International Intervention in Local Conflicts: Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution since the Cold War

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A GATHERING OF DIFFERENT IDEAS


This edited volume presents an insightful collection of case studies assessing international interventions in the post-Cold War era, with a strong emphasis on the Middle East. The essays offer a broad exploration of international conflict management and resolution, taking a hard look at failure and success. Unlike many other books, this one brings together scholars from different countries, presenting an often unique and most importantly different viewpoint on conflicts of U.S. interest. It is impractical to review each chapter, but the following five are particularly compelling for U.S. readership. The attempts of the European Union (EU) to mediate the Balkan and ongoing Israel-Palestine conflicts present a detailed account of EU conflict management in the larger context of the difficulties brought about by institutional challenges and the complex structure of EU policies. A French perspective on Middle Eastern politics is elucidated by Jean-Pierre Filiu. The value of French diplomatic efforts to conflict resolution is highlighted, with the example of the direct contact with Syria and Iran during Operation GRAPES OF WRATH in 2006. Comparing France to the United States, the author points out different narratives, citing such examples as Beirut 1982. The next chapter delves into the important topic of clashes between the Islamic denominations, Sunni and Shia. The feeling of alienation between these groups dates back to the earliest days of Islam. U.S. interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan are discussed as a starting point for increased Iranian support for Shias throughout the Middle East and to confute the common argument that Shias are more sympathetic to Iran than to their home countries. No conclusion is offered about “whether sectarianism is the cause or symptom of the recent geopolitical changes in the region,” but the authors do provide informative insight and point to the importance of understanding these dynamics for any conflict resolution in the region. Chapter 12 explores the motives of the involvement of regional actors in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Egypt and Saudi Arabia both have interests in being perceived as the indispensable Arab mediator. Ultimately, Egypt has a larger
stake, because of its proximity and domestic politics considerations, and it has stayed committed throughout, while Saudi Arabia has less of an incentive to guarantee that efforts become reality.

The concluding chapter stimulates the reader to think about the term “international community.” Rajan Menon offers a sharp yet pessimistic evaluation of the international community’s efforts to react to grave human rights violations and its “inability to act, particularly when it encounters opposition from its most powerful states.” While he displays minimal confidence in governments, the author remains optimistic that one day people will change and cure the “weakness of we-ness,” thereby initiating real institutional change. A common ground for all essays is the critical analysis of international efforts to resolve conflicts. Every author strives to answer important questions regarding the motivations of external actors to become involved. Overall, this volume presents a valuable contribution and is essential reading for anyone looking to understand the struggles of international conflict management.

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This edited volume provides fourteen essays on various aspects of combating terrorism and insurgencies from a just-war perspective. All the contributors, with the exception of Philip Bobbitt, an American, are from the United Kingdom. Contributors are prominent members of their respective faculties and are well-known within the fields of war and security studies. While the subtitle accentuates religious traditions with respect to the just-war tradition, the volume is not a dialogue between religious perspectives, nor is every chapter devoted to religious interpretations. Rather, the book is a collection of essays, of which two are authored by practicing Muslim scholars. Apart from these essays, the religious dimensions of combating terrorism are not prominently presented.

The two essays by Islamic scholars are especially helpful for readers interested in the religious dynamics of post-9/11 terrorism. In the first, “Terrorism and Islamic Theologies of Religiously-Sanctioned War,” Tim Winter, who lectures in Islamic studies at the University of Cambridge and is an imam at the Cambridge Mosque, recounts the interaction of Islamic jurisprudence with the emerging international system of the nineteenth century, as scholars and leaders in Muslim countries have sought to integrate various religious interpretations with international political realities. He also provides a useful overview of the concepts of jihad and hiraba. The second significant essay is that of Ahmad Achtar, “Challenging Al-Qaeda’s Justification of Terror.” Achtar is a lecturer in Islamic studies at Heythrop College, University of London, and he argues, with documentation, that al-Qaeda’s justifications of terror are not part of mainstream Sunni religious and legal thought and are not shared by the majority of Muslims. Other essays focus more on aspects of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and on tenets of the just-war tradition.