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Book Reviews

Conflict resolution in the 21st century: Principles, methods and approaches

Bercovitch, Jacob and Richard Jackson 2009

Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press 2009, 226 pages

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In this book, Jacob Bercovitch and Richard Jackson, two internationally recognised experts, undertake the systematic evaluation of traditional and modern principles, methods and approaches to conflict resolution. The authors argue that, in the current context of post-Cold War relations, terrorism and intra-state conflict, the ‘toolkit’ used for conflict resolution needs to be vastly expanded and improved to include tools from a range of related disciplines in order to successfully address and deal with conflict in the 21st century.

The book is structured into two parts: The Principles and Traditional Approaches, and 21st Century Methods and Approaches. In this way the authors cleverly juxtapose the ‘old’ against the ‘new’ in a simple and clear way as they organise relevant subjects into chapters that enable them to systematically examine each tool either ‘traditional’ or ‘new’. These tools are then clearly defined and their purposes and means described in relation to what and where each tool is likely to be most effective and useful for conflict resolution in the 21st century. In examining the ‘traditional’, the authors cover issues related to negotiation, mediation, arbitration, adjudication, law, the United Nations system, and traditional Peacekeeping issues. These subjects are all described and evaluated for their pragmatic value within the current context of conflicts, and thus the major questions and dilemmas typically raised, for example in debating the United Nations system and its efficacy, are addressed in order to add value to the 21st century toolbox for conflict resolution.

The second part analyses the more current tools that are applicable in the practice of conflict resolution today, such as preventive diplomacy, non-official diplomacy, humanitarian intervention, core issues in justice and reconciliation, and the practice of peacebuilding within the milieu of the nexus between security and development practice. In their examination of these subjects, the authors repeatedly ensure conceptual clarity with reference to the primary literature as well as defining competing schools of thought in a very scholar-friendly manner.

This book therefore brings a wealth of information into the field of conflict resolution (as a discipline in its own right), and enables the reader an opportunity to clearly see the cross-cutting nature of the tools that are needed to undertake the resolution of conflicts today. The authors effectively build their case for what conflict resolution methodologies do, and should look like, as the nature of conflict changes and requires the responses to it to be more dynamic and relevant given the changing global environment. Bercovitch and Jackson’s analysis shows why and how a 21st century Conflict Resolution toolkit must therefore include tools related to preventive diplomacy, humanitarian intervention, regional task-sharing, and truth

commissions. This book contributes to the discipline of Conflict Resolution today as it is enriched by further conceptual clarity and understanding about the possibilities of the 'practice' and pragmatic application of the various tools in the kit.

Conflict resolution in the 21st century is very readable, authoritative and astoundingly broad and deep in its content and analysis. This book would be a valuable reference point for scholars, undergraduate students and general readers interested in conflict resolution, and would therefore be well placed as a prescribed introductory textbook in learning institutions. Bercovitch and Jackson offer the readers a very impressive overview of Conflict resolution principles, methods and approaches as they develop into the 21st century within the changing landscape of conflict.