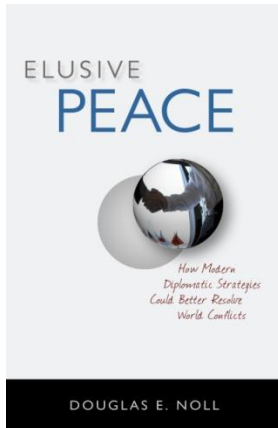




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**[Elusive Peace:  
How Modern Diplomatic Strategies Could  
Better Resolve World Conflicts](#)**

by Douglas E. Noll. (2011 Prometheus Books).

*Elusive Peace* makes peacemaking a reality. Due to its thorough analysis of the processes of mediation and negotiation, *Elusive Peace* a must-read for all politicians, mediators, negotiators and anyone interested in the skills and knowledge necessary for peacemaking.

Noll explains the methods of mediation and negotiation at a novice level to allow readers of all sorts to understand and appreciate the function/art of conflict resolution. Noll, a lawyer turned peacemaker, uses historical and contemporary conflicts as a base from which to explicate his ideas about peacemaking. Using an analysis of international conflicts, from Argentina's pulp mills to the NATO-Afghan war, Noll argues that diplomats and those involved in negotiations need an understanding of conflict resolution theories and skills to maximize their success. Noll carefully explains the obstacles to the resolution of past and current conflicts, and provides solutions for moving forward which form the basic premise for the book.

Throughout *Elusive Peace*, Noll makes clear the reasons why peace is so elusive. He details how belief systems and biases can become the catalyst for conflict. Without properly assessing and recognizing those biases, one simply cannot mediate or negotiate peace agreements. Noll argues that peacemakers need to understand the opponents' perceptions, beliefs, fears, or social identities, in order to achieve true resolution.

Noll outlines various conflicts to show how a different approach to resolution would have yielded better results. Noll backs his advice with scholarly research on emotions, social identities, fear, and even the neurophysiology of conflict. He uses research from neuroscientists regarding belief systems and the participants' need to hold on to their beliefs even when contradictory information is provided which undermines them. One of Noll's recurring themes is that emotion trumps rationality in decision-making. This is essential in understanding why the current negotiation practices of most politicians are simply not working. In his chapter on fear, anger and decisions, he states that "Fear and anger drive violent conflict". Noll uses examples as diverse as the Corinthians' war against Corsica 2600 years ago to President Bush's address to the country regarding the invasion of Iraq during the Persian Gulf War in the early 1990's. On a more personal level, gives elementary examples of basic principles of fear in his own life with simple reactions that demonstrate irrational thought, thus showing the results of fear with regards to decision making and conflict. "The primary work of a mediator is to de-escalate the conflict between the principals so that they can work together to solve problems...the mediator has an obligation to help them learn how to work together

collaboratively rather than contentiously”. He backs this statement by delving further into the mediator’s role in peacemaking, delivering additional necessities of the mediator to act in a role of creating reconciliation through restorative justice and cohesiveness between the conflicting parties. He further recognizes that through the Patriot Act, peace will remain elusive since peacemakers cannot work with ‘criminals’ to rehabilitate them and bring parties together for negotiation. This reminds us of Nelson Mandela’s famous adage: “You don’t make peace by talking to your friends”. According to Noll, working with ‘evil’ or wrongdoers is a necessary, yet difficult venture for mediators.

Douglas E. Noll has sensitively delivered a harshly accurate view of conflict, backed by facts and research. His work and expertise are essential to understanding the elusiveness of peace, while providing a path out of war.

Reviewed by:

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