

## Giving an Adversary the Respect They May Not Deserve

Mark P. Barry  
November 11, 2013  
Lecturer in Management, UTS



April 1990, after his Moscow meeting with Soviet President Gorbachev, Rev. Sun Myung Moon asked Antonio Betancourt, Secretary General of the Summit Council for World Peace, to reach out on his behalf to North Korea. Dr. Betancourt had many years' experience working with former heads of state and government from Latin America and elsewhere. On several occasions, Rev. Moon gave him specific instructions how to conduct diplomacy prior to undertaking this overture.



*Mark Barry*

Shortly afterward, Dr. Betancourt started to visit North Korean embassies in Beijing, Portugal and other world capitals. He would walk into an embassy, introduce himself and his affiliation, and quickly would be bodily escorted outside, and told he was not welcome. The reason was our worldwide movement's strong anticommunist stance. Although he gave them the precedent of Rev. Moon's meeting Gorbachev, it made no difference.

Through sheer persistence, he eventually impressed the North Korean diplomats because he showed both a willingness to listen, as well as displayed a refreshing attitude. On one occasion, he went to the North Korean UN mission in New York and met with their deputy ambassador.

This official carried on for three hours condemning the United States, Japan and South Korea for many of the North's ills. Dr. Betancourt said that once he did his best not only to endure the diatribe but listen attentively, an unexpected change in the atmosphere occurred.

The North Korean diplomat suddenly became curious and willing to listen to what he had to say. The deputy ambassador was amazed this visitor had taken his verbal punishment, digested it, and was willing to proceed to more constructive conversation. What came from this meeting led to Dr. Betancourt's first of 17 visits to Pyongyang in May 1991, accompanied by Rodrigo Carazo, former president of Costa Rica.

Once in Pyongyang, Dr. Betancourt's real test began. He was subjected to verbal berating for two days, despite being a state guest, because the North Koreans wanted to test his true intentions and capacity to deal with them. He concluded they do not trust someone unless proven trustworthy. This is part of understanding and managing North Koreans' complex logic used when dealing with those with whom they have grievances.

Meanwhile, Dr. Bo Hi Pak, assisted by Dr. Betancourt, laid the foundation for Rev. and Mrs. Moon's historic meeting with President Kim Il Sung in November 1991, as chronicled in [Chapter 20 of Dr. Pak's Messiah: My Testimony to Rev. Sun Myung Moon, Vol. II.](#)

Dr. Betancourt notes, "Dr. Pak practiced the application of Rev. Moon's teachings in his diplomacy and exemplified the principle of respecting and honoring everyone, including his enemies. He could speak very strongly against communism in his lectures, but in personally dealing with adversaries, he never demonized them. That's why he could convince North Korea to invite Rev. and Mrs. Moon to Pyongyang. Without Dr. Pak's sincerity, that would never have worked." He adds, "When Rev. Moon

embraced Kim Il Sung, it was not a political act or a pose for a photo-op. It was a heart-to-heart embrace that won Kim Il Sung's heart. Father understood the art of turning enemies into friends."

Peacemaking ultimately requires a partner for peace, and you cannot have a partner unless one's adversary is given what Dr. Betancourt calls "the respect and dignity they may not deserve," although you yourself may not be treated with respect and dignity. He elaborates that by giving your adversaries the dignity and respect you believe they don't deserve, you can then have a partner for negotiations. He observes, "Don't demonize your enemy because you may destroy the possibility of having a negotiating partner for dialogue and even peace."

This does not mean to compromise your principles, ideals or values, but to look for leverage on a positive plane. It is easy to descend to the level of your adversary in an exchange of acrimony and accusations, or expressions of distrust and animosity. But that is the wrong thing to do if the goal is engagement for dialogue, negotiation and an eventual partnership for addressing and managing problems, or even finding solutions together to problems.

You reach out to adversaries to make them partners for peace and eventually even to become friends. Peace after all requires the agreement of two parties. You cannot have a genuine and workable agreement if one party is demeaned, demonized, or worse, if the other party prefers his partner to cease to exist.

The conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis has persisted since 1948, but its origins go back many decades further. Two major wars have been fought, many lives lost to terrorism, and facts on the ground changed to avoid a two-state solution. Fortunately, these two parties are now in the midst of an intensive nine-month negotiating period, brokered by the U.S., intended to bring a final settlement. But how can peace emerge in the Holy Land if both parties fundamentally prefer, in effect, to "drive the other into the sea?" These basic attitudes of the conception of the other have been part of why peace has been so elusive in the Middle East. How can there be peace if one or both parties fundamentally wish for its adversary to cease to exist, or at least to evict him from the neighborhood?

We are also in the midst of negotiations between Iran and the "P5 + 1": Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia, and the United States. It is easy to dismiss Iranian public statements as devoid of realism. But it is a mistake to look at Iran and see a country out of touch with its past and roots. On the contrary, its rich Persian civilization, culture and history could be compared with that of Egypt, the Hebrews, and Greece. Moreover, the ancient Persians had a genius to recognize, accept and tolerate the complexity of the cultures over which they once ruled.



*U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry (left), Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (middle) and European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton (right) attend a meeting of the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany at the United Nations on September 25.*

Iran is negotiating now because international sanctions imposed on it have become intolerable. But it also seeks the respect and dignity it deems a nation with such a rich and ancient civilization deserves. Iran believes it is acting according to its civilizational heritage. It pursues primacy in this region because of its history and geography. While that is a cause for concern for the U.S., Turkey, Israel, and others, it is manageable through wise statecraft. Current negotiations with Iran can better succeed if the Iranian leadership senses the world is treating them with the dignity and respect they believe they deserve.

Koreans cherish a civilization over 4,300 years old. The ancient Korean kingdom of Gorguyo once occupied not only the northern half of the Korean peninsula, but much of northeastern China. North Korea sees itself as the successor to the civilizational heritage of Gorguyo.

It is exceedingly difficult to comprehend North Korea's unique culture and way they see the world and their place in it. Eventually, the North will have to become part of the world, which will involve some form of national reintegration with the South. But North Korea will also want what they believe is valuable and the essence of their culture to remain intact. No matter how moribund their economy, North Korea will want the world to know it has contributed something of lasting value for the future.

The next few years will be critical for both the United States and South Korea to find a new and higher way of engaging North Korea based on mutual respect. While North Korea will have to change its behavior towards the U.S. and South Korea, these two allies must also go beyond the mental framework that has characterized the status quo since the end of the Korean War. Before policy is formulated, the proper mindset must be achieved. Both allies would also do well to show magnanimity.

Effective diplomacy should be based on the principle of a balance between power and diplomacy, with the use of power as the last resort. American diplomacy since the end of the Cold War has been in disarray in large part because successive U.S. administrations did not adhere to the principle of force as a last resort. Instead, we have seen increased reliance on the use of force, or intimidation, threats and ultimatums, as the primary tool of U.S. foreign policy. Diplomacy became subordinated to the threat or use of force. Recent U.S. policy toward Syria is a case in point. The U.S. does not know how to get out of the box it put itself in.

National interests are the basic driving force of international relations: nations act selfishly. But what we should recognize is that my self-interest is preserved when I am also concerned about the interest of the other. This is where respect and dignity, however undeserved, have their place in diplomacy. They are applicable to bringing a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program and regional ambitions, and engagement with North Korea to bring about a permanent peace agreement ending the Korean War and setting the stage for reunification.

*Dr. Mark P. Barry is managing editor of the Applied Unificationism blog, associate editor of the International Journal on World Peace, and teaches management, international relations and modern Korean history. This article is adapted from a presentation given on October 31 at St. John's University in Queens, New York, before a conference of Korean-American undergraduate students. He thanks Dr. Antonio Betancourt for his valuable contributions to this article.*