

Jacob Bercovitch: Understanding Hands Across the Divide

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Abstract

In this article we provide an overview of the research contributions made by Jacob Bercovitch to the field of international mediation. These contributions include both descriptive findings about the use of mediation and factors that correlate with the successful practice of mediation. Interestingly, three-quarters of the attempts to mediate international conflicts either fail or result in partial settlements. Bercovitch's work informs mediators about ways to improve their practice. The article concludes with personal reflections about the person and our relationship with him.

On June 10, 2011, our friend and colleague Jacob Bercovitch passed away after a long battle with cancer. It is most fitting that we dedicate this Special Issue to him, as the study of mediation was the central part of his scholarly life.

The dedication begins with an overview and summary of Jacob's significant research contributions and closes with some personal reflections on our relationships with him.

Research Contributions

Jacob Bercovitch's contributions in the field of conflict management and resolution, particularly with regard to international mediation, are impressive in both scope and depth. They have played a leading role in establishing a new research area, one that has become increasingly grounded in theory and sophisticated methodology. His work has defined the state of the art for studies of mediation as it occurs in various contexts. One of his recent books, *Regional Guide to International Conflict and Management From 1945–2003* (Bercovitch & Fretter, 2004), has become the definitive source for information on the major international conflicts in the world since 1945. His research speaks to the practitioner and the theoretician, blending knowledge of conflict management practice with analytical methods. As a result, we have more penetrating insights into the ways that international mediators extend their hands across the divide between conflicting parties.

Jacob's research highlights a fundamental issue in matters pertaining to foreign policy and conflict management, namely how to discern success or failure of policies and practices. This issue was approached, for a very long time, with single case studies or prescriptive approaches. By sampling broadly across time periods and regions and establishing a vital database, he sought robustness and generality of findings about factors that correlate with success and failure of interventions. As a result, we have an improved understanding of the factors that contribute separately and in combination with effective conflict management.

Conflict Management Database

In the 1990s Jacob constructed an extensive data set that records the endeavors to mediate inter- and intrastate conflicts from 1945 to 2000. Referred to as the International Conflict Management Data (ICMD), this is the largest and, perhaps, most widely used data set on official conflict management efforts in international relations. It covers 333 international conflicts, of which 272 experienced some form of conflict management; 190 of the 272 cases were mediated (not including rejected offers of mediation). The number of mediations increases substantially when multiple mediations within a case are considered, such as the Yugoslavian civil war. A total of 559 different mediators were involved in the cases included in the data set. Two hundred and nineteen structural and process variables, corresponding to the categories in his contingency framework, have been coded. An advantage of this large data set is that it allows for a variety of multivariate statistical analyses that capture the complexity of relationships among the variables depicted in the framework, which derives from earlier work by Sawyer and Guetzkow (1965) and Druckman (1973).

Jacob's tireless efforts to refine and update the data set have provided opportunities for international conflict researchers to conduct a large variety of descriptive and comparative analyses. We can only sample the fruits of some of these analyses, with a few key findings (see also Bercovitch & Gartner, 2006; Bercovitch & DeRouen, 2005).

A Sample of His Research Findings

Two types of findings have been generated from the research conducted by Jacob and his collaborators: descriptive findings and correlates of mediation success.

Descriptive Findings

- (1) On type of conflict management: Mediation is the most frequent approach (59%), followed by negotiation (32%).
- (2) On mediator identity: Most international mediators represent either states (24%) or international organizations (16%). However, international organizations are more frequent interveners in intractable conflicts compared with states (48% vs. 37% of total interventions). The primary international organization is the United Nations (52%), particularly during the period from 1956 to 1965.

- (3) On issues in conflict: Security issues are most frequently in dispute (28%), followed by territory (22%), ethnicity (22%), and ideology (18%). Conflicts over independence and resources rarely occur in the data set.
- (4) On strategies in intractable conflicts: The most frequent mediation strategy used has been communication-facilitation (47% of all intractable conflicts in the data set), followed by directive strategies (29%).
- (5) On conflict outcomes: Violence abatement has been the most frequent outcome of conflict management efforts (27% of the total types of outcomes) followed by full settlements (21% of the total). However, the outcomes in intractable conflicts have been either failure (57% of the outcomes) or partial settlements (30% of the total).

The pattern suggested by these findings is that mediation occurs frequently, usually performed by international organizations, and primarily with regard to issues of security. The record of success, however, is modest across the board (regions, time period, type of conflict), but poor with regard to intractable conflicts. More broadly, there may be two different processes at work: one for mediating the most intense cases, and another for those that are more tractable. Reducing violence has been the more frequently occurring outcome. These descriptive findings are the basis for Jacob's work on the factors that influence these outcomes.

Correlates of Success

- (1) On types of mediators: High-intensity conflicts are more successfully mediated by mediators who have access to a variety of resources, an array of strategic alternatives, and prestige in terms of access to key decision makers than those without those features. Regional mediators are better at resolving low- (but not high-) intensity conflicts than international organizations or individuals from outside the region or unattached to organizations.
- (2) On strategies: Directive strategies (more sustained and intrusive) are more effective than other strategies in high-intensity conflicts. Procedural strategies (focus on power balancing, tension reduction) are more effective than other strategies in low-intensity conflicts. Although most frequently used, facilitative-communication strategies (clarify situation, intentions) are least effective in both high- and low-intensity conflicts.
- (3) On types of conflict and conditions for mediation: Mediation in civil wars between ethnic rivals is more likely to be effective when (a) the process takes place at a neutral site, (b) when both/all parties initiate the process, (c) when the parties have had experience with the mediator, and (d) when the UN (rather than a superpower) intervenes. Directive strategies are more effective in ethnic conflicts, particularly when the mediator is experienced.
- (4) On mediation effort: The effectiveness of mediation depends in part on the extent of the intervention. Too much mediation can backfire, particularly in high-intensity conflicts. Too little mediation can be insufficient if integrative solutions evade the parties. A balance must be struck between the parties' needs and the mediator's response.

A conclusion that emerges from these findings is that the effectiveness of mediators depends on the conditions for mediation as well as their strategies, experience, and

resources. Acceptance of and experience with mediation by the disputing parties are important. As well, neutral sites and UN involvement can make a difference. Interestingly, mediator direction and structure work better than the more popular but less structured facilitative or empathic approach, particularly in more intense conflicts between ethnic rivals. But, it is also the case that mediators must learn to strike a balance between too much and too little intrusiveness as they perform their craft.

Three-quarters of the attempts to mediate international conflicts either fail or result in only partial settlements. Many of these conflicts are mediated by States and rely primarily on the less directed strategies. Often experienced mediators react to the situation as it presents itself, without taking the time to develop a suitable plan for those circumstances. Jacob's contingency approach provides useful knowledge about how to create (or take advantage of) opportunities that increase the likelihood of success. He leaves practitioners with the challenges of tailoring this knowledge to the particular situations that confront mediators. He leaves theorists with the challenge of developing more encompassing theoretical frameworks that guide the next generation of researchers on conflict management through mediation.

Personal Reflections

Sadly, Jacob passed away at his home in Christchurch, New Zealand, in June of 2011. A panel was held in his honor at the IACM meeting in Istanbul. Fascinating reflections about Jacob were shared by Dean Pruitt, Terry Hopmann, Peter Carnevale, Resat Beyer, and us. Statements were sent as well from Peter Wallensteen and Richard Jackson. It was an enjoyable experience for the audience and for his wife, Gillian, and his daughters, Liora and Daniela.

Carmela captured the person that she met for the first time at a conference 18 years ago in Haifa, Israel. Particularly interesting was her description of the emotional transition that occurred from fright and flight to joy and bonding. The grumpiness that she experienced in early conversations turned her away from Jacob. Gradually, their professional relationship evolved into one of mutual respect and appreciation, including collaboration on projects (e.g., Bercovitch & Lutmar, 2010). Indeed, meeting Jacob at conferences was a highlight of her experience, even though she knew that he would play practical jokes: For example, upon seeing Carmela in the hotel lobby, Jacob would hide behind another person decrying—while pointing at her—“I don't know that lunatic.” Understanding that this was his sense of humor, she took it lightly, even laughing joyously at being reunited with him.

Indeed, Jacob displayed a rather unique sense of humor, one that many of us warm up to gradually as an acquired taste. One of the more interesting characters in our field, Jacob could be grumpy, jocular, cynical, cutting, warm, and supportive in the same brief conversation in person or on e-mail. Under this complex veneer however, Jacob was a devoted friend and supporting mentor to colleagues and students. The devoted researcher was a serious scholar. The responsible person was also a person who took himself less seriously.

My (Dan's) first encounter with Jacob was in the late 1970s when he worked at a Washington-based think tank. Jacob was writing a dissertation at the London School of Economics. He sent chapter drafts to me for feedback. One of his letters raised a question

about my research. He had read a case study that I had written with Terry Hopmann for Rubin's (1981) book on Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy. This led him to wonder why I had uncharacteristically turned in the direction of qualitative case study analysis. Although I explained the value of multi methods and perspectives for developing social science knowledge, he was not convinced. This then led to an interesting discussion about approaches to analysis and may have had a shaping influence on our careers. I recall mentioning the need for a framework that would be useful for organizing variables for comparative analysis of cases of mediation. Apparently, this suggestion left an impression. Jacob developed a parallel research career using the Sawyer and Guetzkow (1965) framework for organizing his analyses of mediation, just as I had used it for analysis of negotiation (Druckman, 1977). A difference, however, is that, for me, 34 cases was a large data set for the analysis of negotiation processes. For Jacob, 3,600 cases defined an historical universe of events.

Jacob has defined the field of international mediation, a theme that he pursued with vigor since his dissertation in the 1970s. The many insights gained from his research, as summarized above, bolster our appreciation for framework-driven analyses of a large number of cases. Thank you, Jacob, for making these significant contributions and for your friendship.

We may not see the likes of a Jacob Bercovitch again, neither the person nor the scholar.

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Daniel Druckman received the IACM Lifetime Achievement Award, and he was the 2010–2011 president of the Association. He has written extensively on such topics as turning points in negotiation, justice in peace agreements, electronic mediation, nationalism,

peacekeeping, and research methodologies. His recent book with Paul F. Diehl, *Evaluating Peace Operations* (Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2010), received the IACM outstanding book award in 2012.

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