Book review

Rethinking Conflict Resolution and Management
Zartman I. William and Vukovic Sinisa
2023
Edward Elgar
UK
196 pp
ISBN: 978 1 80037 698 4
Review DOI 10.1108/IJCMA-08-2024-251

Onward and upward in conflict resolution!

Bercovitch and Jackson (2009) identified the post-Cold War period as a critical juncture in the study of conflict resolution, noting how shifts in the nature of international conflict have led to paradigmatic changes in this field. They observed that the end of the global bipolar system required "new approaches," adding multidimensional strategies to the traditional ones – state-centric and unidimensional – which had dominated the field for over 50 years. In their view, a multidimensional mode of conflict resolution could better meet complex challenges to global peace and security that defy the "traditional images of conflicts" (Bercovitch and Jackson, 2009, p. 16). They proposed this thesis against the backdrop of an uptick in bloody internal and asymmetrical conflicts around the globe, fueled by ethnic, religious and cultural divides, as well as disputes over resources and regional interstate tensions. The multidimensional conflict resolution paradigm they advocated is holistic, integrating diverse stakeholders, issues, norms and frameworks beyond strategic considerations. It focuses on tackling the root causes of conflicts and urges involvement of the United Nations and of other international organizations and NGOs in promoting inclusive, culturally sensitive and sustainable peace initiatives (Bercovitch and Jackson, 2009, p. 10).

However, in the 2010s, some limitations of multidimensional strategies emerged as global instability rose. Zartman (2020) noted the world's gradual shift toward disorder, which challenged the adequacy of existing frameworks of negotiation analysis and practice. His concept of a "System of World Disorder" (Zartman, 2020, p. 6) suggested the need to reevaluate conceptual frameworks central to the conflict management field.

Drawing on these foundational insights, and with the perspective of the 202s, "Rethinking Conflict Resolution and Management" by Zartman and Vukovic (2023) (Z&V) depicts a world in which traditional methods of addressing conflict are increasingly inadequate. Z&V argue that the shift from a structured "World System" to a chaotic "World Disorder" – challenging the post-World War II United Nations system, the cornerstone of the conflict resolution field for 70 years – demands fresh, innovative approaches. Transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries, Z&V highlight the urgent need for both incremental improvements and the creation of new designs to navigate the challenges of contemporary global instability.

Zartman's past contributions have already shaped significantly the field of conflict management. His former student, S. Vukovic, has also risen to prominence in the field. They

conduct an intergenerational dialogue that enriches the academic discourse. Their intellectual synergy advances the conflict management field and brings out their shared commitment to addressing contemporary challenges.

Navigating the labyrinth: conflict management in the age of global disorder

Zartman and Vukovic confront the formidable challenge of adapting conflict management strategies to the complexities of the current disordered global system. They intricately map out contemporary obstacles to conflict management, encouraging a quest for innovative approaches and theoretical frameworks to address the widespread turmoil and to foster constructive solutions.

The authors dissect the layered nature of today's geopolitical and societal tribulations, pinpointing the crumbling of the rules-based world system. This unraveling has stripped away the moral, institutional and practical foundations essential for effective conflict control, both internationally and nationally. The disappearance of established norms and of the organizational forms that once facilitated international cooperation – especially the collapse of the UN system – have plunged the world into a state of "normlessness," where rules are bent to fit the whims of individual states or actors (p. 3). The fabric of global order, they note, is "marked by vacuums all over the place" (p. 4). The ensuing erosion of sovereignties and the rise of entities with destabilizing aims have reignited territorial disputes and aggressions, undermining decades of stability.

Z&V examine critically the foundational theories and tools of conflict management, juxtaposing them with real-world complexities and evolving dynamics of global conflicts, and identify deficiencies and theoretical gaps which fail to fully address the nuanced nature of contemporary conflicts. These range from traditional interstate disputes and territorial disagreements to "wicked" conflicts, modern civil wars, hybrid or "lower gray" conflicts, urban uprisings and digital warfare in the cyber realm. The authors advocate for research into the power dynamics of conflict resolution, negotiation and mediation, underlining the urgency to adapt theoretical models to the fluid global landscape. They offer examples from diverse cases across different regions, such as Ukraine-Russia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Cyprus, Somalia, Ethiopia, Syria, Colombia, Egypt, Western Sahara, Taiwan, China and Kashmir.

These instances not only illustrate the practical applications of theoretical approaches but also underscore the critical need for theory refinement to contend with the intricacies of global conflicts today. Z&V analyze, inter alia, debates around concepts such as mutually hurting stalemate (MHS), way out (WO) and mutually enticing opportunity (MEO). They examine challenges to the responsibility to protect (R2P) norm in the wake of the UN's failure to enforce this prevention doctrine. They address conflict-laden governance issues during a time marked by populism. They explore the evolving role of identity, inclusion and representation in conflict management, stressing their significance in achieving enduring peace.

A comprehensive reevaluation: advancing conflict management in a disordered world

Zartman and Vukovic argue persuasively that the conflict resolution field has reached a crucial stage in its current evolution. Along with analytical insights, they offer practical recommendations. This fusion provides solid ground both for academic exploration and for the formulation of policies, as the authors navigate the interplay between theoretical rigor and real-world relevance. Z&V unveil several innovative concepts and insights and raise questions essential for understanding global landscape complexities. While it is hard to

encapsulate the full scope of their contributions succinctly, I outline six principal insights that particularly resonate with me.

First is Z&V's striking interdisciplinary approach. They draw on fields as varied as international relations, psychology, anthropology, economics and even neuroscience. This broad sourcing enriches the conversation in the field, providing fertile ground for future research.

Second is Z&V's revival of geopolitical theory to better understand international conflicts, focusing on meta-conflicts. They shed new light on the role of classical geopolitical insights in navigating current complexities. They analyze the aspirations of global powers and the strategic importance of the rimland, underscoring the necessity of a comprehensive grasp of geopolitical dynamics for effective conflict management.

Third is the introduction of the notion of "the fall of the wall of inhibition" (p. 3) to describe the erosion of norms traditionally curbing aggressive behavior. Z&V highlight various manifestations of this normative decay, stressing the need for innovation to rebuild normative barriers.

Fourth is Z&V's anticipation of the consequences of "power vacuums" and state weaknesses that contribute to the rise of complex, "hybrid" or "lower gray" intrastate conflicts. These conflicts involve nonstate armed groups (NSAGs), including international criminal networks, terrorist organizations and identity-driven collectives. They note the unique characteristics, strategies, tactics and goals of these entities, and the resulting global increase in violence, instability and insecurity. Z&V examine thoroughly how these groups challenge existing conflict management frameworks, suggesting that traditional approaches are inadequate for engaging with actors in what they call the "non-engageable quadrant" (p. 153). These actors challenge conventional negotiation and conflict management frameworks ill-suited to the nuanced characteristics and reality of these groups (pp. 146–147). Z&V underscore the need for research to understand specific tactics, objectives, motivations and conditions that foster the rise of such groups, as well as the individual dynamics and trajectories of the conflicts they incite (p. 161). I find particularly intriguing their discussion of challenges facing the field from the subset of terrorist NSAGs, specifically religious ones. Z&V question the possibility of negotiating with a mindset and belief system in which "The notion of killing so as to immediately go to heaven is simply incomprehensible and unmatchable to Western observers and so it is impossible to think of how to deal with it." (p.158). They argue that responding appropriately to these challenges is even greater than before (p.156).

Fifth is Z&V's call for a shift toward considering individual perspectives and promoting what they call a "rehumanization" (p. 164) of conflict management. This approach challenges the conventional emphasis on state and collective actors, urging a nuanced understanding of the role of individuals in conflicts and emphasizing empathy and inclusivity.

Sixth is the spotlight on the role of technology, and especially on the impact of social media and cyberspace. Z&V describe how digital platforms create decentralized networks ("rhizomes," p. 140), which challenge conventional conflict management strategies. They anticipate that cyber conflicts will inevitably become "the most pervasive" in the coming decades (p. 46). They emphasize the emergence of cyber-, outer- and other "intangible spaces" (p. 46) as new battlegrounds which remain largely uncharted in the discourse on future conflict dynamics.

In future editions, the book could be enhanced by including a nuanced discussion of "cyber conflicts." This term, which I believe to be a relic of earlier scholarship, seems to me inadequate to describe the multifaceted nature of cyberspace. It is critical to recognize that

cyberattacks frequently complement kinetic operations, serving as integral components of a comprehensive conflict strategy. Conflict analysis frameworks should integrate cyber weaponry within the broader conflict dynamics and propose strategies for preventing escalation across diverse dimensions.

The book significantly advances the conflict field with a compelling case for revising strategies amidst the global tumult. It also subtly marks a new phase in the field's internal development. After decades of developing basic theories, it is now at a critical juncture, necessitating a refined and precise understanding of concepts, theory formulations, verification and strategy development for professionals. Z&V's numerous examples illustrate necessary additional work as the field continues to mature. Some knowledge gaps they identify can be construed as a response to the changing global environment.

Onward and upward in conflict resolution!

Conflict management approaches are currently being tested. Zartman and Vukovic offer fresh perspectives on the changing dynamics of international disputes and motivate readers to think outside the box and identify new research and intervention areas. In essence, *Rethinking Conflict Resolution and Management* not only advances the conflict management field amidst global disorder but also marks a crucial moment in its development, offering a roadmap for future scholarship and practical action.

The book's broad scope – arguably the widest to date – promises to invigorate the field with new research directions, ensuring its continued relevance and dynamism. Therefore, this book is a critical text for scholars across the spectrum of conflict studies, yet it is intended for "advanced" learners, who are well-versed in the field's fundamentals and capable of engaging with the very timely, yet complex, questions and challenges posed.

Amira Schiff
The Program on Conflict Management, Resolution and Negotiation,
Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel

References

Bercovitch, J. and Jackson, R. (2009), *Conflict Resolution in the Twenty-First Century: Principles, Methods, and Approaches*, University of Michigan Press.

Zartman, I.W. (2020), "Structuring in a vacuum: negotiating in the current world disorder", *International Negotiation*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 5-17.

Zartman, I.W. and Vukovic, S. (2023), *Rethinking Conflict Resolution and Management*, Edward Elgar, UK.