Blalock, Hubert M., Jr. *Power and Conflict: Toward a General Theory*. Newbury Park: Sage, 1989.

In the relative anarchy of world politics and society, conflictual relationships are endemic to resource allocation. Conflict between large-scale actors is a very complex phenomenon; it becomes important to identify and establish links between the numerous variables lying at the core of this social process. This book, written by an experienced sociologist, is an ambitious attempt at drafting a general "theory" of conflict. The approach is in the pure tradition of deductivist social science (though with little mathematical modelling), emphasizing simple relationships between variables, and encouraging quantitative approaches to testing (a task which the author left to other researchers). Set at a very high level of generality, the book scarcely uses concrete empirical examples and can overwhelm the casual reader.

Hubert Blalock's main contribution in this volume is undoubtedly his "general model" ("model" and "theory" are used interchangeably), designed to capture the relationships between 40 variables as they shape the conflict behavior of a particular party; with modifications, the model can be applied at all levels of analysis. The variables are drawn from both the objective and subjective environment of the actor, including references to the constituting elements of power, the constraints on behavior, and the historical relationship with the adversary as a determinant of current psychological attitudes.

Four chapters actually precede the presentation of the general model. Blalock sets the stage by carefully defining the concept of power and its role in shaping conflict. He insists on a behavioral approach which can account for the obstacles to the exertion of power; more than a mere summation of resources, power is a relation of control or influence which is partly determined by the level of actor homogeneity, the process of resource mobilization, and the extent of dependency on other actors. The interactive display of power and its contribution to conflict escalation is analyzed through a review of deterrence theory and its predecessors.

The general model is accompanied in Chapter 5 by two submodels: one details the link between heterogeneity and mobilization within large-scale actors (such as nations or states), while the other looks at the dynamics of mobilization in interpersonal conflict. A discussion of ideology in the next two chapters yields yet another submodel: Blalock identifies fourteen interrelated "ideological dimensions" underpinning conflict and interacting with previously mentioned variables. The rest of the book essentially deals with the sustaining and end of conflict. Here again, explanatory variables are selected and linked into a final submodel.

In the final analysis *Power and Conflict* may well confuse and disappoint the reader. On the one hand, Blalock must be praised for his bold attempt at generality. In a period of scholarship where most specialists dare not trespass the limits of middle-range theorizing, this author tries to revive the quest for multivariate and multilevel modelling, bringing into play his

knowledge of ethnic relations and his mastery of political science literature. The graphic display of his models unveils a maze of boxes and arrows which immediately commands attention and respect. There is an aura of rigor that stems from the formal-theoretic approach, and which will appeal to a substantial audience among social scientists.

However, the book might be improved on at least three dimensions. First and foremost, the text suffers from a relative lack of structure. Within and across chapters the author often neglects to explain why he has decided to introduce particular themes and concepts. The sections on ideology (Chapters 6 and 7) and "conflict groups" (Chapter 8) are good examples of this problem, reflecting a tendency (though not persuasive) to overlook previous theorizing. Furthermore, the shifts from macro to micro levels of analysis do not take place systematically, leaving the reader quizzical as to whether a particular point should apply or not across the board. Similarly, the many hypotheses inherent in the models are presented in a rather haphazard fashion, while the absence of concluding sections among the ten chapters leaves much of the material hanging and obstructs the flow of the argument. In fact, one is unsure as to the main argument of a book which does not aim at solving any specific puzzle (except perhaps for Chapters 9 and 10).

A second area of concern has to do with complexity, or sophistication. Although the proposed models are very intricate, they are found wanting in three respects. One is their ahistoricity, for which the author cannot be blamed since it does not violate his assumption that social events can indeed be understood outside their historical context. In fact, Blalock does incorporate a historical dimension as he refers to the past relationship between parties X and Y as a determinant of conflict processes; yet in doing so, he stresses the isolated character of a conflict, and will disturb the historically-minded reader. Second is the dichotomous valuation of variables. Granted, one can accept the author's insistence on giving manageable proportions to what remains a first step at grand theory; hopefully, future refinement will nuance the model and allow for more incisive hypotheses. A third point is the rather swift treatment of psychological dynamics. This could be perceived as an oversight in the case of macro actors (though psychology has made important forays in rebutting deterrence theory, and would deserve consideration here), but not so at the interpersonal level where the psychological literature is so rich in insights.

Finally, some of the book's conceptualization would require explication. One striking tendency is to equate macro-level conflict with bitter, protracted conflict, or even with war itself — thus overlooking the conflictual dynamics of inter-ally negotiations or economic rivalry. Conflict and cooperation do form a continuum, and rich grand theorizing should precisely account for the wide space between extremes. A second point relates to "subjective probabilities/utilities," a pillar concept rightly aimed at qualifying the "objective" rational-actor approach: Blalock does not systematically develop this new formulation. Thirdly, the extensive discussion on ideology (Chapter 6) falls short of expectations, essentially because of an unsatisfactory definition of the concept which equates it with "belief system" and from which

"14 characteristics" are drawn in a rather arbitrary manner (interestingly, the micro dimension is nonexistent here: yet, don't individuals display complex belief systems?). Fourthly, a similar reservation is directed toward the list of "structural factors" sustaining conflict (Chapter 9). What is a structure and how does one select its components? These concerns cannot simply remain at the level of assumptions.

Power and Conflict is a difficult book. It is not light reading, it is almost purely theoretical, and heavily deductive (though inductive insights inevitably emerge). It will invite more criticism and debate; for this reason, it must be considered as a significant addition to the field of conflict studies.

Eric Laferriere
McGill University

Melko, Matthew. *Peace in Our Time*. New York: Paragon House, 1990.

The title of this book recalls Neville Chamberlain's premature evaluation of the consequences of his meeting in Munich in 1938. Matthew Melko points out that Chamberlain actually said "I believe it is peace for our time." Yet the author uses the popular version of the discredited phrase to signal the reader that this is a book which challenges popular assumptions about the origins of peace and war.

Melko argues that, in fact, there is peace in our time, but that it is limited in three ways. *Peace* is conceived here not as a state of perfect harmony, but as the relative and imperfect "absence of physical violence." It is *our* peace in that is not enjoyed by all, but resides in the Western World — Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Russia may or may not continue to share in the peace of the West, according to Melko, and East Asia may be in the early stages of its own long period of peace. The current peace is also limited in *time*, but its duration may be longer than many would expect. Melko confidently predicts that the period of peace which commenced after World War II will extend another six to ten decades more, providing a breathing space during which it may be possible to address the serious problems which beset the world. He interprets modern history in a "civilizational perspective" which draws on the writings of Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Carroll Quigley and others. These authors share the view that civilizations go through a series of predictable periods.

Melko undertakes three major tasks throughout the book. I will consider each in turn. First, he presents data on the incidence and intensity of war to show the existence of cycles of peace and general war over the last five