

**Kashmir and Northern Ireland**  
*Lessons for Conflict Resolution and Peaceful Reconciliation*

The increasing number of land and territory disputes around the world present new and increasingly difficult challenges to negotiators who must develop strategies to appease all factions involved, create viable and practical solutions, and implement them quickly and peacefully. Most conflicts over territories have become entrenched in political, religious, and social divides, which force modifications to theories about rational actors, deterrence, and peacemaking.

One of the more prominent areas in dispute today is Kashmir; a region comprised of over 86,000 square miles and located between India and Pakistan, both nuclear-capable nation-states. Kashmir, which is primarily made up of mountainous terrain, contains over 13 million people. The area has long been under dispute but tensions rose in 1947. Kashmir is technically part of India but many within the region of Kashmir want outright independence while Pakistan claims religious and cultural rights over the territory (Srivastava, 7).

In developing a strategy to combat the problems associated with Kashmir, history provides a useful framework and pathway. Examining the conflict, one can draw parallels between Kashmir and Northern Ireland based upon their cultural backdrops, historical antecedents, and with a working knowledge of modern-day international relations acquire insights on solutions through peace initiatives. Ireland provides a masterful template because it contains some of the same issues of ethnic, religious, and political conflict combined with a strong history that drives the dispute.

Through the similarities and differences in the origins of the conflicts, the ways in which the history of the peace process in Northern Ireland illuminates the future of the peace process in Kashmir becomes readily apparent.

**Roots of the Kashmir Conflict**

After India and Pakistan obtained their independence from Britain in August of 1947, a partition plan decreed that Kashmir could accede to India or Pakistan. Kashmir, already a highly disputed area before the liberation, initially chose independence but the Maharaja, Hari Singh, later conceded to India in return for military aid.

Pakistan's claims on Kashmir are based upon religion. Pakistan was established in 1947 to form a Muslim state. Leaders in Islamabad believe Kashmir should have been awarded to Pakistan in the Indian Independence Act

of 1947 because of its religious make-up. The Indian state of Kashmir is over 60% Muslim, making it the only state in India with a Muslim majority.

Pakistan supports a referendum in Kashmir to let the people of Kashmir decide their future and has garnered United Nations resolutions to that effect. India rejects Pakistan's pleas for international intervention and cites the Simla Agreement of 1972, which cites bilateral talks for resolution. The two countries do agree on one thing though, and reject the idea of Kashmiri independence, (Schofield, 36-45).

The United Nations has maintained a presence in Kashmir since 1949 and currently monitors the Line of Command. The Line of Control, which passes through a frigid mountainous region, demarcates a ceasefire line and was established following the first Kashmir war in 1949. The line was renegotiated after the second war in 1972.

Two thirds of Kashmir lies to the east and south of the line and is part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir while the other third lies to the north and west and is controlled by Pakistan, which calls the region Azad Kashmir. China also controls a small part of the land. The United Nations cites its mission "to observe, to the extent possible, development pertaining to the strict observance of the ceasefire of December 1971," (Wirsing, 55).

Since 1947 there have been three wars between India and Pakistan and two have occurred in or over Kashmir. Most recently, in 1999, India conducted a military operation against Pakistani-supported forces in the region, (Ali Ahmad, A1).

Currently the region is claimed not only by India and Pakistan, but also by a growing internal movement of separatists who have rejected Indian rule since 1989. Not all groups in the conflict are armed, but the number of armed separatists has grown to thousand, the most prominent are the pro-Pakistani Hizbul Mujahideen. Pakistan denies supporting any group with logistical support or arms.

The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front are the largest pro-independence group while other groups have joined under the umbrella of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference, which campaigns for a peaceful end to India's rule in Kashmir, (Ali Ahmad, A1).

India declared a ceasefire in November of 2000 but violence continued. Talks between the nation and separatist group have stumbled because the groups insist Pakistan must be involved in the dialogue while India refuses its involvement because it believes Pakistan supports and instigates violence in Kashmir.

## **Roots of the Northern Ireland Conflict**

In 1920, the British government divided its colony of Ireland after a 1916 uprising and years of guerilla warfare led by the infamous Irish nationalist Michael Collins. The Republic of Ireland was formed as an independent

state in the island's predominantly Catholic south. The six Ulster counties in the north, which contain Protestant majorities, remained part of the U.K.

The conflict is political and religious and Catholics in Northern Ireland complain of oppression and seek to reunite Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland. Protestants in the region want to remain part of the United Kingdom to keep their political power and majority status, (Bew, 7-15).

### **The Differences**

Irish Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland and those in the Republic of Ireland share similar identities while the Muslims in Pakistan and those of Kashmir do not share the same ethnic and sectarian identity. Muslim Kashmiri leaders voluntarily affiliated with India after partition.

Northern Ireland Protestants are primarily colonists from England, making them culturally and ethnically distinct while Hindus residing in Kashmir are ethnically similar to Kashmiri Muslims.

While Protestants and Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland experience frequent conflict, there is no analogous relationship between the Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir. Also, minority Hindus did not decide to join India, Kashmiri Muslims did that, (Srivastava, 37-44).

### **The Similarities**

In Northern Ireland, the desire of the Catholic majority to join their brethren in Ireland drives the conflict, just as Muslims in Kashmir desire to join the Muslim state of Pakistan. The issues of ethnic identity are important to both groups to preserve ethnic and religious cultures. The groups are also motivated by the desire for political power. Kashmiri Muslims joining Pakistan and Irish Catholics joining the Republic of Ireland would instantly be transformed from a religious minority to a powerful majority.

Looking at the logistical issues of constitutional law, the advantages and disadvantages of independence and alignment, social and economic equality, cultural and religious differences, as well as security and day-to-day relations also reveal similarities between Kashmir and Northern Ireland.

### **Lessons from Ireland**

Initially, Britain used policy initiatives to combat the violence and insurgences in the area. For example, housing allocation was rife with discrimination and schools were segregated at one point, but the government has attempted to bridge differences by promoting similarities.

Between 1973 and 1995, violence and impasses made peace almost impossible in Northern Ireland.

Allegiances and enemies changed, as peace seemed impossible in a situation that seemed to breed cycles of violence, revenge, and attack. In the late 80s, loyalist groups found that violence no longer had an impact on the violence-weary public, which began to reject all forms of terrorism, (Bew, 66-67).

In 1987, Sinn Fein, the political mouthpiece of the IRA, failed to garner tangible support in the election. This was seen as a remarkable turning point as the peace process took root in the rejection of violence.

Britain finally contributed to the process when the British secretary of state, Peter Brooke, admitted in 1990 that Britain had “no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland.” In 1993, the Downing Street Declaration acknowledged Northern Ireland’s right to self-determination and established Britain’s intentions to “encourage, enable, and facilitate” a peaceful agreement in the region.

The Belfast Agreement in 1998 marked a notable change and an attempt to coalesce all sides and address the issues of the inter-group conflict. The document is based on minority protection and answers questions of human rights, division of peoples, balancing differences and examines issues of international law and territorial boundaries. The agreement is a political framework, within which the group can balance their interests and forge agreements, (Bew, 77).

The lesson to be drawn from Northern Ireland is that policy initiatives and managed dialogue can produce extraordinary results even through a horrific period of strife, violence, and hopelessness. While both sides have erred, the problem in Northern Ireland was far more entrenched than those in Kashmir and still a solution continues to be a viable goal for all parties involved.

### **Peace Initiatives for Kashmir**

Three viable options currently exist for Kashmir. The first is independence for the territory, which has a sizable population and enough land and infrastructure to support itself. While economic disparity exists within Kashmir, the issue is one currently rampant in South Asia.

The second is sovereignty well short of independence, which would keep Kashmir from falling under the power of either Pakistan or India, (Lakshmi, A1). This may appease all sides but is less than ideal in terms of economic and social improvement within the country. Resource allocation and governance make this solution impractical.

The third is to formalize the current tenuous division of the territory into an international reality and allow Pakistan and India to control the different regions within Kashmir. The United States has initiated talks between all parties in an effort to catalyze the process and move the region toward peace. U.S. involvement has centered on security concerns because of India and Pakistan’s nuclear capabilities, (Kripalani, B1).

## Conclusion

The peace process in Northern Ireland has followed a tenuous and hard-fought path, which has produced small but visible results. If the same lessons are followed in Kashmir, Muslims and Hindus, Indians and Pakistanis can begin to repair the damage caused by this ongoing and bloody dispute. Taking a historical perspective, it is easier to realize how quickly a dispute can escalate into a battle and how violence can permanently tear a region apart.

By closely examining the triumphs in the Northern Ireland peace process, dialogue, negotiation, and compromise are revealed as the tools of victory. Kashmir emerges as an even more important situation because of the nuclear capabilities of its disputants and thus it is imperative to turn to diplomatic measures before force or retaliation become necessities.

## Works Cited

- Ali Ahmad, Mujtaba. "Kashmiri separatists urge talks between India and Pakistan." Associated Press. 9 Feb. 2003.
- Bew, Paul. *The Northern Ireland Peace Process: A Chronology*. London, Serif Press, 2000.
- Kripalani, Manjeet. "A Cry from Kashmir's Broken Heart." *Business Week*. 20 Oct 2002.
- Lakshmi, Rama. "Kashmiri Politics at 'Crucial Stage'." *Washington Post*. 17 Nov. 2002.
- Schofield, Victoria. *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan, and the Unending War*. New York, I B Tauris & Co Ltd: 2003.
- Srivastava, Madhumita. *International Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict : A Case Study of Kashmir and Northern Ireland*. New Delhi, Bhavana: 2001.
- Wirsing, Robert G. *India, Pakistan, and the Kashmir Dispute: On Regional Conflict and Its Resolution*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 1997.