

Books

# Book review: Negotiating with the Devil, by Pierre Hazan

Written by a professional armed conflict mediator, *Negotiating with the Devil* highlights the complexities of the world's security apparatus today, and the need to find a new, shared international ethos, writes Vin Arthey

By Vin Arthey


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In 1993, as a journalist reporting on the war in Bosnia, Pierre Hazan was with a team of humanitarian workers who were suddenly tasked to decide who should be released from a grim detention camp. Until that point, Hazan had been a "fact finder" but now he found himself part of a group involved in a traumatic selection process. Suddenly he realised that his actions were in conflict with his ideals. The experience led to his now distinguished role in armed conflict mediation.

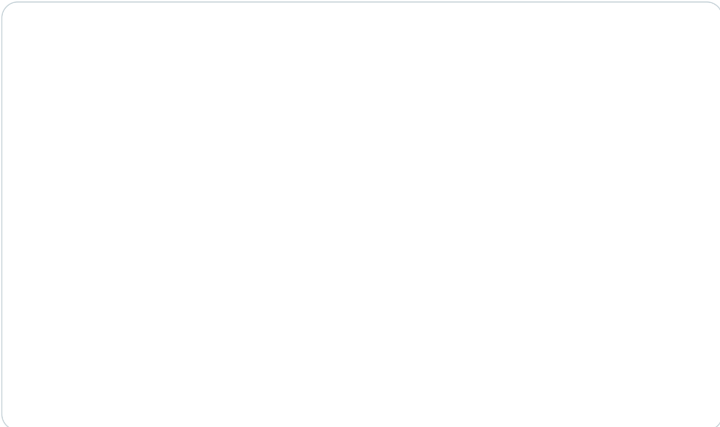
His short book is a breathtaking, demanding, but vital read. It takes the reader into the background of conflict resolution. It itemises the wars and conflicts that have proliferated since the end of the Cold War, their causes, and the errors made in the efforts to resolve them. Looming large in this complicated picture is President George W Bush's "War on Terror", a declaration that had the effect of preventing potential mediators having any contact with a checklist of "terrorist organisations." The Taliban were among these, of course. After tens of thousands of deaths, the US did eventually talk to them, and ended a war.

While that war was going on, the Arab Spring movement started. One outcome of this was NATO going into Libya to "protect civilians" before their approach morphed into a strategy to oust Colonel Gadaffi. And so the dominoes fell. Russia thought it had been tricked by the UN and involved itself in the Syrian civil war. A UN attempt to mediate in that war failed, thus marginalising the UN.

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Hazan leaves his grim take on international relations in two ways: he discusses the nuances that describe the art of the go-between – mediation, humanitarian aid, neutrality, impartiality – and he gives illuminating details to make his points. For example, he shows how simple agreements on the movement of livestock through disputed territory eased conflicts in the Sahel and saved lives. For the Western reader there is also a reminder that Turkey was a key player in getting an agreement between Russia and Ukraine for the export of grain and fertiliser to help avert famine in parts of Africa.

Translated from the original French by Susan Mutti, the English edition of *Negotiating with the Devil* begins with a six-page preface written just two days after the releases of 100 Israeli hostages and 150 Palestinian prisoners on 21 November last year, mentioning that these negotiations were mediated by a new international player, Qatar. This beginning highlights the complexities of the world's security apparatus today, and the need to find a new, shared international ethos.

***Negotiating with the Devil: Inside the World of Armed Conflict Mediation, by Pierre Hazan, trans. Susan Mutti, Hurst and Company, £18.99***

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