

**THE DIFFICULT TASK OF PEACE: CRISIS, FRAGILITY
AND CONFLICT IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD**

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“It isn’t enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn’t enough to believe in it. One must work at it.”

(Eleanor Roosevelt, 1951)

As best-selling author Eckhart Tolle said, “The greatest achievement of humanity is not its works of art, science, or technology, but the recognition of its own dysfunction”. And as we talk about dysfunction, the world as we know it today abounds in it. The past few decades have witnessed various conflicts related to the Rwandan genocide, the September 11 attacks, the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), continuing deaths from hunger despite sufficient global agricultural production, millions living in extreme poverty and ‘natural’ disasters exacerbated by anthropogenic climate change, to name but a few. It is in this backdrop that “*The Difficult Task of Peace: Crisis, Fragility and Conflict in an Uncertain World*”, a compilation of the visions, studies and the analyses of the members of faculty of the University for Peace (UPEACE) edited by Francisco Rojas Aravena and published by Palgrave Macmillan becomes increasingly relevant. Established by the United Nations General assembly “*to provide humanity with an international institution of higher education for peace and with the aim of promoting, among all human beings, the spirit of understanding, tolerance and peaceful coexistence, to stimulate cooperation among peoples and to help lessen obstacles and threats to world peace and progress, in keeping with the noble aspirations proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations*”, the faculty of UPEACE has been at the forefront of research and education as well as the practice of peace for the over four decades of its existence. The four decades of accumulated knowledge in the domain of global peace studies have informed the book, making it an essential read for academics, practitioners and other stakeholders of the domain of peace studies.

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The book has been organized in four parts comprising the global perspectives, regional views, institutional frameworks and lastly the shared challenges, actions and interventions, and has further been subdivided into specific chapters. The content of the book is introduced and set in context by the editor in a short introductory essay summarizing the current state of conflict across the world, painting a bleak picture, comprising the persistence of traditional threats such as hunger, epidemics, inequality resulting in extreme poverty and nuclear tensions to name a few coupled with the emergence of new menaces such as the climate change, transnational crime and the continuing repercussions of the latest iteration of the financial crisis. The global nature and the sheer scale of these challenges make its resolution outside the capabilities of any state or actor, necessitating a coordinated global response for their redressal which is encumbered by “A deep crisis in the multilateral system and its institutions ... produced by the breakage of large multilateral agreements as well as by growing nationalist and populist visions” (pg. 5).

The first part of the book, the global perspectives, comprises of a single chapter by Fernando Blasco which critically traces the progression of the current ideas of peace and violence through literature, particularly focusing on the concept of structural violence and tracing it back to the psychological traits of “power elites”. Through its broad conception of peace, as not just the absence of direct violence, but also “violence built into the structure”, and which limits human beings from attaining their potential realizations, the chapter sets the tone for the rest of the book and equips the reader with the necessary perspective on peace and violence to truly appreciate the subsequent chapters.

The second part of the book, the regional perspectives, is composed of four chapters dealing with the peace and conflict scenarios of Africa, the Middle East, the Latin America and the South China seas respectively. The topics covered in the chapters are diverse in line with the varying conflict dynamics of the respective regions. In conflict-ridden Africa, which witnessed nearly 18,000 violent events in 2017 alone, the authors, Samuel Kale Ewusi and Kingsley Lyonga Ngange focus on using qualitative data from interviews as well as secondary data from peace and security indices to explore the drivers of conflict as well as to evaluate the readiness of governance systems in the African subcontinent to confront the incumbent violence. In the Middle East, which has similarly been plagued by violence, the authors, Amr Abdalla, Lilya Akay, and Zeynya Shikur, divide the drivers of conflict into two categories, namely “constant dynamics” comprising the factors which have been persisting over several generations and “shifting dynamics” comprising emerging problems such as climate change and water shortage to better elucidate the conflict dynamics of the region. The authors conclude the chapter with measures needed to bring about peace in the Middle East and the present progress and challenges in achieving the same. In the chapter on the relatively peaceful Latin American regions, author Juan Carlos Sainz-Borgo explores the use of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) by the states of the region to settle potential conflicts. The chapter examines the establishment, the ambit and the functioning of the ICJ and its evolution over history through a critical analysis of its success in settling disputes between the Latin American countries providing an exemplar of an international institution’s role in mediating and managing conflict. In the final chapter on the South

China Seas (SCS), the authors, Alma Maria O. Salvador and Daisy C. See, examine how the ASEAN member states have come together to handle issues such as maritime safety and marine environmental protection. While the focus of the previous chapter is on the use of a formal institutional mechanism (ICJ) to handle conflict, this chapter focuses on the use of informal mechanisms. Working together on non-confrontational and non-traditional issues such as anti-piracy and anti-terrorism initiatives, the ASEAN members have evolved a set of common practice-based norms based on a shared understanding of the region's dynamics which are serving as the basis for the development of rules for successful management in the SCS. Viewed jointly, the second section of the book highlights the different meanings that peace can take in different contexts and the measures different regions have adopted in the pursuit of peace, some with a relative degree of success and some without.

The third part of the book, the institutional frameworks, is comprised of four chapters examining different institutions, namely International Adjudication, the European Union (EU), the Belt and the Road Initiative promoted by China and the African Union and the factors impacting their ability (or the lack thereof) in achieving peace in their relevant jurisdictions. In the first chapter in the section, Mihir Kanade examines the role of International Adjudication in Conflict Resolution and Transformation as opposed to their conventionally accepted role in dispute settlement through a detailed transdisciplinary exploration of judicial instruments and mechanisms to arrive at a typology of the roles International Adjudication plays in Conflict Resolution and Transformation interspersed liberally with historical examples. In the chapter on the EU, Enrique Barón Crespo and Pelayo Castro Zuzuárregui make an impassioned argument for why the EU is all the more a relevant and stable 'Superpower' today despite the challenges from populism, the Brexit and foreign policy challenges such as the rise of China, the Russian threat and the continuing chaos in the Middle East and Africa. The following chapter focuses on the Belt and Road initiative promoted by China aimed at establishing an economic belt connecting the regions of Asia, Europe and Africa and bringing about unprecedented levels of economic cooperation, trade and globalisation in these regions. In the chapter, author Zhang Xiaoyu performs a detailed analysis of the proposed plans and the aspects that it must incorporate into itself in order to achieve the targeted results. The chapters on the EU and the belt and the road lacked a critical perspective, merely superficially mentioning the challenges associated with the functioning of the institutions. For instance, the chapter on the belt and the road do not consider any of the challenges faced by the project, completely ignoring important challenges such as the resource requirements for the ambitious project and whether China has sufficient credibility to drive cooperative initiatives of the scale in the region given its adversarial relationships with several countries over which the proposed project extends. In the final chapter in the section, Chinedu Thomas Ekwealor examines the functioning and the success or the lack thereof of the African Union (AU) in achieving peace in the African subcontinent from a realist perspective. The AU has found itself impotent in dealing with critical issues such as the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Rwandan genocide, the Libyan conflict and the continuing conflicts in the region. Through a detailed analysis of the formation and the evolution of the AU and its

relationships with different stakeholders, the author attempts to shed light on the critical deficiencies that detract the AU from fulfilling its objectives as well as steps necessary to overcome them.

The fourth part of the book, common challenges and interventions, comprises of four chapters dealing with threats such as fundamentalism, terrorism and hunger. The chapter by Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Galib Bashirov tries to understand how fundamentalism and violent extremism operate in major religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, drawing a clear contrast with the conventional understanding of fundamentalism which solely associates it with Islam. The focus of the next chapter is on the related topic of international terrorism in which Mariateresa Garrido V highlights human rights issues often overlooked in the fight against terrorism. The author highlights how UNSC resolutions on surveillance and information sharing and the manner in which they are operationalized in several countries often contradict the basic regulations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law. The next chapter by Olivia Sylvester focuses on food insecurity around the world and its complex nexus with inequity, climate change, and conflict. While the ideas or the issues dealt with in the chapter are not novel, the author nevertheless succeeds in presenting a complex multidimensional issue with remarkable simplicity and brevity. In the last chapter of the section, Heather Kertyzia describes participatory action research conducted in Northern Nicaragua in 2013 in relation to their peace education practice. The participatory action research tries to understand the community's vision of a culture of peace, explores the local contextual barriers in establishing the same and develops a detailed plan of action of moving towards a culture of peace. While the definitions, the problems and the plans developed in the chapter are unique to the local context of Nicaragua, the key takeaway from the chapter is the process followed by the author in enabling the local community to achieve the same which is replicable in other contexts.

The chapters of the book come from different regions of the world in different stages of development and facing widely divergent forms of conflicts. The authors have also employed a wide variety of methodologies and perspectives to inform their analysis. The result is a truly multiphrenic understanding of peace and conflict. Given the complex nature of conflicts and its multiple incarnations ranging from direct violence such as wars to indirect manifestations such as poverty and hunger, such a multiphrenic understanding is sorely needed to enable actors to successfully tailor their approach to their unique contexts and achieve lasting peace. The contributions from multiple authors from different disciplines which makes this very plurality possible, at the same time creates a book with a wide variation in readability. While sections of the book are interesting and well-structured certain chapters present a difficult reading experience, even by academic standards, and could have benefitted from further editorial revisions and structuring. Future editions of the book must improve upon this aspect to ensure that the book may live up to its true potential and become accessible to a wide range of readers so that it may inform policy and action.

The “majority of humanity yearns for stability, progress, freedom, sustainable development and the respect for human rights - in short, a sustainable peace” (p. v,

preface). In an increasingly chaotic world, any realistic pursuit of peace requires the world leaders, the ambassadors, the heads of international organizations and thought leaders to educate themselves on conflict resolution. We must also as a society take a hard look at our past and evaluate what we did wrong and what we could have improved upon. After all, as George Santayana wrote and is often repeated, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Using a variety of methods, the faculty and researchers at UPEACE take a preliminary step in this direction through a critical examination of the leading international institutions, different conflict resolution mechanisms as well the historical and current manifestations of conflict across the globe.