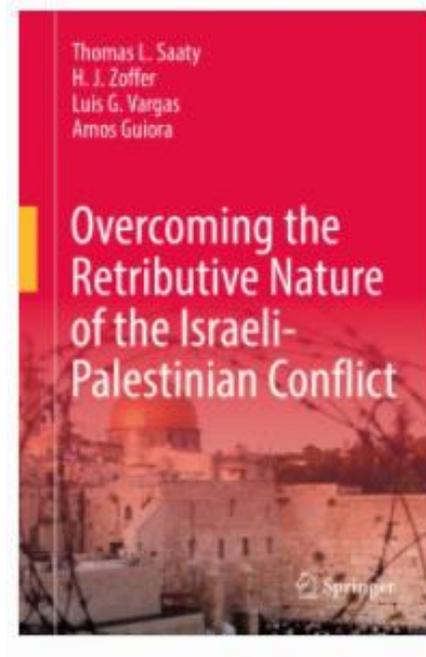


BOOK REVIEW: OVERCOMING THE RETRIBUTIVE NATURE OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT BY THOMAS. L. SAATY, H. J. ZOFFER, LUIS G. VARGAS, AMOS GUIORA

Enrique Mu
IJAHP Editor-in-Chief



Thomas Saaty continues to amaze us with publications appearing four years posthumously. A book written with his collaborators H. J. Zoffer, Luis G. Vargas and Amos Guiora has been recently published by Springer. There is a rich tradition of the use of the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) in conflict negotiation and resolution, beginning with the classic “Conflict Resolution: The Analytic Hierarchy Approach” (Saaty & Alexander, 1989), in which the second half of the book was dedicated to retributive conflicts. These are conflicts in which each party is concerned not only with their own gains, but also with the pain they can inflict on the opposing side to compensate for perceived injustices. Saaty and his collaborators have tackled other real conflicts in the past, such as the conflict in South Africa, the free trade agreement negotiation between Canada and the U.S., and the violent hostage crisis in Peru in 1996-1997 (Saaty, 1986; Saaty, 1988; Saaty & Mu, 1997). However, no unresolved conflict can match the importance, scale, duration and complexity of the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis in the Middle East, and this is the struggle addressed in this book.

What I particularly liked about this book and what, in my opinion, makes it different from so many books written about this conflict is that firstly it provides a process,

based on the use of a mathematical decision-making method called the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), to address the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which is perhaps the most intractable socio-political conflict of our time. Secondly, the authors demonstrate that this process is a workable model because they used it to discuss resolving conflict with real Israeli and Palestinian negotiators who remained anonymous for political and safety reasons. They developed an objective tentative solution to the conflict, or more accurately, a set of tradeoffs on the many issues that would satisfy both parties. For this reason, the proposed results reflect the collective opinion of the negotiators who are subject matter experts and who have engaged in substantive international negotiations in the past. To our knowledge, no one has proposed a tangible objective plan to solve the conflict that includes the extent and level of detail provided by the actual stakeholders as has been done in this book.

The book (Chapters 1 and 2) begins by laying the groundwork from an historical context by discussing the origins and evolution of the Middle East conflict as well as recapping the attempts that have been made to resolve it. The authors recognize that the parties have a different mental model about the conflict which in turn leads to each party having their own different truths (for example, “I was here first”) that they believe about the conflict. The authors make a wise observation by stating that there are not competing truths among the participants, but their perceived truths must be respected. At the request of the Palestinian participants, the negotiation focused exclusively on the West Bank with Hamas and Gaza being deliberately excluded from consideration. This provided a very good start because one of the most important aspects of strategic decision-making is the context, including the assumptions, of the decision.

In Chapters 3 and 4 the authors explain the AHP fundamentals, taking into account that some readers may be hearing about the AHP for the first time. The AHP introduction is followed by a description of what retributive conflicts are and how to address them using the AHP’s ability to quantify both tangible and intangible gain and loss factors for both parties. In conflicts like this, the intangible factors may have far greater importance than the tangible ones.

In Chapters 5 and 6, the authors show the hierarchy they used to equalize the trade-offs between the parties with calculations that include each party’s knowledge of their own benefits and costs, and what they perceived the benefits and costs would be to the other party. This is followed by a chapter explaining the lessons learned in the process and has a very ambitious title: “Lessons Learned: The AHP Can Help Achieve Peace.” Judging from the results of the negotiations, the AHP certainly has the potential to do so, if given a chance.

The remaining chapters (7 to 10) address very specific results of the negotiation and their implementation. One of the most important contributions is the ten Pittsburgh Principles for fair and equitable trade-offs discussed in Chapter 7. These principles were developed from the negotiated trade-offs that served as guidelines for their creation. As an example, the first principle states the intention by the two parties to establish “a two-state solution based on the borders of the fourth of June, 1967, with mutually agreed upon land swaps.” (Saaty, Zoffer et al., 2021, p. 85). The last principle

states that “the full implementation of these principles concludes the end of the conflict and claims of the two parties” (p, 86). This is a direct quote from the book and means that upon implementation of these ten principles, both parties will agree that the conflict has ended.

While the whole negotiation process and proposed solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seems very promising, the book ends on a cautionary rather than optimistic note (Ch. 10: Looking Ahead). The authors recognize that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is now on the back burner of the Israeli government due to the emergency created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the sense of political power gained by Netanyahu because of actions of the Trump administration including the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by the U.S., the U.S. and Israel’s common concern about Iran, and the lack of interest by the U.S. in pressing Israel to address the conflict. Whether the Biden administration will change current policies, and to what extent, remains to be seen. The authors make a very important point that, in retrospect and in light of the recent violent confrontations between Hamas and Israel, ignoring the Gaza Strip and Hamas in the negotiation process (because of the explicit request of the Palestinian participants) was akin to ignoring the elephant in the room. The current split between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority makes it very difficult to see a viable two-state solution. In other words, until this internal conflict among the Palestinians is resolved, moving forward to create a Palestinian state could be a non-starter.

Reviewing this book from different disciplinary perspectives (e.g. political science) would probably require a book in itself. The present review focuses on its multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) aspects and, in particular, the use of the AHP methodology (Saaty, 1980). This book will become a classic and the go-to reference handbook for negotiating retributive conflicts using the AHP approach.

Note: The book is nicely printed by Springer and is pleasant to read. However, the details, such as the color maps and large tables in Chapter 8, are better appreciated in the electronic version because of the reading zoom capability. The book is available for purchase at the Springer Link site <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-83958-1>

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