

Charles Webel and Johan Galtung (Eds.) . Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies. London, New York: Routledge, 2009 (2007 hc). 406 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-415-48319-3 (pbk).

With twenty-five chapters by 32 (co-) authors, this handbook offers a fairly comprehensive overview of the state of the art in conflict- and peace research, addressing such issues as mediation, conflict (mis-)management, reconciliation, peace education and international law. One of the editors, Johan Galtung, is one of the founders of the field of peace and conflict studies. Yet his own introduction on “peace by peaceful conflict transformation – the TRANSCEND approach” is strangely idiosyncratic. But his brief concluding chapter (co-authored by Charles Webel) on the past and future of peace and conflict studies in which he pleads for “Bridging the gap between peace movement moralism and foreign policy pragmatism” (p. 399) is more accessible. Those interested primarily in terrorism will find the volume unsatisfactory. While much is to be said for studying terrorism within a framework of other forms of violence and non-violent political actions, and address all of these within a wider framework of conflict-waging at various levels, the volume has little to offer in this regard. “Terrorism” and “terrorists” receive only 8 and 10 brief mentions in the index (plus 2 for “terror” and 2 for “Al Qaeda”). While a sub-title on Charles Webel’s introduction is “Peace and its antithesis: terror and terrorism” (p.8), this idea is not worked out. In fact, counter-terrorism rather than terrorism is seen as the main problem in much of the volume. The chapter by Kinhide Mushakoji, Director of a Peace Research Institute in Tokyo and former Vice President of the International Political Science Association, is one of the most ideological ones of the entire volume. According to Mushakoji, the “War on Terror, is a new form of colonialism”, “a global form of fascism” (p.91).

In a chapter on “Nuclear disarmament”, David Krieger, founder of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, argues that “With nuclear weapons, an extremist group such as al Qaeda might conceivably bring even the most powerful country to its knees. And it could do so without fear of retaliation, since such a group could not be located” (p. 113). While deterrence is indeed difficult and perhaps impossible when the location of the opponent is not immediately known, that does not mean that a non-state group in possession of one or even several crude nuclear weapons could bring a superpower to its knees. More likely, a nuclear attack might trigger an over-reaction from that “most powerful country” and lead to the formation of an unprecedented forceful international coalition against those who are associated with the terrorist cause. The ability to escalate conflict rapidly to unprecedented levels is so much larger on the side of the most powerful country that any rational terrorist non-state actor would most likely be dissuaded and any irrational terrorist actor would hopefully be replaced by saner elements in the terrorist entourage. At this moment in time, the fear of non-state, going nuclear is generally exaggerated

in the political discussion and while the desire to lay their hands on the “ultimate weapon” exists among a handful of terrorist groups, their capabilities to do so are still largely absent. As a whole, the Handbook is of uneven quality; there are many sound ideas about peace-making but there is also a great deal of leftish ideology where one would have wished for more evidence-based, empirical social science research findings.