

Dr John T Alderdice

From: [redacted]
Sent: 14 February 1996 17:33
To: [redacted]
Subject: Cambodia parallels

From: [redacted] "S.FARRY" 14-FEB-1996 17:29:02.48
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CC:
Subj:

Dear John,

Cambodia is a very different country from Northern Ireland, but there are few analogies from its recent experience with conflict resolution that may be relevant to here especially in light of the past week's events.

During the 1980s, a civil war raged in Cambodia, fueled by the Cold War. On one side was the Cambodian Government that had been installed by the Vietnamese whenever they had invaded in 1979 to oust the genocidal Khmer Rouge. On the other side was a coalition of forces, which carried much international legitimacy, and included the Khmer Rouge, backed by China and Thailand, and Prince Sihanouk's monarchists.

By the turn of the decade, this conflict had exhausted itself, most parties were interested in peace. The outlines of a settlement were fairly clear, that the people of Cambodia would determine their own future. The core problem was the intense lack of faith between the parties. most claimed to be the rightful government, but nobody would recognise each other. The issue was crucial as the government in the interim period leading up to elections, would normally conduct the elections.

The deadlock was broken by an international plan, whereby the United Nations would control the organs of the state in the interim, supervise the disarmament of the parties armed forces and then conduct elections. This peaceplan had substantial international legitimacy and was backed by most of the former patrons of the parties, China, Russia, US etc

The process quickly unraveled whenever the Khmer Rouge opted out of the peace process and returned to violence. It had entered the peace process under duress, and being unwilling to compromise, believed they had nothing to gain from a settlement in Cambodia. The disarmament phase of the process collapsed as the other parties understandably refused to disarm. At this stage, the UN could have easily washed its hands of the problem, but decided to proceed with the elections, despite the persistence of violence. The Khmer Rouge failed in their attempt to derail the peace process.

The election results produced a balance between the monarchist and communist forces. But significantly, the monarchists were prepared to enter into coalition with the communists, and abandon their former allies the Khmer Rouge. The coalition has been very unstable, and is rife with corruption, but the important point to note is that the former enemies have now joined forces against the Khmer Rouge. But now the new government has complete international legitimacy, and the Khmer Rouge have been transformed from a potential partner in government that carried considerable legitimacy, to a low-level internal insurgency with no legitimacy and abandoned by all their former allies. The differences with Cambodia and Northern Ireland are substantial. The civil war included all the major players, all the main parties were armed, and there was little history of legitimacy. Nevertheless, it was determined that disarmament should take place before elections to a constituent assembly that was tasked to draw up a constitution and turn itself into a legislature.

This wasn't really decommissioning before elections to a convention, as substantial all party talks had already occurred. But the point here is that Sinn Fein don't have an international leg to stand on, if they argue that the IRA shouldn't disarm before elections to any legislative body in NI. Of course, they should disarm long before this point. The fact that the disarmament didn't occur seriously jeopardised the elections.

The useful parallel with NI, above all, is that the peace process in Cambodia proceeded as best it could, without the Khmer Rouge (SF/IRA), and while the former allies the monarchists kept links open, they had the courage to proceed with a process without the KR. (SDLP) The door was open to the Khmer Rouge to return to the process. I have to admit that barriers weren't created to the Khmer Rouge returning to the process, but they excluded themselves. But this does not detract from the wisdom in NI of having the parties abide by exclusively democratic means to remain in the negotiating process.

But the Khmer Rouge had their legitimacy, both internal and legitimacy, undermined by the other parties having the courage to proceed with setting up a new government. This can be a useful parallel for arguing in NI that other parties can proceed without Sinn Fein/IRA and by the very act of finding agreement that settles a long-running dispute, further undermine the legitimacy of a group that insists of rejecting progress. The IRA have realised the peace process is not for them. Thru the return to violence by itself, according to the Cambodia model, the IRA should lose much of their former international legitimacy. If an agreement can be made which Sinn Fein and the IRA exclude themselves for, a workable agreement should undermine their legitimacy and support more.

Sorry, if this was somewhat waffly, but I hope there are some parallels here which you either find useful or encouraging.

All the best,

Stephen Farry