

**Carment, David, and Patrick James, eds. Peace in the Midst of Wars: Preventing and Managing International Ethnic Conflicts. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998.**

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## Book Reviews

**Carment, David, and Patrick James, eds. *Peace in the Midst of Wars: Preventing and Managing International Ethnic Conflicts*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998.**

Following the end of the Cold War many believed that the new world order would yield unprecedented peace; yet instead it opened the doors for old religious and tribal hatreds to resurface in places like the former Yugoslavia and Somalia. The authors argue in *Peace in the Midst of Wars*, that the demise of communism afforded new "freedoms" that lead to this wave of nationalism, which then became the catalyst for bloody ethnic conflicts all over the world. The editors, David Carment and Patrick James, bring together a collection of essays examining the common origins of ethnic conflict, the ways to prevent its escalation and how peacekeeping fits into the modern reality of identity-based conflict.

The foundation of ethnic conflict is nationalism, which assumes ethnicity and territorial boundaries should be synonymous, an assumption that cannot be reconciled. (Ryan p. 74-75) Nationalism is often born of ignorance, fear, and hatred and when combined with economic hardship it can become fodder for extremist leaders intent on exploiting these tensions for their own gain. Both Kriesburg and Ryan agree that a common feature of ethnic conflict, though often not the root cause, is uneven distribution of wealth and the resentment that builds as a result. Prosperous groups, like the Basques of Spain and the Ibo of Nigeria, are examples of this, according to the authors. Kriesburg asserts that the existence of ethnic conflict and associated levels of violence are stirred by aggravating factors including the internal character of the communal group (i.e. existence of extremist leaders, socio-economic position, cultural myths), and relative position of groups within the system context. (p. 34) Likewise, Stephen Ryan argues in Chapter 3 that areas of conflict potentially leading to violence are land disputes, uneven distribution of wealth, exploitation of domestic conflict by regional neighbors and fear of assimilation and/or genocide. Once these conditions exist the conflict can escalate violently particularly if the conflict becomes militarized, options are prematurely closed, and there is a sense of victimization. (Ryan, p. 79) Occasionally, the "hurting" stalemate" will become a factor, as each side realizes that continuation of violence will hurt both sides. This realization may stop the violence temporarily but does nothing to address the underlying causes. (Ryan, p. 80)

Understanding a group's fear of extinction is important when appraising the breath and depth of an ethnic conflict. Because these types of conflict, "whose complexity escapes the grasp of most Westerners" (Fortmann, et al, p. 126) are so emotional and protracted the antagonisms easily lend themselves to escalated violence. (Haaglund and Pentland, p. 96) The prevention of ethnic violence by a third party like the United Nations (UN) is sometimes the key to averting situations that are likely to spiral out of control. (Morrison, p. 294) Called preventative diplomacy, it involves prevention of violence in present conflicts and management of old conflicts through tools like cease-fire agreements.

(Ryan, p. 67) Despite this, it must be acknowledged that major powers will not intervene unless tangible humanitarian or political gains are possible. In reference to this Carment and James write ". . . the essence of statecraft is to develop and manage relationships with other states in ways that will protect and enhance one's own security and welfare." (p. 312) Clearly, goodwill is an element of third party intervention, but it is not the central focal point in an anarchic world order. Peacekeeping is defined as ". . . the non-violent use of third party armed forces to maintain peace among belligerents." (Kaufman, p. 197) The author comments that although the word "peacekeeping" is a familiar term its duties and purpose have changed in recent years. It now encompasses observatory functions, institution building, conciliation and mediation, in addition to traditional operations. He notes that dangers involving peacekeeping include the possibility of becoming entrenched in a war of perception or becoming an accelerant to an already explosive situation if they are not seen as impartial or if sovereignty has been encroached upon. (James, p. 178-181, Carment and James, p. 302-03) Peacekeeping operations in the Congo, Lebanon and Bosnia-Herzegovina are prime examples of this. Having said this, countries cannot be permitted to hide behind their sovereignty as a vehicle for inaction; as, according to the author, it is a relative freedom and not an absolute. (James, p. 189)

Determining the origins of ethnic conflict is difficult; however the solutions to these complexities are even more elusive. Ryan asserts that containment and resolution of violence is probable when confidence is instilled, early warning systems established, and demilitarized zones identified. Alan James agrees by contending that without the physical separation of all parties involved and a viable written agreement negotiated in good faith, the peace process will inevitably fail by allowing the parties to continue, "upping the ante." Some of the elements needed for resolution proposed by the authors include cultural awareness, restriction of the supply of arms, promotion of pluralism, and redistribution of wealth. Similarly, Frank Harvey in Chapter 8 proposes that solutions to ethnic conflict will be found with in-depth research into the causes and resolutions. (p. 257) However, through all of this remains one truth: "Peacekeeping can only work when the parties to the conflict want the peace to be kept." (Kaufman, p. 195)

Although each essay in *Peace in the Midst of Wars* has a unique perspective there is one commonality: war can only be de-escalated, prevented, and halted with the deployment of a multi-faceted approach. Conflict is not one-dimensional, the book argues, and therefore should not be treated in an ad hoc fashion. This sentiment is echoed on page 84 when the author says if peacekeeping "is not properly coordinated . . . they may provide a false sense of security and perpetuate de facto situations without removing the smouldering potential causes for renewed violence." Furthermore, Alex Morrison recognizes that states are not the only entities involved, instead offering a holistic approach between non-governmental organizations, civilian forces, and multilateral bodies like the United Nations (who incidentally must deal with member states in arrears in order to be effective).

Carment and James succeed in gathering a collection of insightful essays on the many elements of ethnic conflict. Despite the need for further study it can be said that *Peace in the Midst of Wars* is a valuable addition to the scholarship on ethnic conflict and

peacekeeping - in all its forms. It is recommended for those who want to dig deeper beneath today's headlines.

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