

The Central American Peace Process: Possible Lessons from El Salvador and Guatemala

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Each peace process was a result of the interplay between the international, regional and domestic political changes, and the social movements' internal dynamics. Specifically, the outcome of the peace negotiations depended upon (1) the degree of domestic political opening; (2) the support and impact of international actors; and (3) the ideological flexibility, pragmatism and confidence of the revolutionary movement's leadership that the movement had sufficient strength to make significant political gains from the peace process. Two Central American peace processes — one which concluded with a peace accord in El Salvador and the other which is on-going in Guatemala — were examined. The peace processes in both countries showed that democratic transitions force social movements to elaborate new frames of collective action and define their respective positions towards electoral politics and the peace process.

Introduction

In this article I will examine two peace processes in Central America: one which concluded with a peace accord in El Salvador, and another which is on-going in Guatemala. At the end, I will try to draw some possible lessons from these two peace processes. It is hoped that in drawing such lessons, we may discover whether there are some parallels between the Central American and Philippine peace processes.

My discussion is based on a paper I wrote about a year ago. I approached this topic not as a peace study scholar but rather as someone interested in social movements and democratic transition, here understood as the transition from an authoritarian regime to an elected civilian government.

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When I wrote the paper, my research problem was to understand how revolutionary movements adjust to such transition and how this affects the evolution of a peace process. In terms of cases, I chose to analyze the *Frente Farabundo Martí de Revolución Nacional* (or FMLN, Farabundo Martí Front of National Liberation) in El Salvador and the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (or URNG, Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) in Guatemala. Before turning to the case studies, I will briefly discuss the literature on democratic transitions and propose a social movement perspective to untangle each country's experience.

Democratic Transitions and Social Movements

What someone called the third wave of democratic transitions, which started in the mid-seventies in Southern Europe (in Spain and Portugal) and recently culminated in Eastern Europe, came as a major challenge to the literature on democracy and comparative politics. As a result, the study of democratic transitions became a flourishing and booming intellectual industry in the 1980s. From a situation where you had relatively little attention given to democratization in the 1970s, you have an incredible amount of discussions on democratic transition in the comparative politics literature of the 1980s. It actually became a fad with numerous and very detailed case studies. Within this abundant literature little attention however is given to the impact of these transitions on armed revolutionary movements. Scholars have looked thoroughly at the outcome, the democratic transition, but have not examined the impact of this transition on a revolutionary movement.

What does the transition to an elected civilian government mean for a movement that seeks to seize state power through armed struggle? This was the entry point of the paper. My goal, as I focus on the URNG in Guatemala and the FMLN in El Salvador, is to highlight some of the key factors that account for the different experiences of the two countries — a peace agreement and the political institutionalization of the FMLN in El Salvador and an ongoing and uncompleted peace process in Guatemala.

What I will suggest is that the return of elected civilian governments during the 1980s and the regional peace initiatives confronted Central American revolutionary organizations with unprecedented domestic and regional political environments.¹ These movements were also faced with a new international environment after the implosion of the Soviet Union

and the end of the Cold War. Such new domestic, regional and international political environments provided the movement with new opportunities to expand their political participation and influence in legal or what is often referred to as aboveground politics and broaden their diplomatic relations.

I will also suggest that the specific outcome of each peace process was the result of the interplay between these international, regional and domestic political changes and the movement's internal dynamics. What I am saying is that one cannot be mechanistic. For instance, just analyze the external conditions and say that these will automatically result in some specific process. You need to look at the movement itself — what were the dynamics within the movement? As social movement analyst Sydney Tarrow argues, political opportunities may be present during a particular historical conjuncture but it is up to the political actor to seize them and construct frameworks of action.²

To be more precise I will propose a two-part argument. The first part is that the transition to elected civilian rule created new political opportunities which permitted the initiation of peace negotiations and discussions about the political institutionalization and legalization of the movement. The second is that the outcome of the peace negotiations depended upon the degree of domestic political opening, the support and impact of international actors, and the ideological flexibility, pragmatism and confidence of the revolutionary movement's leadership that the movement had sufficient strength to make significant political gains from the peace process.

Before examining each case, I would like to further explain what Sidney Tarrow calls the political opportunity structure (POS) which is increasingly being used in social movement theory. The concept of the political opportunity structure was originally developed in the 1970s while looking at social movements in the United States. It was recently revived by Tarrow who tried to formalize it into specific variables. He defines the POS as "consistent, but not necessarily formal or permanent or national, signals to a social and political actor which either discourage or encourage it to use its internal resources to engage in collective action."

To be more specific, there are four types of signals that may indicate an opening of the POS:

Increasing access to power: When there are increasing possibilities of access to political positions or influence in political processes.

Changes in the alignment of the ruling elite. Changes within the ruling political elite may provide new opportunities for the movement.

Figure 1
Analytical Levels and Variables

External

International

Changes in International System and Support of International and Regional Actors for the Peace Process

Domestic

Opening in the Political Opportunity Structure:

- 1) access to power;
- 2) changes in ruling alignments;
- 3) possibility of establishing linkages with influential allies;
- 4) existence of divisions within and between the political elites

Internal

Movement's Internal Dynamics:

- 1) flexible ideological orientation in interpreting previous historical experiences and current conjuncture;
- 2) pragmatism and willingness to adopt new strategies;
- 3) assessment of the armed, political, and diplomatic strength of the movement

Possibility of establishing linkages with influential allies. These allies can be domestic (other social movements, unions, politicians, etc.) or international (international organizations, foreign NGOs, political parties abroad, etc.).

Existence of divisions within and between the political elite. When such divisions are present, there are more possibilities for the movement to build new alliances.

By combining the POS concept and international processes with the movement's internal dynamics, it is possible to develop a two-by-two matrix:

Figure 2
Possible Outcomes of Peace Process

		<i>External Processes</i> Pressure from International and Regional Actors and Opening of the POS	
		+	-
<i>Internal Processes</i> Ideological Flexibility, Pragmatism of Leadership, and Its Assessment of Movement's Strength	+	(I) Peace Accord and Political Incorporation	(II) Deadlocked Negotiations (due to a lack of commitment from the civil government)
	-	Deadlocked Negotiations (due to a lack of commitment from the revolutionary movement) (III)	No Negotiation and Guerilla Warfare versus Counterinsurgency (IV)

There are three possible outcomes to the peace process based on the proposed matrix. First, situation (IV) which usually happens prior to the transition to elected civilian government when there are no peace negotiations. Instead you have a guerrilla warfare on the part of the revolutionary movement and counterinsurgency programs on the part of the government. There is little pressure from international and regional actors for a peace process and the opening of the POS is very limited. On the opposite side is situation (I) where peace negotiations result in a peace accord and the political incorporation of the revolutionary movement. In such situation, there is regional and international pressure for the progress of the peace process, an opening in the POS while the movement is confident that it can make important gains by entering or incorporating itself into institutionalized political life.

In the middle you have two situations (II and III) with the same outcome: deadlocked negotiations. One situation (II) happens when the movement is redefining new frames of action and is willing to explore peace negotiations but the POS is still close with little pressure from international actors on the domestic actors. For example, the military still has a lot of influence on the political elites and is not interested in a negotiated settlement. In the other case (situation III), you have new political opportunities due to changes in the international and domestic contexts but the movement's leadership is still holding on to its old framework and is not willing to seriously consider a peace settlement estimating that the movement cannot make significant gains by entering into peace negotiations.

Before going in detail with the two cases, I would like to give a synthesis of each scenario. In Guatemala, the negotiations for a peace accord and the political incorporation of the movement were deadlocked until recently despite a return to an elected civilian government. Such situation can be explained by a series of factors: the strong entrenchment of the military establishment; the continued political hegemony of the landed elite; the initial weakness of the international pressure for the progress of the negotiations; and the assessment by the movement's leadership that it could derive more gains by maintaining and consolidating its armed strength while trying to expand an embryonic legal above-ground movement. An opening in the POS following important domestic political changes resulted in a breakthrough in the negotiations in 1994.

In contrast, the FMLN and the Salvadorean government concluded a final ceasefire accord in January 1992, and the political incorporation of the FMLN as a political party took place in December 1992. Such outcome was the result of strong international pressure; a change in American foreign policy towards the Salvadorean conflict; the gradual decrease of military control over domestic politics; shifting alignments within the ruling coalition; and the leadership's assessment that the movement's military, political and diplomatic strengths were favorable to its political incorporation.

Guatemala

Guatemala is a show case of what has been described as a "Banana Republic". Its territory measures about 42,000 sq. miles (or one-third of the Philippines) with a population of 9.3 million. It has a high illiteracy rate (about 50 percent), and 80 percent of its population live below the poverty line. In the 1940s, the United Fruit Company controlled about 42 percent of all national lands (this would be like all of Luzon and some parts of the Visayas being controlled by a single company). Direct and indirect intervention by the United States has been a recurrent feature of Guatemalan modern political history. Its political system has traditionally been very exclusive and mostly controlled by the Latinos — the ethnic group brought about by the mixture of Spanish descendants with the native population. The majority of Guatemalans (60 percent) belong to various indigenous groups who are mostly living in the countryside where they remain largely excluded politically and economically.

The Guatemala National Revolutionary Unity or URNG was formally established in February 1982. It came about with the alliance of four different armed revolutionary organizations.³ Upon its foundation, the URNG declared that its objective was to undertake a popular revolutionary war because it was the only option left to the people of Guatemala to liberate themselves from oppression, exploitation and imperialism. At the time of its foundation, the URNG had an estimated 6,000 combatants. After boycotting the 1982 elections, the URNG mounted several offensives in 1984 and maintained its boycott stand during the 1985 elections.

The Transition to Elected Civilian Rule

The origins of the transition to democracy or, more precisely, the transition to an elected civilian government can be traced back to March

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one million Guatemalans who either sought refuge in Mexico or went hiding in the mountains.

Rios Montt's abuses of power provoked a year later a new coup d' état seen by many analysts as the revenge of the High Command. The new government headed by the former Defense Minister, General Oscar Mejia Victores, tried to make cosmetic adjustments but these were at most a reflection of the modernization of the counterinsurgency strategy. Instead of removing entire communities, the government tried to give a human face to the counterinsurgency with "win-the-heart-and-minds" operations. Mejia Victores announced that there would be an election for a Constituent Assembly in 1984. This election was the preface to a redefinition of the domestic power structure.

In 1985, there were signs of an opening in the political opportunity structure. Following the election for a Constituent Assembly the year before, general elections for the Legislative Assembly were organized. The election brought into power a Christian Democrat president, Venecio Cerezo who was not directly linked to the military.

What was the initial response of the revolutionary movement to this new context? The transition to elected civilian government came as a challenge for the revolutionaries because the government had greater

1982, when disgruntled junior officers under the leadership of General Rios Montt, a new-born religious fundamentalist launched a coup d'état. The coup was the first sign of the destabilization of the military supremacy over civilian authority. Montt adopted a populist rhetoric, announcing the eradication of corruption, the expansion of the private sector, the reorganization of the public enterprise and a return to constitutional order. In reality, his rule was far from democratic as he orchestrated the worst and most violent episode of Guatemalan counterinsurgency campaigns. It resulted in the death of 100,000 individuals, the destruction of 440 communities and the dislocation of

domestic and international legitimacy. But, at the same time, it meant new political opportunities which the UNRG could exploit provided that it was willing to engage in struggles and political organizing in civil society.

The first thing the UNRG did was to reject the electoral process while saying that it was willing to hold a dialogue for possible peace negotiations. At the same time, the UNRG began to develop a new global strategic approach which included an intensification of its guerrilla activities, a greater weight placed on political aspects of the struggle by organizing the popular sectors and seeking new alliances with democratic and patriotic forces. The UNRG also sought to enlarge its bases of influence by organizing not only in the countryside but also in the cities.

For two years, there was no dialogue or negotiation between the UNRG and the Cerezo government despite the fact that the UNRG had made a first offer to hold such dialogue as early as October 1986. The first dialogue only took place in Madrid (Spain) in 1987. This talk did not lead to any significant agreement. The talk was merely held for the purpose of not being accused by international circles of violating the regional peace process. At this point, regional and international organizations were putting pressure on domestic political actors — the government and the UNRG — to enter into some forms of dialogue.

In May 1988 and July 1989, the Guatemalan military launched two coup attempts because they were wary of the possible outcomes of the peace negotiations. As in the Philippines where the coup attempts pushed Aquino more to the right, they had a similar impact in Guatemala. Cerezo was gradually constrained by the military, especially since he was not able to professionalize them. These coups delayed the reopening of the dialogue for almost over two years.

The next series of dialogues began in 1990. The talks resumed in Oslo (Norway) when the UNRG met with the Commission for National Reconciliation. The meeting was sponsored by international organizations supporting the Esquipulas agreements, a regional peace plan. In this plan, each country was tasked to set up a commission for national reconciliation. The Oslo meeting permitted the holding of several dialogues between UNRG representatives and various sectors of civil society.

From May to October 1990, representatives of the revolutionary movement held meetings in different parts of the world: first, with the political parties in June (Escorial, Spain); the business sector (Ottawa, Canada) and the religious sector (Quito, Ecuador) in September; twenty-three (23) different popular organizations (Metetec, Mexico) and the small business and professionals (Atlixco, Mexico) in October. Within four months, the URNG drew significant attention from the international community as well as built up some initial alliances among various sectors of society. These meetings enabled the movement to achieve political gains and helped it isolate the reactionary segments of the landed elite. In doing so, the URNG was trying to take advantage of the international pressure to create new alliances with social sectors to isolate as much as possible the more reactionary sectors of the government.

In November 1990, there was a new national election. Jorge Serrano coming from a more conservative political party, the *Movimiento de Acción Solidaria* (MAS or Solidarity Action Movement) was elected in a second round, despite the fact that his party was a minority in Congress. Soon after the election, there was a shift in repression which became more selective largely as a result of international and domestic pressure for greater respect for human rights. Such pressure was also reflected in the attendance of international observers to monitor the conduct of the elections.

The progress in the regional peace process and the general diplomatic effort surrounding it forced the newly elected government to reopen peace negotiations. In 1990, negotiations began to accelerate in El Salvador and there was a sort of a ripple effect in Guatemala. In April 1991, a first agreement was signed in Mexico City. For the first time, URNG *Comandantes* from the General Command and the Politico-Diplomatic Commission sat down with government and military officials to discuss an agenda for peace. Known as the Mexico Accord, the agreement established the procedures for an on-going dialogue under the auspices of the Commission for National Reconciliation (CNR) and the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The agreement contained an 11-point agenda of discussion.

Why was it possible that, after trying to block or delay the process, the government and the military would agree to sit down to negotiate with

the revolutionaries? I would argue that there were four reasons: the model of the militarized regime with a civilian facade had failed; there was strong regional pressure for the negotiations to begin; the United States was shifting its foreign policy towards the region; and there were growing divisions within the conservative elite. A faction of this elite began to think that it was not only important to have a counterinsurgency program but it was also necessary to attract investments. To do so, the country needed internal peace. Moreover, the prospects of an economic integration with the North American market and trade with Central America compounded the desire for pacification. On the side of the URNG, it is likely that its expanding gains and alliances with urban-based organizations strengthened its confidence in the possibilities of increasing its legal political and diplomatic struggles.

During the next three years, there would be 10 rounds of negotiations but all bogged down on the second part of the first point of the Mexico Accord which was on the issue of human rights. Early on, a first agreement had been reached on the meaning of democracy, the first part of the first point, during a third round of negotiations in Queretaro (Mexico) from 23-26 July 1991. But on human rights, there were serious disagreements especially on whether a Truth and Justice Commission would be created to investigate past human rights violations. Military advisors on the government were systematically blocking any possible agreement. Ten rounds ended with no specific agreement on that issue.

In 1993, a coup and countercoup resulted in changes in political alliances within the elite and eventually open new political opportunities for the progress of the peace process. On May 25, Serrano, the Guatemalan President, tried to launch a personal coup d'état following the example of president Fujimori in Peru. Just a year earlier, a similar scenario had happened in Peru where president Fujimori had maneuvered what amounted to a personal coup. Contrary to Fujimori, Serrano did not succeed in imposing his rule. After a week of popular protest, Serrano was deposed when the army launched a countercoup with the backing of the private sector and opposition political parties. After intense internal negotiations within Congress, the popular human rights Ombudsman was chosen as president although the military would have preferred the 81-year old president of the Supreme Court who they could have easily manipulated. Leon Carpio, an outsider to traditional political parties,

came to power with very strong popular support even from the international community because of his previous work on human rights.

Initially the new domestic political situation did not help the peace process move forward. Upon assuming power, De Leon tried to consolidate his bases of power by isolating the conservative faction of the military and bringing in a new breed of military that would be willing to recognize the supremacy of the civilian government. De Leon also tried to foster alliances with some of the more progressive sectors of the business class so that they would not oppose the peace process. The negotiations reopened in January 1994 and on 29 March, a general agreement on human rights was reached which allowed verification by the United Nations. This was a crucial point for the URNG. If the government alone would have been monitoring the human rights agreement, there would have been no guarantee that it would seriously follow the various clauses of the agreement. In the agreement, the United Nations became a monitoring agent.

Why was the agreement reached? It happened in the context of the loss of popularity of De Leon. The government which was so popular a year ago was losing its popularity, and there was a growing division within the army and the business class within the government. These factors favored the movement which could take advantage of De Leon's need to get popular support. In terms of the framework, the political opportunity structure was more open and more conducive to the conclusion of such agreement, not to mention the fact that, by that time, the movement had also made its position more flexible. Following this breakthrough, the negotiation process continued to progress up to the present although with frequent ups and downs.

El Salvador

El Salvador is another case of what one may call a "Banana Republic", although more accurately, it should be called a "Coffee Republic". It is a very small country measuring about four percent of the Philippine territory. It used to be known as the country where fourteen (14) families control 60 percent of all arable lands. Like in Guatemala, the political history of El Salvador has been marked by violence against popular forces especially since the culture of coffee was introduced at the turn of the 20th century. In 1932, a popular uprising led by Augustin

Farabundo Martí (which was how the name Farabundo Martí came about) was violently repressed. An estimated 30,000 peasants were killed. The massacre consecrated the alliance between the military and the coffee oligarchy for the control of the state.

The alliance lasted for 40 years from 1932 to 1972. In 1972, there was a shift (not unlike the shift in the Philippines) to a more authoritarian regime clearly dominated by the military. When a political coalition led by Christian Democrats relatively independent from the oligarchy was about to win the national election, the military launched a coup d'état and ruled the country from 1972 to 1979. The defeat of the reformist project embodied by the coalition meant that few political options remained for the civilian opposition. The two principal ones evolved outside political parties; organizing the popular sectors in non-violent protest and launching an armed insurgency. Increasing levels of military repression towards popular organizations led to the formation and rapid expansion of guerrilla organizations.

In 1979, there was another coup by the military. This time, it was headed by younger officers who had realized that if there was no political change, the same thing that had just happened in Nicaragua in July, that is, the triumph of the Sandinista revolution, would also happen in El Salvador. What these younger officers tried to do was to establish a reformist junta to prevent an imminent popular revolution. Eventually they were not able to consolidate their rule. Within the span of six months, three juntas (or three temporary governments) including civilians were organized until Napoleon Duarte, a Christian Democrat, was appointed as President in March 1980. The 1979 Coup marked the beginning of more than 10 years of civil war during which an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 civilians were killed.

The formation of the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN or Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation) as the unified command for the five Salvadorean guerrilla organizations was formalized on 10 October 1980.⁴ Earlier on 22 May, a unified politico-military revolutionary direction had been established. The *Frente Democrático Revolucionario* (FDR or Revolutionary Democratic Front) was also formed the same year to act as the FMLN's political arm. After the October 1979 Coup, one guerrilla organization, the ERP called for an immediate "popular insurrection" which it attempted but dramatically

failed to achieve. Thereafter, the ERP withdrew to the mountains and joined the other four organizations in a strategy of protracted guerrilla warfare.

The Transition to Elected Civilian Rule

Upon joining the third junta, Duarte promised to restore democracy and organize an election in 1982 for the formation of a Constituent Assembly. This election was not so much for domestic purposes as for the international legitimacy of the government. Duarte's appointment marked the beginning of massive American economic and military assistance to El Salvador. The American aid came despite the intensification of counterinsurgency activities, political assassinations, the growing killings by right-wing death squads (*Escuadrones de la Muerte*) and the assassination of four American sisters and two American land reforms advisors. The American support was largely a reaction to the revolution in neighboring Nicaragua. Democrat President Jimmy Carter restored American military aid to El Salvador during his last week in office before Republican President Ronald Reagan increased massively this assistance. Reagan argued that the possibility of a spread of the Nicaraguan revolution to neighboring countries was a threat to American national security. There were over four billion dollars of American aid sent to El Salvador during the early eighties including over a billion in military aid and intelligence support. At one point, U.S. aid amounted to 50 percent of the total budget of the Salvadorean government.

Unlike Guatemala where the URNG waited until 1986 before making peace proposals, the FMLN made its first proposal as early as 1981. It took this initiative before the General Assembly of the United Nations where it laid down the bases of its peace offer on 8 October 1981. This was before Duarte's administration came up with its own proposals. At that time, the rationale behind the proposal seemed to have been to maximize the movement's international exposure. There was yet no serious commitment to enter into a ceasefire agreement.

The FMLN's international and diplomatic offensive was largely an attempt to counter the massive economic and military support received by Duarte from the United States. A few months before in August, the Mexican and French Presidents had recognized the FDR, the equivalent of the NDF in the Philippines, as a legitimate representative of El

Salvador. In effect, the French-Mexican Declaration provided the FMLN-FDR with international legitimacy which helped them later to access the United Nations and the Organization of American States. There was, however, a resulting backlash at home to this diplomatic victory. The military, including Duarte, were very upset by the Declaration and the FMLN's peace proposal which had been announced without any negotiations held beforehand.

In the wake of the FMLN's proposal, the military intensified its counterinsurgency activities. At that point in time, there was little hope that peace negotiations could really take off. Nevertheless, FMLN continued with its diplomatic and political offensives and made a second peace proposal in October 1982 and a third in 1983. The FMLN's diplomatic strategy is best understood when one takes into account the regional context. On 8-9 January 1983, the Foreign Ministers of Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela met in Contadora island to design an initiative for peace in the region. The peace initiative became known as the "Contadora" initiative. It later included representatives from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Jamaica, Honduras and the United States. Contrary to the Philippine scenario, there was a lot of international diplomatic activities in the region to push for a peaceful settlement of the various armed conflicts. In its third peace proposal, the FMLN welcomed the Contadora initiative and the United Nations Security Council's resolution to support Contadora.

In January 1984, the FMLN made a fourth proposal. Among other things, it proposed the creation of a provisional government of broad participation. These proposals and the international efforts for peace in the region eventually forced Duarte, who had just been officially elected during the 1984 presidential election, to come up with his own peace offer. He presented such proposal before the United Nations on 8 October 1984. His proposal included holding a first round of negotiations a week later. This first round took place in La Palma on 15 October and marked the beginning of the peace negotiations process which would be interrupted in several occasions. From 1984 to 1989, Duarte made various peace proposals primarily to insure continued U.S. support for its counterinsurgency

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programs without making any serious commitment to the ceasefire negotiations.

When confronted with an elected civilian government equipped with almost limitless economic and military assistance from the United States, the FMLN gradually readjusted its overall strategy during the mid-1980s. Instead of fighting a "guerilla concentration war" similar to the Chinese scenario where a revolutionary movement controls a territory and assumes civilian and political control including protection of the civilian population and prevents the government from entering, the FMLN shifted to a "war of resistance". From 1982 to about 1984, the FMLN had largely become a revolutionary army using large contingents of guerrilla fighters and undertaking highly visible attacks on key military positions. In reprisal and with the American support, the Salvadorean government responded by combining the use of large mobile forces with air and artillery supports. By 1986, the Salvadorean army had over 40,000 soldiers with modernized airforce capabilities compared to about 12,500 in the early 1980s.

The FMLN's new strategy included the so-called "poder de doble cara" or the double-faced power. Under this approach, the FMLN did not fight to control a specific territory of the country, but instead helped to organize various legal popular organizations influenced by the FMLN

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which it could later use to access projects (even those funded by the United States). At the same time, these organizations were part of a vast clandestine network controlled by the FMLN. From the time it readjusted its strategy, the FMLN quietly organized popular organizations to consolidate and expand its mass base, constantly moving from aboveground or legal to semi-underground and underground networks and activities.

Another important component of the FMLN's new strategy was its diplomatic offensive. During the Fall of 1988, top leaders of the two largest organizations of the FMLN, the FPL and ERP conducted an important tour in Latin American newly

restored democracies and even in Washington. The FMLN leaders sought to appeal to a broader constituency and modified their ideologically hard-line and orthodox image by proposing a vision of a pluralist society initially capitalist and gradually moving towards socialism.

During the second half of 1988, the FMLN launched what it called its strategic counter-offensive which combined an increasing number of urban actions, a limited reconcentration of its forces, and the consolidation of its political project. Such project became visible when the FMLN offered early 1989 to join the national elections provided that these would be delayed from March to September. Upon Duarte's refusal, the FMLN simultaneously assaulted 54 towns on election day while the FDR, the politico-diplomatic arm of the FMLN supported the efforts of the *Convergencia Democrática* (CD or Democratic Convergence) a broad umbrella political formation (which could perhaps be compared to an expanded version of *Partido ng Bayan*) which participated in the election.

The 1989 elections were important because the FMLN for the first time through its open organizations attempted to group the different forces of the left to join the elections. Although the CD performed poorly during the 1989 presidential elections, it would later on elect eight deputies during the 1991 election for the Legislative Assembly.

Even though the Duarte government received a lot of money, it was not able to implement any significant reforms. As it turned out, his government was largely corrupt. By 1988, the Duarte regime had lost much of his popular support and backing from the moderate sectors of the oligarchy and the middle class as it proved incapable of resolving the internal civilian conflict, reactivating the economy and consolidating civilian supremacy over the military.

In 1989, there was a new presidential election and contrary to what was expected, the conservative party ARENA (or the Nationalist Republican Alliance) won the election. The extreme rightwing faction of the party had been responsible for the formation of death squads in the early eighties and was strongly suspected of having planned the assassination of Bishop Romero in 1980. By the late 1980s, the party had changed from being an extreme right party under the leadership of former Major Roberto D'Aubuisson to a more institutionalist one while continuing to represent the interests of the oligarchy. Alfredo Cristiani, a relatively unknown

businessman with technocratic style, married to a member of a prominent coffee clan and trained in the United States was chosen as ARENA presidential candidate for the elections. ARENA won the elections on the platform of bringing back economic growth and peace to the country.

Interestingly, the election of a conservative government created new political opportunities for the FMLN. The election of the ARENA government polarized the political spectrum creating a vacuum at the center which the Christian Democrats could not claim, having been discredited by the poor performance of the Duarte regime. This meant that the FMLN could occupy more political space towards the center. This is what the FMLN tried to do right after the election of Cristiani with its *greater participation* in the *Convergencia Democrática*.

The crucial turning point though to understand how the peace negotiations evolved following the election of the ARENA government was the November 1989 offensive. On 11 November 1989, the FMLN launched a surprise and massive operation on San Salvador. They occupied many neighborhoods of San Salvador and even went to the streets of affluent subdivisions (the equivalent of Dasmariñas and Forbes). For the first time, guerrillas occupied some of the houses of the oligarchs. By doing so, the FMLN brought the revolution directly into their backyards. The oligarchs were deeply shocked and realized that the guerrillas were not dead and in fact were very much alive.

The offensive lasted for two weeks and involved air bombings by the government forces in many of San Salvador poor neighborhoods. International criticism on how the Cristiani government handled the rebellion, especially its aerial bombings, increased dramatically following the killings of six Jesuits, their cook and her daughter on 16 November. The San Salvador offensive and the international condemnation of Cristiani's handling strengthened the FMLN's negotiating position.

Both domestic and international factors influenced the pace of the peace negotiations when they re-opened in 1990. These conditions were conducive to a settlement of the conflict. When I asked the *comandantes* what was in their mind following the November 1989 Offensive, they answered at that point they had realized that they had to enter into some form of settlement since support from the Soviet Union and other sources

was gradually decreasing, and the civilian population was increasingly tired of years of civil war.

Conversely, American support for the government was also decreasing because the United States government was becoming less and less interested in Central America. The electoral defeat of the Sandinista and the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1990 that Washington increasingly perceived the Salvadorean conflict as a domestic one.

Not surprisingly, there was an acceleration of the peace process. This was in part facilitated by United Nations' mediation but mainly because both parties, the government and the FMLN, realized that there was a military stalemate in the conflict. It became clear to both parties that neither could win within a short period and hence, it was advantageous for both to make progress in the peace process.

An initial agreement was reached on July 1990 regarding human rights violations against the civilian population and the treatment of prisoners of war. The next breakthrough came in April 1991 following the March elections for the Legislative Assembly when major consensus points were achieved regarding the respect for the independence of the judiciary, the reorganization of a national civilian police and the creation of the Truth and Justice Commission. The Commission was mandated to investigate human rights violations and prosecute officers who were found guilty. Negotiations were however deadlocked on the issue of the reorganization of the Armed Forces. A compromise solution came four months later on 25 September during negotiations held in New York City. The agreement stipulated that the military forces would be reduced by 50 percent and that an independent commission composed of civilians would be established to review each individual officer's record. These two elements were long time FMLN's demands in exchange of which the insurgents accepted to become part of a new civilian security force that would be established.

A final agreement was signed on 31 December 1991 (the last day of Perez De Cuellar's mandate with the United Nations) in New York City. The Peace Accord was officially signed on 16 January 1992 in Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City. The Accord laid down the peace process for the next nine months. On 1 February, a national ceasefire came to effect and the demobilization of the Army began while the new civilian police force was

established. The final agreement also stipulated that all lands contained in the FMLN-controlled zones would be legalized and allocated to FMLN combatants, their families and the rural population living in the areas. Finally, regarding the oversight and verification of the accord, it was agreed that a commission, the *Comisión para la Consolidación de la Paz* (National Commission for the Consolidation of Peace or COPAZ) would be created to supervise, oversee and monitor the implementation of the accord. The international verification of the accord would be carried out by more than 1,000 United Nations delegates present in El Salvador.

In December 1992 following the demobilization of its last fighters, the FMLN became an official and legal political party. In 1994, it participated for the first time in the national and local elections and became the second political force in the country. ARENA, the conservative party remained in power while the Christian Democrats ended up as the third political force in the country. The FMLN elected 21 deputies out of a total of 80 in the Legislative Assembly.

Following the March 1994 election, the FMLN went into a period of internal crisis which came to an end when two organizations left the front. Recently, the remaining three organizations decided to fuse themselves to form an unitary structure under the FMLN name. The current challenge for the FMLN is to see whether all agreements will be implemented, whether there will be some electoral gains in future elections and whether playing only in electoral politics will bring some concrete results for the mass organizations. It is important to underscore that questions about the relations between leadership and mass-based organizations have become a central axis of contention. Many mass-based organizations are now asking what has been the impact of the peace agreement for the grassroots.

Conclusion

Having now covered the two peace processes, what do they indicate in terms of assessing how a revolutionary movement adjust to a transition to an elected civilian government. Despite the different outcomes — one peace process which is still on ongoing in Guatemala and the other one already concluded in El Salvador — they both show at the very least that this transition forced the movements to elaborate new frames of

collective action and define their respective positions towards elections and the peace process.

In both cases, the movements made their initial proposal for peace negotiations in the context of a transition to elected civilian rule. The holding of elections for a civilian government confronted these movements with a new political environment wherein political and diplomatic tactics grew in importance.

Compared to the URNG, the FMLN was able to obtain more rapidly concessions from the government. Early on, it re-oriented its overall response towards the newly elected regime. This greater success of the FMLN can only be partly explained by its military strengths. A mere consideration of its armed capabilities is not enough though. The FMLN's experience reveals that ideological flexibility and pragmatism on the part of its leadership and a greater opening of the POS were as important.

The capacity of the FMLN's leadership to realize the costs and failures of the strategy of "guerrilla concentration" was crucial. Between 1981 and 1984 such strategy emphasized the establishment of a quasi-professional guerrilla army in the countryside. The costs of such approach became increasingly horrendous in terms of resources, human lives and popular support especially since the FMLN was faced with an army having almost limitless access to resources. Moreover, instances of forced recruitment by the FMLN alienated to some degree its popular support.

The crucial reorientation from a strategy of "guerrilla concentration" to a "war of resistance", which eventually led to the "strategic counter-offensive", regained the initiative and expanded political opportunities. Political and military tactics were complemented by various diplomatic offensives which included tours of the top leadership in Latin America, Western Europe and even in the United States to explain and promote the FMLN's political platform. Moreover, by having semi-autonomous organizations which were not directly dependent on the FMLN for

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determining all of their political lines and activities, the FMLN was able to construct a thicker network of legal aboveground organizations.

In Guatemala, the UNRG confronted a more difficult situation. There was only a limited opening in the POS following the transition to elected civilian rule. Urban organizing was particularly difficult because of the high level of repression which virtually disseminated an already limited effort to organize urban areas. In rural areas, the counterinsurgency campaign of the early 1980s was the most violent and inhuman of the country's history and made organizing open organizations a very painstaking and difficult process. There were initially few political divisions within the oligarchy and for a long time the hard-liner faction of the military had a quasi-hegemonic control over the Armed Forces. In addition, the adoption of a political approach was not initially unanimous within the URNG's leadership.

At the international level, the transition to elected civilian rule redefined the "rules of the game" because it brought along international legitimacy for the government despite minimal domestic changes. This new legitimacy which in the case of El Salvador permitted a substantial increase in level of American economic and military assistance constituted an additional challenge for the revolutionary movements. It reinforced the importance of elaborating a diplomatic strategy. For both organizations, the role of their diplomatic commissions became increasingly more significant as well as international tours and appearances of these movement's leadership abroad. The creation of the CONTADORA group and the ESQUIPULAS II, two diplomatic regional fora also acted as push factors for the progress of peace negotiations. In fact, the international system constituted an additional resource for these movements to exert pressure for the progress of the negotiations.

Beyond illustrating the importance of the internal dynamics of the revolutionary movement and the role of the international environment, each negotiation process clearly indicates the importance of shifts in domestic political opportunities. The transition to elected civilian rule

modified the alignment of political elites and affected a key institution, the military. In both cases the emergence of divisions and tensions within the armed forces meant new opportunities to push the peace process ahead.

In Guatemala, the continuing dominance of the hardliners up until the 1993 countercoup was a major impediment to the conclusion of a peace accord. The recent dominance of the "institutionalist" faction who favored a negotiated solution over the hardliners who favored a military solution to the insurgency has meant new possibilities for compromises during the peace negotiations. In El Salvador, the increasing dependence of the military on American assistance has had the effect of reducing the margins of maneuvers of the hardliners. Despite the dominance of these hardliners within the Salvadorean military, the international pressure that followed the killing of six Jesuit priests and their housekeeper and daughter as well as the impossibility of a military solution on the short term forced the military to make important concessions. These concessions were most likely seen by a faction of the military as the best scenario to insure their institutional survival and interests.

In terms of shifting political alliances, which is one of the ideas behind the concept of POS, the analysis of the Salvadorean case revealed that a regime internationally perceived as moderate such as Duarte may not be the most advantageous for the revolutionary movement and the progress of the peace process. Such regime may alienate possible urban and middle-class support to the revolutionary movement as well as reduce the international pressure. The election of the conservative political party ARENA and the internal division between the modernizing faction represented by president Alfredo Cristiani versus the more reactionary sectors of the party resulted interestingly in a political opening for the FMLN. In order for Cristiani to consolidate and expand his bases of support, concessions were made to the insurgents to appear internationally more moderate and also to gather support domestically. The maintenance of a hard line stance could have resulted in the FMLN controlling a greater portion to the political center. With

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the participation of the *Convergencia Democrática* (CD) in the 1989 and 1991 elections, the FMLN was gradually able to establish alliances with new social sectors willing to support a negotiated solution to the conflict.

In Guatemala, the limited domestic political opportunities have made the progress of peace negotiations more difficult. By the time that negotiations began in 1991, there were at least four factors that greatly limited the potential accomplishments of such negotiations: (1) the military conflict did not reach a stalemate like in El Salvador; (2) the URNG calculated that it could only learn from negotiations than the FMLN; (3) there was no electoral coalition such as El Salvador's Democratic Convergence which could have facilitated the URNG's integration in institutionalized political life; and (4) the military were not as dependent on American assistance as in El Salvador and felt that it could sustain international pressure and even defeat militarily the URNG.

Both the Cerezo and Serrano governments only needed to appear committed to these negotiations without having to make any serious concessions. Contrary to El Salvador, where American assistance totalled over \$4 billion during the 1980s, Guatemala received substantially less assistance. It was only with the arrival of new political elites brought along by the coup and the countercoup that new opportunities began to emerge with the appointment of former Human Rights Ombudsman De Leon Carpio. This unexpected outcome changed previous ruling alignments.

With the ascendancy of De Leon to the presidency, the more reactionary sectors of the oligarchy and the military hardliners were gradually set aside. The new dominance of the "military institutionalists" and De Leon's confrontational attitude with the Congress opened new opportunities by challenging existing political alignments and forcing a redefinition of domestic political alliances. These political opportunities were further increased by the international pressure on the De Leon government for a progress in the peace process. At the same time, the URNG seems to have concluded that the best alternative given the political conditions was some progress in the peace negotiations.

The two case studies suggest that a successful outcome to a peace process and political incorporation of an armed revolutionary movement can be explained by four contingent processes that constitute necessary and sufficient conditions. These can be stated as:

1. for the negotiations to succeed, international pressure must be exerted on domestic political actors, both on the state and the revolutionary movement;

2. such pressure may only succeed if there is an opening in the domestic political opportunity structure (shifting political alignments, availability of influential allies, divisions within and between political elites including the military);

3. the revolutionary movement needs to have adopted a broad strategy which includes not only military offensives but also diplomatic and political tactics, and its leadership must be willing to give up the goal of capturing state power by force assessing that it can gain more by such peace negotiations and political incorporation; and

4. the success of the negotiations is dependent on whether both sides feel that the content of the peace accord benefits them and sees it as a better alternative over the continuation of the armed confrontation. ♦

Notes

- 1 While thinking comparatively, it is important to note that in Central America, there were regional peace initiatives which was not the case for the Philippines. In the early 1980s, several Latin American countries got together to launch a diplomatic offensive to help bring peace to the region. In the eighties, three of the seven countries of Central America were in the midst of civil wars: Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador.
- 2 My discussion on social movements and political opportunity structure is primarily inspired by Sidney Tarrow's most recent contribution: *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Mass Politics in the Modern State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- 3 This is a key feature in Guatemala and El Salvador which is distinct from the Philippines. In these two countries, the revolutionary movements are made of an alliance of smaller revolutionary organizations and function as a front. In both places, revolutionary organizations united in the early eighties. At the time of the formation of the URNG, the *Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres* (EGP or Guerrilla Army of the Poor) was the largest organization, operating in 19 of the 22 departments (more or less the equivalent of provinces in the Philippine) and was specifically strong in the North and the Western hinterlands. The second largest, the *Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas*

(ORPA or Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms) was based in central Guatemala. The third, the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* (FAR or Rebel Armed Forces) was established in 1962 and operated in the northern and eastern portions of Guatemala. Finally, the *Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo* (PGT or Guatemala Workers Party formerly the Communist Party of Guatemala) was active in the capital and the southwestern region.

- 4 The first of the five Salvadorean guerrilla organizations to be formed was the *Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí* (FPL-FM or Popular Liberation Forces). It was formed in March 1970 by disgruntled members of the Salvadorean Communist Party (PCS). The PCS was at that time reluctant to adopt the armed struggle as one means to gain state power. By the late 1970s, it was considered the largest and most important guerrilla organizations in El Salvador. The second organization to be formed was the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP or People's Revolutionary Army). The organization emerged in 1972 and was initially made of former Christian Democrats of middle-class origins.

Following the death of FPL's senior leader, Cayetano Carpio in 1983, ERP commander Joaquín Villalobos was considered one of the most influential and powerful figures within the FMLN. The third major guerrilla, the *Fuerzas Armadas de Resistencia Nacional* (FARN or Armed Forces of National Resistance) was formed by a dissenting faction of the ERP which favored the construction of a mass movement fighting a war of national resistance as opposed to the ERP's insurrectionary approach. The fourth organization that formed the FMLN was the *Partido Comunista de El Salvador* (PCS or Communist Party of El Salvador). Initially created and led by Farabundo Martí, the party was banned following the 1932 popular uprising.

As mentioned above, divisions in the party over the use of armed struggle resulted in a faction headed by Salvador Carpio establishing the FPL. The PCS reversed its position on armed struggle during its 7th Congress in April 1979. The fifth and relatively smaller organization which joined the FMLN's creation was the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos* (PRTC or Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers). The PRTC was established in September 1979.