

Taming Intractable Conflicts

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MEDIATION IN THE HARDEST CASES

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and Pamela Aall



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Foreword

T*aming Intractable Conflicts: Mediation in the Hardest Cases* delivers an admirably succinct and forthright assessment of the problems of mediating conflicts that are unusually resistant to resolution. The authors don't merely rehearse a list of the difficulties of mediating intractable disputes; they conduct a groundbreaking exploration of the subject, carving out a new approach that yields new insights into both the sources of intractability and the mediator's challenges. Their argument for a *strategic approach* to conflict management is arresting and persuasive, and many of the ideas they put forward are sure to provoke discussion. For instance, their contention that the first priority in working toward a settlement is "hammering out a framework of negotiation or a statement or declaration of principles," rather than tackling violence and security issues, is striking and sure to stimulate debate.

Taming Intractable Conflicts speaks with equal authority to a number of different audiences. Many books claim to span one or more of the divides between academics and practitioners, between government agencies and NGOs, and between experts and novices, but most tend to have much less crossover appeal than they hope for. Perhaps because most books are written by scholars, practitioners are especially likely to be disappointed by the content of volumes that claim broad appeal. In this case, however, the authors — one of them a seasoned diplomat — have paid particular attention to ensuring that practitioners are not shortchanged. The result is a volume that is no less accessible than it is sophisticated, and that provides solid, practical advice to current and future mediators while illuminating for professors

and their students the concepts and dynamics that underpin effective mediation. The breadth of professional experience on which the authors draw goes a long way toward explaining their success in this regard. Between them, they have served—with great distinction—in government, in academia, in private foundations, in publicly funded think tanks, in the NGO community, and on the frontlines of diplomacy.

The insights and implications of this book are remarkably far-reaching. For instance, the authors criticize the tendency for mediation to be dismissed by foreign policy pundits as “social work” and for mediation experts to frown at the idea of states using mediation to promote their own interests. “It is time,” they write, “for foreign policy pundits and academic commentators alike to take a deep breath and recognize that mediation can be and typically is an instrument of conflict management that should be judged on its merits as a policy tool—that is, on the basis of what it can contribute to the advancement of the mediator’s conflict-related interests and goals.” Such a recognition, of course, would not merely enhance understanding of the nature of mediation but also increase the readiness of governments to engage, through mediation, the parties to long-festering conflicts. At present, governments often eschew the relatively low-cost but painstaking process of mediation and choose instead simply to ignore intractable conflicts—ignore them, that is, until they generate regional instability or international terrorism, at which point those same governments are forced to respond with high-cost military interventions that do little to address the underlying causes of conflict and that require considerable investments of diplomatic resources for years thereafter. As the authors remark with typical frankness and concision, when addressing the ills bred in forgotten conflict zones, “diplomacy should be the first response, not the last.”

The fact that *Taming Intractable Conflicts* can shed so much light on so many issues will not surprise readers who have opened the pages of the authors’ previous volumes. Since 1996, Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall have put together four path-breaking edited volumes, all of them published by the United States Institute of Peace. Two of these, *Managing Global Chaos* and *Turbulent*

Peace, are remarkably broad ranging, bringing together a large, diverse, and distinguished cast of contributors to examine the varied causes of contemporary conflict and the equally varied possibilities of responses to it. Lauded by scholars and practitioners alike, both books have won substantial audiences on campuses and in the halls of government.

The other two edited volumes focus, like this book, on mediation. In *Herding Cats*, published in 1999, highly respected practitioners recount their efforts to bring peace in conflicts that involved multiple mediators working simultaneously or sequentially. Most of the cases examined in *Herding Cats* are success stories and the lessons they offer are thus clearly of great potential value. But failure, too, has important lessons to teach, and recognizing as much, Crocker, Hampson, and Aall were inspired to examine mediation in the most challenging of circumstances. The United States Institute of Peace convened a group of experts to discuss prominent cases of intractability, discussions that in turn generated two books: this one, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, and the authors' fourth edited volume, *Grasping the Nettle: Analyzing Cases of Intractability*, which will be published in late 2004 and which combines analysis of the dynamics of intractability with in-depth assessments of eight specific cases.

These books complement not only each other but also the many other Institute-sponsored studies of the theory and practice of mediation and other forms of conflict management and resolution. The Institute is proud of both the quality and the quantity of the work it has supported in this area. Aside from the numerous grants it has awarded to researchers throughout the world to explore different facets, types, and instances of diplomatic negotiation, the Institute has published more than thirty books and dozens of reports on the subject. The books range from broad-ranging analyses such as Timothy Sisk's *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts*, Chas Freeman's *Arts of Power*, John Paul Lederach's *Building Peace*, and John Darby's *Effects of Violence on Peace Processes*, to case-specific studies by practitioners such as Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah's *Burundi on the Brink*, Princeton Lyman's *Partner to History*, and my own *Exiting Indochina*.

The Institute has also developed a series of studies that focus specifically on cross-cultural negotiations. This series encompasses both explorations of overarching principles and factors—for instance, Raymond Cohen's *Negotiating Across Cultures* and Kevin Avruch's *Culture and Conflict Resolution*—and in-depth examinations of the negotiating style of individual countries, including China, Japan, North Korea, Russia, Germany, and France. These volumes will soon be joined by studies of the impact of culture on Israeli-Palestinian and Indo-Pakistani negotiations.

Taming Intractable Conflicts is an important addition to these works. Crammed with down-to-earth advice for mediators, brimming with insights for policymakers, and studded with bright ideas for scholars, this book highlights the Institute's continuing commitment to enhancing our knowledge, both theoretical and practical, of the craft of diplomacy.

Richard H. Solomon, President
United States Institute of Peace

Preface

Several years ago, we edited a book entitled *Herding Cats: Multi-party Mediation in a Complex World*. That book looked at a variety of mediation challenges but focused primarily on the difficulties of peacemaking when many third parties are involved in the process. The case studies in *Herding Cats*—written by practitioners who had led or been closely involved in the mediation—concentrated in large part on successful mediation efforts, including the 1991 comprehensive peace agreement on Cambodia, the Dayton accords, and the 1995 settlement of the Ecuador-Peru border dispute. Because we were interested in pulling out lessons from these successful mediation attempts, we did not include many cases of mediation efforts that failed. In the intervening years, we have watched as peace processes have failed to take hold and fraught postconflict periods have reignited into violence. Clearly, successful cases tell only part of the story of mediation; long-enduring, resistant conflicts also have much to teach us about the complexities of mediating difficult conflicts. This realization is reflected in this book, *Taming Intractable Conflicts: Mediation in the Hardest Cases*, and its companion volume, *Grasping the Nettle: Analyzing Cases of Intractability*.

Many friends and colleagues helped us in this endeavor. In order to explore the complicated relationship between intractable conflicts and third-party mediation, the United States Institute of Peace convened a group of scholars and practitioners with extensive experience in the area. Richard Solomon, both as a member of the Experts Group on Intractable Conflicts and as leader of the Institute, provided invaluable support. We also owe the other members of the

Experts Group a great deal of gratitude for their inspiration, insights, and guidance, as well as for their conviction that intractable conflicts can yield to negotiation under the right circumstances. Many thanks go to Morton Abramowitz, Pauline Baker, Jacob Bercovitch, Diana Chigas, Jan Eliasson, Melanie Greenberg, Paul Hare, Bruce Jentleson, Richard Kauzlarich, Louis Kriesberg, Samuel Lewis, Roy Licklider, William Nash, Charles Nelson, Joyce Neu, Meghan O'Sullivan, Marina Ottaway, Robert Pastor, Harold Saunders, Tere-sita Schaffer, Stephen Solarz, Paul Stares, Stephen Stedman, and William Zartman.

Several members wrote papers for Experts Group meetings, as did the following specialists: Cynthia Arnson, Steven Burg, Stephen P. Cohen, Charles King, Stephen Morrison, Howard Schaffer, Scott Snyder, Shibley Telhami, and Theresa Whitfield. These papers and the discussion they engendered added depth and breadth to our own understanding as reflected in *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, while forming the core of *Grasping the Nettle*.

Among this group, special thanks are due to Jan Eliasson and Louis Kriesberg, whose wisdom, experience, and clear-sightedness inform this book and who graciously put us back on the right path where we had strayed from it.

We would also like to recognize the staff of the Institute's Education Program—Jeff Helsing, Raina Kim, Alison Milofsky, Alan Tidwell, and research assistant Naren Kumarakulasingam—for their strong support for and interest in this endeavor and their patience with its sometimes distracting nature. Dan Snodderly and the members of the Publications Program did a superb job, especially Nigel Quinney—sharp eyed, quick witted, and an editor of rare quality. His commitment to the project and authors made this volume a much better book.

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