continued existence of a multiethnic world without becoming mired in exhaustive detail. Sisk's section on escalation and de-escalation would, nonetheless, benefit from an examination of the research in the newer Zartman volume.

Although these two works approach the field of conflict resolution from very distinct theoretical orientations, they both offer important insights. Zart-

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man, the *realpolitik* academic, advances his own theories, illuminated through critical case studies by other authors. He largely succeeds in his quest to explain why internal conflict resists resolution and at least begins the theoretical journey of proposing solutions. Sisk, the activist scholar-practitioner, levels sound criticism at the policymaking assumptions that lead to uninformed imposition of outside political settlements on ethnic conflicts. Both are essential manuals for princes of the global age—diplomats, mediators and all those who aspire to make a difference in a world where diversity is to be preserved, not eradicated.

Notes

1. See generally Marieke Kleiboer, "Understanding Success and Failure of International Mediation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 40, No. 2 (June 1996).
2. *Ibid.*, 380.
3. Herbert C. Kelman, "Foreword" to Dennis J. D. Sandole and Hugo van der Merwe, eds., *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice: Integration and Application* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).
4. Numerous authors address the bias issue. See for example, William P. Smith, "Effectiveness of the Biased Mediator," *Negotiation Journal* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1985); Saadia Touval, "The Context of Mediation," *Negotiation Journal* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1985); Touval, "The Superpowers as Mediators" in *Mediation in International Relations: Multiple Approaches to Conflict Management*, eds. Jacob Bercovitch and Jeffrey Z. Rubin; Touval and Zartman, *International Mediation in Theory and Practice* (Boulder, CO and London, UK: Westview Press, 1985).
5. Little writing seems to have addressed this issue. For a perspective on the exclusion of parties that can result from "back-channel" diplomacy, such as that utilized to reach the PLO-Israel Declaration of Principles, see Anthony Wanis St. John, *Assessing Advantages and Disadvantages of Back Channel Diplomacy: Negotiations Between the Palestinians and Israel*, unpublished manuscript, 1997.
6. See for example, Timothy D. Sisk, "The Violence-Negotiation Nexus: South Africa in Transition and the Politics of Uncertainty," *Negotiation Journal* Vol. 9, No. 1 (1993): 77-94. See also *Islam and Democracy: Religion, Politics and Power in the Middle East* (Washington, DC, United States Institute for Peace Press, 1992)
7. This position, while consistent with state practice of international law, excludes from discussion such situations as Palestine; where part of a territory lacks statehood for its original inhabitants, while statehood is accorded to more recent arrivals on another portion.

