

'The People's Peace' - Preface and Synopsis

The people made peace in Northern Ireland. After 30 years of failure the peace process there has been a great success. My contribution to that achievement was to work with the parties on a program of independent public opinion research and public diplomacy that allowed the people to be consulted and brought into the process at each critical stage of the negotiations. This work is described in my first peace polls book, *The People's Peace Process in Northern Ireland*, written so that the central lessons of that achievement could be extended to the resolution of other violent conflicts.

To this end I have spent the past ten years applying those lessons first in the Balkans, then Kashmir, Sri Lanka, the West and Muslim World and 'War on Terror', Israel and Palestine, Darfur Sudan and the Arab Spring. Regrettably, the results have been mixed. In all the cases where peace polling has been used it has made a positive contribution to peace building and peace making but the ultimate goal of peace, all too frequently, has not been achieved. This book explains why and how such failures might now be turned into success.

I was very lucky as the first peace process I got involved in was Northern Ireland where a series of fortuitous events made peace possible. Critically, those events included elections to negotiations that brought all the parties to the conflict into the talks under a strong independent Chair who both respected their democratic mandate and the value of the peace polls method. Subsequently, when the governments responsible for the negotiations wanted to bring the program of independent polling to an end, to advance their own agendas, the parties rebelled, the peace polls continued, peace was made, and my work was extended around the world.

Of course I thought, in my limited experience at the time, that all peace processes were like Northern Ireland. But this was not the case. The interests of governments and political elites, both domestic and international, all too frequently pervert the will of the people to deny them the peace that they seek. In hindsight, we were very fortunate in Northern Ireland. With elections to negotiations, independent research and an independent Chair the people were able to make their peace through the democratization of their peace process. This was the key to our success. We owned the peace process, not them, not the governments or some other political elites with self-serving agendas. The people's peace prevailed.

This book is written to explain how this can be done elsewhere. If this were easy it would have been done. But it is not. For comparative purposes I could have treated each case study in the same way but historical and political contexts were always different and in every conflict I have visited I have learnt something new. Also the processes of peace making are complex. So I have used each case study in each conflict setting to make different points about the peace making process except for the final comparative chapter and my recommendations. So each chapter tells its own story as follows:

With a focus on theory Chapter 1, *Conflict resolution and peace research theory*, notes that in the modern world of mass media, mass communications and globalization peace processes require the effective use of public diplomacy to achieve political legitimacy, and that open, transparent, objective, public opinion research can unlock the full peace making potential of such diplomacy. But this requires truly independent peace research not bound to the interests of any of the conflict parties - a difficult but not impossible task.

With a focus on methods Chapter 2, *Northern Ireland and the development of the peace polls method*, reviews the evolution of the techniques and practices used to achieve independent polling in Northern Ireland. They were fundamentally different to popular, partisan, media polls and public opinion surveys commissioned by governments and states.

With a focus on negotiations Chapter 3, *The Northern Ireland peace polls and negotiation of the Belfast Agreement*, details the political impact of each of the nine polls undertaken in support of this peace process, to confront and resolve problems of procedure, substance and implementation. Having dealt with questions of theory and method the emphasis here is on how the peace polls achieved real political advances.

With a focus on problem solving Chapter 4, *The Balkans*, reviews the first efforts to apply the Northern Ireland methods elsewhere. Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo and Serbia were all at different stages in their conflicts with different problems to be solved. These were identified and when dealt with the peace polls helped to stabilize the situation but when the results were ignored on-going instability required further international intervention.

With a focus on effective research Chapter 5, *Kashmir*, describes the first use of peace polls in a developing country. A program of three polls clearly identified the issues that needed to be addressed if peace was to be achieved. The people wanted peace and would be willing to make compromises to achieve it but their political leaderships and ultimately India and Pakistan stood in their way. Regrettably other researchers emphasized the difficulties while ignoring much of the common ground so little progress has been made.

With a focus on reporting and dissemination Chapter 6, *Sri Lanka*, provided the first opportunity, after Northern Ireland, to work with negotiators to reach a peace agreement. This project should have been a great success. The people wanted a settlement of the 'National Question', which was well researched, reported and the findings widely disseminated. But having defeated the rebel Tamil Tigers in war the President 'said no'.

With a focus on what happens when peace polls are not done Chapter 7, *Cyprus*, reviews ten wasted years of lost opportunities and failed peace making. Eventually others are completing a program of peace polls on Cyprus but it may all be a case of 'too little, too late' as a new generation of Greek and Turkish Cypriots grow up in separate worlds.

With a focus on the misuse and abuse of polls Chapter 8, *The West and the Muslim World*, details the failings of government and media polling before, between, and after the 9/11 US and 7/7 UK suicide attacks. For the most part these polls failed to address the questions that could have helped to resolve this global conflict and/or run partisan polls designed to support the respective governments' foreign and domestic security policies.

With a focus on the most researched conflict in the world Chapter 9 critically examines the political and academic failures of polling, public diplomacy and peace making in *Israel and Palestine*. Everything that could be made to go wrong has been made to go wrong to maintain the status quo. Although everyone knows what needs to be done to 'get to peace' US/Israeli relations and electoral politics have placed the people's peace beyond reach.

With a focus on state interference Chapter 10, *Darfur – Sudan and the Arab Spring*, illustrates the misguided attempts of security services in Sudan and Egypt to manipulate and manage peace research to protect their own agendas and narrow self-interests. The result has been war and revolution.

The review of all the polls in Chapter 11, *Pax populi, pax dei: Peace polls in comparative perspective and how to make them work*, illustrates their value as a problem solving tool for conflict analysis and as a public diplomacy tool for negotiations and conflict resolution. When used they help people achieve peace. The only impediments to their success are the spoilers who place their own interests above those of the people. Through monitoring and standard setting international institutions can confront the spoilers and give the pollster/peacemakers the support they need.