

**Crocker, Chester A., Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall.  
*Taming Intractable Conflicts: Mediation in the Hardest Cases.*  
Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2004.**

Reşat Bayer

Volume 27, numéro 1, summer 2007

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs27\\_1br02](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs27_1br02)

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (imprimé)

1715-5673 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Bayer, R. (2007). Compte rendu de [Crocker, Chester A., Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall. *Taming Intractable Conflicts: Mediation in the Hardest Cases.* Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2004.] *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 27(1), 130–131.

attempt to frame foreign policy issues? Certainly, and that's reason enough to applaud Entman's effort.

**Daniel Cassino** is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

Crocker, Chester A., Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall. *Taming Intractable Conflicts: Mediation in the Hardest Cases*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2004.

Over the years, Chester Crocker, Fen Hampson, and Pamela Aall have edited several volumes for the United States Institute of Peace, including *Grasping the Nettle: Analyzing Cases of Intractable Conflict* and *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World*. They make another insightful contribution to the conflict management and resolution literature with *Taming Intractable Conflicts*. Their goal here is to assist mediators involved in intractable conflicts, e.g., Angola, Northern Ireland, and Middle East.

The authors tackle a question that lies at the heart of the mediation literature: how can a mediator get the sides to agree to a negotiated settlement? This question becomes even more intriguing when we remember that their focus is on intractable conflicts. In such conflicts, the antagonists might not see a political settlement as a particularly enticing option. Undaunted, the authors view such conflicts as "stubborn or difficult but not impossible to manage." (page 7) Moreover, they "do not accept the notion that violent conflicts are best left to burn themselves out, and we believe that most intractable conflicts end only with considerable outside help." (page 187) Their tone is refreshing given the pessimism and neutrality prevalent in the literature. They argue that mediators need to adopt a strategic approach to mediation by examining their own interests, capabilities, and constraints, as well as those of the antagonists and other concerned parties when planning their moves. At the same time, they remind us that sound strategic analysis without institutional capacity and resources will not amount to much.

The organization of the book attempts to help the mediators plan their strategies. The first part of the book discusses the context facing the mediator. Here the authors discuss in depth the motives behind the mediation of powerful states, forgotten intractable conflicts, and the environment surrounding the mediator. Their discussion of forgotten conflicts demonstrates the benefits of their strategic approach, as it becomes clear that different conflicts will require different forms of third-party involvement and that there is no panacea. Similarly,

their examination of the mediator's environment shows how the layers circling the mediator can have widely different impacts under different circumstances. The second part examines the tradecraft of mediation at four stages: opening stages, when the going gets turbulent, reaching a deal, and contributing to the survival of the deal. Their discussion of mediator responses to flare-ups in the conflict is particularly interesting as such events are commonplace. Here they consider a range of options, from pushing the process further along to exiting and highlight the role of external support. Negotiating tactics crucial to any conflict, such as turning points, bringing in other actors, side channels, and managing spoilers and factions, all receive attention.

While major powers receive ample attention, middle and regional powers could have received more. This need becomes acute when we remember that regional powers are increasingly expected to address local problems and are more likely to draw lessons from actors similar to them. In fact, the authors clearly see these actors as having an important role in forgotten intractable conflicts; Norway and South Africa certainly surface frequently throughout the book. However, as it stands right now, there is nothing comparable to their "When Powerful States Mediate" chapter.

Crocker, Hampson, and Aall also make several controversial statements, such as when they mention the need "to empower the local populace in the peace process so that elites are accountable to their constituents." (page 183) If nothing else, this makes one wonder about the sheer magnitude of things expected from mediators. It also raises questions about what the authors would consider to be a successful mediation in an intractable conflict. They also write that in intractable conflicts "psychological wounds and a sense of grievance and victimization run very deep." (page 7) It would seem that strategic analysis would need to establish the extent to which this holds for any conflict, rather than being taken for granted by the mediator from the beginning. If these grievances and wounds run as deep as they claim then it would be necessary for mediators to explore them further and decide how to deal with them. Track-two diplomacy would become particularly appropriate for mediators in such cases.

Overall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts* is well written and accessible. It will be of interest and use to practitioners as well as students of conflict for years. Crocker, Hampson, and Aall rightly see mediation as a vital element of foreign policy and one deserving of more respect by decision makers themselves. Hopefully, this attitude will surface in several capitals and headquarters.

**Reşat Bayer** is Assistant Professor of International Relations at Koç University, Istanbul.