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Managing International Conflict: From Theory to Policy: A Teaching Tool Using CASCON. St. Martin's Press.

Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Allen Moulton. *Managing International Conflict: From Theory to Policy: A Teaching Tool Using CASCON.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. ix + 229 pp. $29.32 (paper), ISBN 978-0-312-13675-8.

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CASCON (Computer Aided System for Analysis of Conflicts) was developed originally from research done on the Bloomfield-Leiss model of Conflict at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). First accepted by the United States Government in the late 1960s, CASCON's first successful database program was used during the 1967 June War in the Middle East. Following that, the United Nations began using the computerized model of conflict, and, finally, CASCON made its way into the university. In 1974, Dr. Nazli Choucri of MIT "used 42 CASCON cases in her <cite>Population Dynamics and International Violence</cite>, in which she examined the relationship in developing countries between conflict behavior and underlying factors of population, resources, and technology" (p. 121). In <cite>Managing International Conflict</cite>, the two authors involved in developing CASCON as a spin-off from another MIT project make the program generally available to not only students and scholars, but policy makers as well. <p> The book is divided into three parts. Part One situates the various definitions of conflict from International Relations Theory as a way to understand conflict. As one who teaches comparative political violence regularly and an alternating seminar on Drug Trafficking in the Americas, I found this section to be very accessible to undergraduate students. In my experience, such books attempt to cover too much, and, without a solid background in conflict theory, students often feel overwhelmed by the verbiage. The authors manage to keep a very complex subject relatively free of jargon. Part Two is devoted to managing conflict as the authors continue to sketch out their model. Again, their sensitivity to the needs of undergraduates is evident in the clarity of their tables and in the language they use. Part Three is devoted to analyzing conflict and includes instruction for the enclosed computer applications. There are two 3.5 floppy diskettes, one for Windows 95 and another for Windows 3.2. <p> For my Fall '97 Comparative Political Violence class, I am using an edited anthology, <cite>Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and Responses to International Conflict</cite>, edited by Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall and published by the United States Institute for Peace in Washington, D.C. (http://www.usip.org). I am also using again Dr. Peter C. Sederberg's book, <cite>Fires Within: Political Violence and Revolutionary Change</cite>, published by Harper-Collins in 1994. Both books provide clear theoretical approaches to conflict but, again, are pretty complex according to the reports on on student evaluations. I was also concerned that the cases cited in Sederberg's book would be too dated. I was pleased and impressed to find that, in CASCON's database, some of these same cases serve as comparison cases with some level of conflict resolution. Equally attractive is CASCON's ability to sort out factors and do a comparative analysis of resolved (?) and ongoing cases. When previously teaching these classes, I had insisted on students selecting cases of ongoing conflict only. Reviewing this software helped me realize I had been focusing so intently on understanding conflict and its causes that conflict management and resolution themselves were getting short shrift in the courses. <p> Since I require my students to make intensive use of the World Wide Web (WWW), I have also been searching for an accessible computer program that would provide sophisticated enough databases for the students yet interesting in terms of real people and real life. More importantly, the program had to be accessible for undergraduates in my classes who often reflect a wide range of computer competence (or incompetence!). Thus the computerized program would have to be extremely "user friendly." As I had not received this book in time to order it, I decided to add two new books that might help the students' understanding of conflict solutions: <cite>Autonomy: Flexible Solutions to Ethnic Conflicts</cite> by Ruth Lapidoth (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, 1995) and

<cite>Beyond Machiavelli: Tools for Coping with Conflict</cite> by Roger Fisher, et. al. (NY: Penguin Books, 1994). While admiring Fisher's brevity and economy of presentation, I found his inclusion of international scenarios quite limited for my purposes. Lapidoth's book seemed to cover the majority of conflict areas that student's choose as their semester long topics. <p> I was disappointed, therefore, to find that Part Three of Bloomfield and Moulton's book has more computer jargon than most of my students could or would tolerate and, in truth, with which I would become impatient. As someone who has taught and continues to teach computers to a wide range of age groups in the community, I find nothing succeeds for a self-admitted technophobe like achieving some kind of success within the first ten minutes of logging onto a computer. The surprise, however, is that the program itself is amazingly "user friendly" given the level of verbiage and jargon in Part Three. While following each and every direction in this section myself to be sure I could understand and make it work, I realized that with even minimal instructions the program is so intuitive with an excellent online help section that students will be up and running within minutes. I do plan to use this program in the future but will devise the instructions in an outline form more pleasing to the eye and understandable to even a novice user. This is not to say that computer instruction is not in Part Three, but it gets lost in the authors' well-intentioned attempt to cover all bases, thus obscuring the program's ease of use. <p> I would not recommend this program for such a specialized seminar as Comparative Political Violence. Since I am designing an introductory course to Conflict Resolution and Management, I would not hesitate to make this text a core text for that course. An attractive feature it has for a future Drug Trafficking In the Americas course is a user designed database capability. While a precisor case history of a regional conflict would provide valuable and succinct information, the particularity of a Drug Trafficking in the Americas course would require a user-designed database. I hope, in the future, there will be some modification of the program that permits such a use without this particular text. Generally speaking, I think this is an excellent book and program for upper level undergraduates and graduate students. <p>

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