

Northern Ireland and North Korea: Exemplars of Peace Processes and the Management of Conflict?

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Management and Human Resources

Two of the most durable conflicts extant in today's world are those taking place in Northern Ireland and North Korea. Both appear intractable, with one having roots going back centuries and the other lasting fifty years or more (on the Korean peninsula) with no end in sight. Peace processes have been intermittent in Northern Ireland for quite a while and, from some standpoints, thought to be promisingly pursued since 1994. North Korea may also have moved a bit and has delayed its nuclear military activities in return for two light-water reactors from the USA and South Korea. By the end of 1997, North Korea had also held high-level discussions with American Department of State and agreed to open negotiations on a peace treaty for the Korean peninsula (which had been previously proposed by the USA and South Korea). Many observers wonder if these two conflicts (Northern Ireland and North Korea) may now be inching slowly toward meaningful management, some sort of eventual and ultimate resolution perhaps, and the avoidance, in the short run, of further large-scale armed aggression. Is it possible that peace might "break out" for these possible exemplars, or that significant change is imminent?

Perspective

Hope springs eternal among peacemakers, even when the harshest realities intrude upon their hopes. By January 20, 1998 ten people in Northern Ireland had already been murdered in a renewed outburst of politico-religious terrorism that began with the New Year. The killers were gunmen and paramilitaries who had clear intentions and no fear of (and perhaps little respect for) humankind. They kill. They insouciantly accept that they may be killed. Murder is banal. But almost everyone in the island of Ireland wishes it would end. Will it ever?

Former U.S. Senator George J. Mitchell, who now heads a tripartite group formed by the British and Irish governments in the latest Northern Ireland peace process effort and shuttles weekly between New York and Belfast, believes "a settlement is going to happen" by May 1, 1998 but he "wouldn't put odds on it" (*Los Angeles Times*, January 29 1998 p. A-14). There is little doubt that Mitchell is a person of great skill and dedication and has honed his legislative, judicial, and negotiatory competencies to a fine point in his erstwhile roles as Majority Leader in the U.S. Senate and U.S. District Court Judge (Montalbono, 1997, pp. A-1-A-8). He is another in a long list of able public servants who have tackled the issue of Northern Ireland. None has succeeded, if a peaceful and durable settlement of the conflict is used as the criterion for success.

Land Partition and Conflict Resolution

As a general proposition, when armed conflict is terminated, reduced to a stalemate, or continued by very intermittent outbursts of violence or terrorism, we may acknowledge that conflict has been de-escalated and hope peace may be at hand. After World War II, much armed conflict was reduced or eliminated for a while in different parts of the world by using land

[Editor's note: recent developments have borne out the author's insight.]

separations of segments of nations (sometimes called in history "partitioning") to form new states. In this way East and West Germany, North and South Vietnam, and North and South Korea were created. Each of these partitioned lands took on names suggesting that they were, in a certain sense, the real successor to a former nation or some historical entity and now formally named a democratic republic or federal republic.

The land division lines were pragmatically drawn and did not necessarily have any fundamental or clear cut cultural or important subcultural basis. The distinctions were mainly geographical, brought about by lines drawn on a map as we normally put it. By the time the Cold War ended with the economic destruction of the former Soviet Union and Germany moved toward reunification, the two segments of Vietnam had been joined sixteen years (since before 1975) and the two segments of Korea were still in a rather nasty ceasefire standoff.

Conflict between North and South Korea has flared up sporadically for more than 45 continuous years; the ceasefire line remains a worrisome and uneasy one (Oberdorfer, 1997). South Korea flourished economically after the Korean War (1950-53) and related itself to the USA and world democracies while North Korea became economically distressed, a national pariah, bellicose, and almost unrelated diplomatically to the rest of the world, except the former Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

Land divisions in other parts of the world also presented particular problems, with roots going back to World War II, but were influenced more importantly by events antecedent to that war. For example, Palestine and the creation of the state of Israel (not to mention the delineation of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish sectors within Jerusalem) is another example of geographical partition (but perhaps with greater attention given to cultural and religious considerations than some of the previously mentioned partitions).

Still another long-standing partition is that of "Ulster", the six counties on the island of Ireland that are joined in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the remaining 26 counties that constitute the Republic of Ireland, an independent nation. World War II hostilities had little to do with creating a new partition for the two Irelands but marked a period of time during which the Republic remained officially neutral during the war while the North was (as a part of the UK) a combatant fighting against the axis powers. The existing partitions of Ireland and Korea remain as focal points for conflict in the world as we approach the new millennium.

Visits to Ireland and South Korea

During 1997 while on sabbatical leave during one quarter, I invested my time in Ireland and South Korea. I was about five weeks in Dublin. I spent a little less than three weeks in Seoul and made several trips to outlying areas around the country. I did not visit Belfast in Northern Ireland or Pyongyang in North Korea.

Contrary to what I expected before I left the USA, I found that Belfast is being hyped in Ireland as a tourist destination for "holiday breakaways" and visitors can tour Panmunjom in the Korean demilitarized zone in one of the dozen or more tourist packages offered (with lunch included!) from Seoul.

Having read Gerry Adams' *Before the Dawn* (Adams, 1996) I determined from a map of Belfast in the book that the Shankill Road (Protestant area) and Falls Road (Catholic area) have been flash points in past street fights and gunfire exchanges. Random murders elsewhere in Belfast and Northern Ireland are not uncommon. Thus not all Belfast would be

ideal for a holiday or sabbatical breakaway. As for Panmunjom, tourists are in no danger there if they do not stray from where they should confine their walking. In the past a few American troops in the Panmunjom area who deviated in minor ways from being where they should have been were hacked to death by North Korean troops standing by (perhaps looking for trouble). Tensions have often been high in both Belfast and Panmunjom. Entry into North Korea *per se* was out of the question; tourists do not go there! But word is out that some tourism may be forthcoming, including an opportunity to visit the USS Pueblo, an intelligence ship, that was seized by North Korea in a bellicose moment in 1968.

Common Denominators and Differences

My visits to Ireland and Korea had one common denominator: I was a visiting professor of human resource management at the National College of Industrial Relations in Dublin and the same at the Center for the Study of Human Resources in the Future, which is an affiliate of Korea University and several other major universities in Seoul. In Dublin I was especially interested in gathering information on social security benefits and occupational (private industry) pension plans in Ireland (and also the same among large European countries by use of the NCIR library). In Korea I was expected to give several lectures on the future of human resources and meet with industrialists and top managers in large companies to talk with them about contemporary problems in human resource management, especially downsizing and compensation. In both countries I was fortunate to end up meeting many persons in academia, government, and business who generously contributed their ideas and insights about human resources, business, politics, and public policy to me. (I even had a conversation with a former prime minister in Ireland, Albert Reynolds, after he gave a speech on campus in Dublin.)

Without having planned to do so, I found I had placed myself in two geopolitical situations involving partition where many years of avoidance and unsuccessful conflict management efforts had frustrated progress of the peace process. Both conflict situations had proven intractable. Both involved a north-south partition where the land carve-out did not result in creating states where the resources were approximately equal. (In fairness, this was never the intention in Northern Ireland.) Both situations involved external intervention by world political powers who offered their services and geopolitical ideologies to achieve a lasting peace. Both conflicts involved violence from time to time but neither involved virtually unceasing battles of the type and scope staged in World War II. Both involved terrorism and shows of force. In both, trust was absent and the immediate danger of escalation of the violence was real. In both there were internal conflicts among the power holders, uneasy relations with the respective populations, and inability to relate effectively or in any depth to the other side.

There were differences between the Irish and Korean situations. In Northern Ireland troops from another location (Britain) had been used to pacify parts of the immediate country in conflict, particularly Belfast, where there was much unrest and terrorist activity (that was also carried to Britain in the form of bombs and explosions in London and other places by members of a group of irregulars, zealots, and activists known as the IRA, Irish Republican Army).

People in the North and the Republic deplored the IRA for its actions. Yet, of course, the IRA has its followers in both places. Religious differences also strongly enter in the situation where a Protestant majority in Northern Ireland (subdivided into three main political groups which favor continued unity with Britain) confronted and is still confronted by a Catholic minority (also subdivided into three groups, including the Sinn Fein, which is headed by Gerry Adams and is the political arm of the IRA). All these interrelations are very complex and very important but cannot, for reasons of space, be explored further in this article. (See Coogan, 1993, for the details.) The British troops are in Northern Ireland to protect the people and property and cope with the IRA and individuals who use violence to gain their ends. There are

no pitched battles, for the IRA does not field troops at a time and place to engage large segments of the British Army. The IRA is, in any event, at most an army of irregulars. The war is one of a guerrilla style and tactics and, it is fair to say, an exercise in paramilitary politics in respect to the IRA and Sinn Fein, although they are also interested in and espouse democracy, fair treatment for all, and a new way of life.

In North Korea one of the few remaining communist dictatorships in the world has one of the world's largest armies (one million troops) with actual nuclear capabilities. From 1950-53 it fought forcefully in an armed invasion of South Korea. For four decades it was dictatorially ruled by Kim Il Sung and the North is now in an unstable withdrawn political transition as his son, Kim Jong-il, tries to assert himself within the ruling circle. He is considered weak and subject to removal by those who want him replaced. The economy is very weak and widespread famine is taking place. The nation is very hostile to the outside world, very secretive, and utterly repressive.

North Korea constantly excoriates South Korea and unceasingly threatens that a new invasion of the South is looming. It has a well armed military force close to Seoul. It repeatedly sends spies and terrorists into South Korea to cause damage to people and property (Gleysteen, 1997). Terrorism as well as immediately available massive armed and nuclear force are prominent as tools for conflict and could be introduced with force if the North desires.

South Korea also has a very large and modern army that daily and effectively confronts the North along a demilitarized zone that is drawn across the Korean peninsula. After World War II, the 38th Parallel was used as the dividing line between the two Koreas. But at the time the armistice which partly settled the hostilities of the Korean War was drawn up in 1953, the main line of resistance of the troops facing one another — a wavy line now with Panmunjom as the main center where contacts for the ceasefire were made and carried out — became a new dividing line. It is like two warring camps opposite one other with a small demilitarized zone separating them. The conflict is made plain by the existence of the line. To this day a permanent peace treaty has never been signed by the belligerents.

The USA has about 40,000 troops in Korea (45 years after the armed hostilities ended) and has helped South Korea become a world economic and military power. The South Korean Army is very large, very well trained and equipped, and very powerful, with about 600,000 troops under arms.

The economy of South Korea is undergoing change and experiencing considerable distress and instability at present (as are many Asian nations). But per capita income in the country has been high in the recent past and, surprising perhaps to casual observers of the Korean scene, is the expectation stated by experts on the Korean economy that the per capita income in South Korea will surpass that of the USA within ten years.

Thus the damage, devastation, and bloodshed that could come from a conceivably thermonuclear war between the USA and South Korea on one side and North Korea (possibly with the alliance of the People's Republic of China) on the other is shocking to contemplate. Because of the horror of such a war many people — Americans, Koreans, other Asians, Europeans — consider the possibility of such a war as low. It is "unthinkable" as many view it. Yet attempts by the USA, China, and both North and South Korea to manage the conflict by signing once and for all a permanent peace treaty that would formally end the Korean War have made no noticeable progress. Hopes for agreeing to and fulfilling a pledge for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons by North Korea are held by the USA. But there is an uneasiness about whether controls over their production and verification of the North's reluctant promises can be confidently set in place. Reunification is thus probably a far-off dream. What about the prospects for forging the island of Ireland into a unity?

“The Troubles” Since 1969 in Northern Ireland

Space prevents detailed treatment of developments in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s to the 1994-96 IRA ceasefire, but detailed treatments of the era are available (such as Mallie and McKittrick, 1996).

Briefly, from 1921 to the early 1970s the Catholic community of Northern Ireland was politically isolated and excluded from political power and economic opportunity. Protestants felt “home rule was Rome rule” and systematically excluded Catholic and nationalist influences. Inspired by Martin Luther King in the USA and student agitation in Paris, in August 1969 Northern Catholics launched a civil rights movement that resulted in widespread rioting in Belfast and Londonderry (now called Derry by many Northerners), overwhelming the police force (the largely Protestant Royal Ulster Constabulary) and requiring the intervention of the British Army to restore order. But the latter failed to accomplish this task with any permanence.

In the quarter century since then Protestant attacks on the Catholic ghettos in Belfast have led to the re-emergence of the IRA, first as a defensive force but shortly thereafter as mostly a terrorist force. Soon large Protestant paramilitary organizations in the North emerged, and some of their hardcore groups moved from being defensive vigilantes to becoming killers of substantial numbers of Catholics. By August 1994, when violence ceased for a period of time, the bad news was that at least 3000 people had been murdered or killed as victims of the resulting violence. The good news was that four persons had emerged to take on the task of leading a peace process.

Prominent New Leaders

John Hume, a Northern Catholic from Derry, became well known in 1974 and thereafter as a moderate political leader with Unionist goals and head of the SDLP (Social Democratic and Labor Party). Gerry Adams, also a Northern Catholic, and a Sinn Fein leader, eventually became President of the latter. Adams came across to the people as a serious intelligent politician with good listening skills, and was popular in Belfast.

Hume and Adams became driving forces in the peace process. Also prominent were John Major, Prime Minister of the UK from 1990-97, and Albert Reynolds, Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of the Republic of Ireland 1991-94 (who had served in the same role a few years earlier). Reynolds’ predecessor, Charles Haughey, had started making contacts and engaging in other significant political activity to move the peace process forward. Of course, myriad other individuals also played important roles, but none stood out as prominently as those mentioned.

Hume talked to Reynolds about the opening of a window of opportunity, that the mood of the Sinn Fein was changing, and that John Major should be approached. He was (by Reynolds). Also Adams, it was learned, seemed to be gradually committing himself to peace and to bringing the violence to an end.

These interactions among the quartet of driving forces were complex and painfully slow, many of the steps being quiet and behind the scenes, including interactions by Hume and Adams that Reynolds considered distressing especially in the light of continuing IRA terrorism.

Reynolds regarded John Major as giving more attention to the Irish problem than any prime minister since Gladstone (a long century before). Major, in London, had suggested at one point that Reynolds should not associate with Hume and Adams because that would likely

be a kiss of death. In addition, there were several back-channel communications that also existed between the various moving forces in the peace process.

On August 28, 1994 the IRA announced that as of August 31 there would be a complete cessation of military activities. Importantly, they never suggested this would be forever or permanent. Within a week Reynolds met publicly with Hume and Adams. Six weeks later the Northern Ireland loyalist paramilitary groups followed the IRA's lead and announced an end to violence.

Major hoped the ceasefire would become permanent and urged the parties to use that word when discussing the ceasefire. The word became an irritant to the IRA, observers in Dublin of the unfolding of the peace process, and others who worried that the British failed to understand the significance of the progress that had been made, owing to the perceived cultural, psychological, and temperamental gap which some believe has always existed between Britain and Irish nationalism.

The IRA did not intend to become inactive and it continued to enforce communal retributions including violence against miscreants who were burglars, wrong-doers, and the like. Then, more importantly, the Fianna Fail coalition government of Reynolds fell in October 1994 on a vote of confidence relating to matter entirely different from the peace process (a child molestation allegation case against a priest). The new Taoiseach was John Bruton of the Fine Gael Party, with a different coalition from Reynolds.

Bruton wanted to re-think the whole attitude toward Northern Ireland and did not want his government to espouse a special relationship there with anyone on the basis of religion or ethnic origin alone. Bruton appeared to move away from the position that the Irish Taoiseach had a particular duty to sponsor and speak for the interests of the Northern nationalist minority. Reynolds' commitment to that role had helped create the ceasefire.

In the Bruton years (1994-early 1997) Adams and some members of the Sinn Fein began to feel they were no longer part of a nationalist coalition. The British seemed to be dragging their feet in talking to Sinn Fein representatives about matters of interest to them.

The largest stumbling block was what should be done with the IRA's weaponry and arms. John Major wanted the IRA to give them up. Gerry Adams wanted to get the guns out of Irish politics but saw the resolution of the issue being dependent on a political settlement.

Most observers thought it inconceivable that the IRA would give up its guns in advance of talks involving all parties. The British pressed on, but the situation was one where the IRA had only disengaged from armed conflict on its own initiative and had not surrendered. The British did not seem to understand this unsubtle difference in social realities. Insofar as turning over the weapons had never been a precondition for negotiations, Adams pointed out that, for the British, negotiation was simply war by another means and that they were playing a game. The gun issue remained deadlocked and the peace process moved at a snail's pace. (To early 1998 Senator George Mitchell was stymied by this gun issue or "decommissioning" as it is called.)

The release of IRA prisoners held by the British also remained slow during this time. Adams and other Sinn Fein personnel warned that the peace process was in crisis. Major and Bruton seemed to either be not listening or, at worst, unresponsive to a number of the voiced concerns of the Sinn Fein. Finally, on February 7, 1996 a huge bomb was detonated near the Canary Wharf in London by the IRA, supposedly without Adams' knowing of the plan. The price tag on the Canary Wharf damage was estimated as high as one billion dollars. The ceasefire had lasted seventeen months and nine days up to that point.

Was Adams brought into the ceasefire with no intention by the British to go forward with a peace based upon consensus? Was Adams courageous or duplicitous? Was Major playing politics in Ireland hoping to score with the Northern voters and get re-elected or non-understanding of the IRA's willingness to go back to terrorism?

In the Spring of 1997 Major's Tory government stood for re-election and lost by a landslide to Tony Blair's New Labor Party. The Sinn Fein won two seats in Parliament (Adams and his close associate, Martin McGuinness) and was ecstatic about the result. Major kept his seat in Parliament but the defeat ended 16 years of Tory dominance in the British House of Commons and marked the end of the Thatcher-Major era and its Northern Ireland policy.

Tony Blair's Labor Party took power (and he as British Prime Minister) in May 1997; by July Blair had successfully wooed the support of David Trimble of the mainstream pro-British Unionist Party in Northern Ireland. Blair opened the door at the same time to Adams and the Sinn Fein, giving them the same access to British officials as the Labor Party would to any other political movement in Northern Ireland.

By December 1998 Adams had gone to 10 Downing Street to meet Blair and tell him that Britain *must get out of Northern Ireland*. Blair declared that topic was not on the agenda. This December encounter was the first between a Sinn Fein leader and British Prime Minister since 1921 when the Irish Free State (Eire) was declared, which is the linear root of today's Republic of Ireland. The December meeting was thus very important symbolically.

Blair, Trimble, Adams, and Mitchell were at significant loggerheads as of mid-winter 1998. The guns and murders of January 1998 referred to above were accompanied by Protestant guerrilla groups threatening to walk out of the peace talks. Adams (and McGuinness) of the Sinn Fein opposed new power sharing arrangements in Northern Ireland suggested by Blair's government (as well as by Bertie Ahern, the new Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland since John Bruton stepped down in May 1997); a very tight deadlock developed on the "decommissioning" of firearms issue. Even Marjorie "Mo" Mowlan, Blair's highly competent British Secretary for Northern Ireland, felt stymied by the decommissioning stumbling block. She believes that the parties to the peace process need time to build trust and confidence in each other so that they can gradually remove that so-far intractable obstacle (Profitt, 1997). [Editor's Note: Nevertheless, the parties did come to some agreement, a referendum was passed by large majorities by the peoples of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and a "national" assembly elected in Northern Ireland which has withstood highly disruptive activities by splinter groups.]

People and Peace Processes

The Irish story on conflict management and the peace process is one of persons and situational factors but the same can be said of the Korean partition (with Kim Jong-il and the ruling circle in North Korea). Owing to a free press, we in the USA have more information on the intricacies of the Irish "troubles" than of what is happening in North Korea.

North Korea demands secrecy and has virtually no truck with the press corps of the nations of the free world. It is very difficult to gauge life and politics there in the detail and with the accuracy of what takes place in Ireland.

Stories in American newspapers of record suggest the names and positions of people in the peace process and provide a variety of analyses of happenings in the Northern Ireland peace process: Hume, Adams, Major, Reynolds, Blair, Mitchell, and Mowlan, to mention prominent figures who have been or are presently on the scene.

If we look at the personalities involved and the relative power they wield in their roles, can we obtain a good start in understanding why and how conflicts that have been settled by use of geographical partitioning persist despite the fact that extended and extensive attempts to solve them have dragged on interminably? Such analyses would be helpful but the fundamental conceptual base they work from also needs to be identified and evaluated.

Of all the persons named, we believe John Hume has contributed most heavily conceptually to pinpointing the fundamental causation of the persistent troubles of Northern Ireland. If he is correct, peace in Northern Ireland does not seem to be at hand because the people do not have a consensus. Moreover, peace may be many years away—more years than we like to think about.

John Hume has had a “single transferable speech” about the crux of the problem that political acquaintances allege he has been making for the last thirty years (Drower, 1995). He believes:

It is not territory which is divided, it is people who are divided; we are a divided people. Division can only be ended by agreement. Agreement threatens nobody. We must work toward agreement. My party is committed to agreement.

This lucid train of thought, his cutting through much fuzzy thinking, his unswerving dedication to peace and justice and his willingness to dedicate himself to the success of the peace process for Northern Ireland have caused many acquaintances to think Hume will be a Nobel Peace Prize candidate on some future occasion. If peace were permanently attained, that is if there is agreement among the groups involved, and peace “breaks out”, then Hume may indeed become a Nobelist for his understanding, dedication, and action.

Conclusion

The peace processes in Northern Ireland and North Korea that we have described are hardly exemplars of conflict management. They do typify, however, frustrating arms-length relationships that generally avoid widespread violence and may easily be argued to be preferable to continuous war and armed aggression. To the extent violence and terrorism are contained and somewhat discontinuously controlled, it may also be said that a very marginal type of conflict management exists. Greater engagement is obviously required to achieve a lasting and durable peace. In neither the island of Ireland nor the peninsula of Korea is the level of engagement at present a very encouraging indicator of an impending peace or tranquility which the world community and the Irish and Korean people hope for.

There are those who despair of *ever* finding a solution to the Northern Ireland conflict. They are reminded of words of an advisor to Henry VIII in the Sixteenth Century:

It is a proverbe of olde date, ‘The pryde of Fraunce, the treason of Englande, and the warre of Irland, shalle never have ende.’ Whiche proverbe, twycheing the warre of Irland, is lyke allwaye to contynue, withoute Godd sett in mennes brestes to fynde some new remedye, that never was founde before (Bardon, 1996).

As for the situation in North Korea, the cultural context and politics are clearly much different from those of Northern Ireland. But the problem of finding a “new remedye” is at least as challenging for conflict management and peace there because the level of desperation has reached the stage of famine and threatens perpetuation of the basic civilization north of the demilitarized zone. Something has to happen soon. Change in conflict levels may come more quickly in North Korea than in Northern Ireland.

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