Journal of Conflict Studies

Conflict Resolution

Karen Mingst

Volume 16, numéro 2, fall 1996

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs16_02re01

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (imprimé)
1715-5673 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer ce document

Mingst, K. (1996). Conflict Resolution. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, *16*(2), 125–127.

Vol. XVI No. 2, Fall 1996

REVIEW ESSAY

Conflict Resolution

Zartman, I. William, ed. *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1995.

Zartman, I. William and Victor A. Kremenyuk, eds. *Cooperative Security: Reducing Third World Wars*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995.

The end of the Cold War has ushered in an era where regional conflicts increasingly take centre stage. These conflicts, all of which have both historic and contemporary roots, are the subject of scholarly and policy maker's attention. The two volumes edited by I. William Zartman focus on this phenomenon, with special attention to the processes of negotiation and the dynamics of conflict resolution among the contending parties.

The more general book, the one which should be read first, is *Collective Security*. The book is a broad-ranging one: examining on the one hand, "the conditions, bases, and mechanisms of cooperation between the two [the United States and Russia] in Third World security issues," (p. xii) and analyzing, on the other, from the perspective of specific geographic regions, "the nature of conflict and superpower roles as a comparative springboard for the analysis of future possibilities." (p. xiii) To accomplish these goals, the co-editors, an American and a Russian academic, have enlisted the contributions from their respective countries.

Zartman's first chapter introduces two useful typologies which provide a framework for discussion of the issues. The first is a typology of strategies available to great powers with respect to a regional conflict. Great powers may be *crusaders*, preferring military intervention to eliminate the source of the unrest, *sheriff*, taking a position on the "right side," *umpire*, using methods of indirect intervention (economic, military, or support by multilateral institutions) on the side of "right," *mender*, utilizing diplomatic intervention skills, *dampener*, withholding from participants to quell the conflict, *bystander*, preferring a hands-off approach, or *spoiler*, breaking up opportunities for collective action. It is unfortunate that the subsequent chapters do not systematically employ this thought-provoking and comprehensive typology.

The second framework, elaborated by Udalov, offers a categorization of different regional interests, namely coincident interests: intrastate separatist or subnational conflict for self-determination with external support; nonintersecting interests: intrastate replacement of internal ideological conflicts for central government control with external support; and conflicting interests: interstate claims on neighboring territories, and broad conflict over regional structures. (pp. 11-13)

The different interests characterized above have direct implications for conflict reduction. And that is the subject of eight of the case study chapters in Part 3. For example, from the perspective of the Third World (Mirsky), there remain persistent fears of imperial domination with the absence of a counter-hegemon, especially after the Gulf crisis. For the US (Doran), the Gulf crisis illustrates that it cannot disengage; that will likely lead to increased belligerency in Third World areas. For the India and Pakistani dispute (Thornton and Bratersky), the demise of the Soviet Union means that neither "super"power will have an incentive to support the regional protagonists, but those protagonists may find new supporters in the newly independent central Asian republics.

In the post-Cold War era, is there a cooperative security system where there are principles, rules, and norms for reducing conflict peacefully? What might replace the threat-based cooperation exhibited between the superpowers during the Cold War? Kolodziej suggests that "Russia's reintegration within an expanded European security system is a precondition for its effective contribution to solving regional conflicts . . .." (p. 310) More specifically, Katz proposes some very concrete policy recommendations about how conflict resolution can occur with superpower efforts, including withdrawal of foreign forces, cessation of military assistance, joint diplomatic initiatives, cooperation in holding elections, joint sanctions, and collaboration with international organizations. (p. 316)

A number of these case studies provide excellent background for understanding particular regional conflicts; others do not detail much "new" information or different perspectives. As is often true in edited volumes, however, the analytical connections between the theories and approaches discussed at the outset and the specific cases are tenuous. The authors do not make the appropriate connections, but the reader has the information available for making such generalizations.

It is the conflict resolution process which forms the core of the second book, *Elusive Peace.* In the introductory chapter Zartman posits a series of favorable conditions for successful negotiations: a hurting stalemate, a deadline, valid spokespersons, and an idea of a mutual compromise.

The contributors examine cases of ongoing conflict in Angola, Eriterea, Ethiopia, Southern Sudan, Afghanistan, Philippines, among others. The emphasis is not exclusively on the characteristics of these confrontations, but rather on how past negotiations have failed. Tracing the pitfalls of previous negotiations, the authors suggest how changes in negotiation strategies could lead to more effective outcomes, loosely testing the viability of Zartman's hypothesized conditions.

Why have these civil wars proved so intractable? In Sri Lanka (Wriggins), it appears there has been "a near-total lack of trust" among the various sides. (p. 55) In the Basque conflict (Clark), reliance on one-track rather than two-track negotiation may explain the "mutually hurting stalemate." (p. 75) In the Sudan (Deng), the issues are largely hidden from the technical discussions, issues of "competing identities and the alternative

visions." (p. 100) The more generalized conditions point to power asymmetry and objective asymmetry as the main reason for the intractability of many civil wars.

When the goal of the insurgency is revision of the entire political system, such as in Angola, Mozambique, Lebanon, Afghanistan, or South Africa, the problem rests on "shifts in the balance of forces that allow parties with longer-range, cooperative, or coalitional interests to see an advantage in creating a new political system . . .." (p. 123) In Lebanon (Deeb and Deeb), such a party has not been found; "the only mediator to have the power to implement the agreements has been Syria, or the manipulator." (p. 143) In contrast, in Mozambique (Msabaha), peace was attained as each party, FRELIMO and RENAMO, had internal constituencies that called for peace. Zartman attributes the success in South Africa to the "step-break-gesture-step dance pattern" (p. 170) as key to making progress, along with the key role of Mandela and deKlerk.

At one level, this book confirms the obvious: "the difficulty of bringing internal conflict to any successful conclusion." (Zartman, p. 33) When stalemate was "bearable or justified, no settlement was negotiated." (Zartman, p. 334) At another level, however, the findings are more subtle and worthy of consideration. If the conditions are changing the power of the insurgents increasing or decreasing and government legitimacy changing then the situation is more favorable to negotiation. ". . . parties tend to negotiate in a dynamic situation of equality, when the underdog starts rising and the upper hand starts slipping." (Zartman, p. 335) Under such conditions, mediators may be useful. "The mediator must use its skills to get the parties to see that unattainable perfection is not worth the commitment, and that a partial solution that leaves both parties alive and able to pursue their own relations politically and productively is really a positive outcome . . .." (Zartman, p. 345)

Karen Mingst

University of Kentucky