



Innovations in Teaching Conflict Management and Resolution in Israel

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Conflict Resolution in the International Arena

by Amira Schiff

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Conflict Resolution in the International Arena is the result of many years of hard work by its author, who is one of the leading experts in the field in Israel. Unfortunately, despite

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the development of varied courses on conflict management and resolution and the importance of a subject that is taught on many campuses in Israel, until now there has no comprehensive book in Hebrew on conflict management and resolution. Students and others who wanted to expand their knowledge of the field were forced do so without a systematic theory textbook in Hebrew. Publishing houses believed it was not economically worthwhile for them to translate into Hebrew the seminal works taught in educational institutions across Israel. In addition, and for understandable reasons, the vast majority of the literature published in Hebrew deals primarily with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and many research institutions add their differing viewpoints on the conflict (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2010).¹ Veteran researchers in the field are aware of literature that has been published on these issues over the years, such as international intervention (Kertcher, 2015) or international law (Ben-Naftali & Shany, 2006). However, this handful of books examines only specific angles of the subject matter. The new textbook by Dr. Amira Schiff, who is the head of Bar Ilan University's conflict resolution program, seeks to correct this anomaly and provide readers with the theoretical tools to understand the phenomenon.

When considering the enormity of Schiff's achievement and the contribution her book will make, it is important to understand that the American school in higher education is based on textbooks, which provide students with the theoretical and empirical fundamentals to approach a specific subject. Writing a textbook is quite different from authoring a research study. Over the past few decades, a variety of textbooks and approaches have been published to teach the subject of conflict resolution and management. *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, for example, edited by Deutsch, Coleman, and Marcus, contains more than 50 chapters

examining the subject of conflicts, primarily from the perspective of social psychology (Deutsch et al., 2014). A different approach, offered by Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall, describes the field of conflict management and resolution by categorizing every stage of the conflict—from pre-conflict to the aftermath—alongside thematic elements, such as ethics and gender (Ramsbotham et al., 2016). A third approach appears in the textbook edited by Bercovitch, Kremenjuk, and Zartman, in which there are dozens of chapters, divided according to research methodology, conflict causes, and conflict resolution elements (Bercovitch et al., 2008). There is no one perfect method, and there is always room for the literature to be updated.

Amira Schiff's new textbook is different from the abovementioned works. It is divided into six thematic chapters, each of which introduces not only the basic approaches but also refers to the most recent publications by leading researchers in the field. For students and researchers hoping to broaden their expertise in the discipline, this book is a good foundation for ways to engage in a theoretical discussion. In other words, the main goals of the book are accessibility and putting the emphasis on acquaintance with the theoretical approaches in the field.

The first chapter explains the issue of conflict in international relations, while differentiating between realistic and liberal assumptions, the differences between managing and resolving a conflict, and the typologies of conflict. The subchapter dealing with the history of the field is especially important for understanding its evolution and depth, highlighting a field that is interdisciplinary and draws upon history, international relations, political science, and social psychology.

The second chapter deals with conflict management. The chapter explains a variety of strategies, such as sanctions, agreements, and the use of both soft and hard power. The discussion about coercive diplomacy and examples such as the Cuban missile crisis and the sanctions against Iran help clarify the

potential uses of various strategic tools. All these approaches are founded on interest-based rational approaches or on social psychology.

The third chapter, which comprises around one third of the book, deals with one of the key issues in the field—negotiations. At the heart of the chapter are the paradigms of bargaining and problem-solving, which are the cornerstones of all negotiation tactics and which can be used in situations far beyond the resolution of ethno-national and international conflicts. This chapter is especially recommended for people engaged in the study of mediation or involved in international peacekeeping. At times we find that even expert mediators in the international arena work more by intuition and less in an orderly and methodical fashion. Understanding frameworks, tools, and operational methods that have proven themselves in the past can be of great help.

The fourth chapter examines international intervention in conflicts. The chapter covers two main strategies: coercive diplomacy and humanitarian intervention. Unfortunately, and presumably because there is just so much material to cover, readers are not exposed to the broad typology of field interventions—such as observers, buffer forces, state-building, nation-building, enforcement troops, and international policing. Since international organizations like the United Nations, the African Union, and NATO have launched dozens of such operations since the late 1990s, it would have been worthwhile to mention them, at least in an appendix.

The fifth chapter, which examines the discipline of intercultural negotiation, helps to highlight the importance of culture in negotiations. The cultural discussion assumes that communication between sides from diverse cultures will be more complicated since the intercultural factor is a disruptive element.

The sixth chapter deals with the discipline of political psychology. Unlike the rational school of negotiations, this discipline assumes that alongside concrete issues such as a conflict over a geopolitical issue, there are also conflicts

over sensitivities and basic needs that must be addressed. This chapter deals with approaches to issues such as identity, honor, and justice, which should also lead to reconciliation.

Since this book was published by the Open University, there are some editing decisions that apparently stemmed from the pedagogical priorities and teaching methods of the institution. The length of the third chapter, for example, is around 120 pages. In contrast, the fourth and fifth chapters are around 80 pages in total. The chapter order is also surprising; there is a direct connection between the third chapter and the fifth and sixth chapters, which cover approaches that expand the paradigm of conflict resolution.

The advantages of structuring the chapters to suit educators, researchers, and students, or to suit people who simply have an interest in the field, lie in the didactic method. Each chapter contains clear explanations, alongside a glossary of terms and concise case studies. The book is replete with contemporary examples from across the globe and from our region; it can provide fertile ground for expanding the discussion. The section in the fifth chapter dealing with humanitarian intervention provides an excellent example of how case studies are successfully developed against reality. Schiff dedicates five pages to comparing between the motivation for intervening in Libya, as opposed to the refusal to do so in Syria (pp. 301-306). A profound analysis of this helps to understand the key elements of the book, and anyone using the book for teaching purposes would be well advised to augment the theory and concepts presented by examining case studies systematically. In the section on humanitarian aide to Syria, for example, the book addresses all the levels of negotiations, the problem of development, and changes in domestic, regional, and international conditions in the conflict—as well, of course, as the differences between the rational and cultural approaches and the social psychology approach.

In conclusion, this book is an important breakthrough in teaching conflict management and resolution in Hebrew. Schiff's masterpiece will help all the educational programs in the field in the coming decades. Moreover, hopefully it will also help sharpen and improve the educated use of key concepts by the Israeli public, professionals and laypeople alike. When it comes to my courses, I have already added this book to my syllabus.

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Notes

- 1 Similarly, see the reference books published by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), the Truman Institute, and the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research.