

PEACE PROCESSES IN CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE U. S. CHANGING ROLES

PROCESSOS DE PAZ NOS PAÍSES DA AMÉRICA CENTRAL: ANÁLISE DOS PAPEIS MUTANTES DOS EUA

Paula Gomes Moreira (UnB)
paulagmri@gmail.com

Abstract: Central America has its recent history full of episodes resulting in violent conflicts over land maintenance, parallel armed groups' confrontations or even organized crime control. This has lead countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador e Nicaragua to receive intense external interferences in order to eliminate violence and establish peace. This paper argues, on one hand, that the United States played an important role in intervening in peace processes in the 20th era in these countries, that involved governments and non-state armed forces; on the other hand, it develops the idea that this external actor has acted as an important player in these processes, as a consequence of its regional influence at the area, trying to identify through sources such as academic book review and others, its different strategies as an ambassador of democracy stability. The main contribution for research on studies about peace process in Central America is that not only domestic actors should be considered in further analysis, but also external ones.

Key-words: Central America. United States of America (USA). Peace Agreements. Democratization.

Resumo: A América Central tem a sua história recente cheia de episódios que resultaram em conflitos violentos sobre a manutenção da terra, confrontos entre grupos armados paralelos ou mesmo derivados da tentativa de controle do crime organizado. Isto levou países como Guatemala, El Salvador e Nicarágua a receberem intensas interferências externas no combate à violência e estabelecimento da paz. Este artigo argumenta, por um lado, que os Estados Unidos desempenharam um papel importante em intervir em processos de paz durante o século XX nesses países, que envolveram governos e forças armadas não estatais; por outro lado, desenvolve a ideia de que esse ator externo tem atuado como um jogador importante nestes processos, como consequência de sua influência regional na área, tentando identificar por meio de fontes como revisão bibliográfica e outras, suas diferentes estratégias como um embaixador da estabilidade da democracia. A principal contribuição para a investigação em estudos sobre o processo de paz na América Central é que não apenas os atores nacionais devem ser considerados em uma análise mais aprofundada, mas também os externos.

Palavras-chave: América Central. Estados Unidos da América (EUA). Acordos de Paz. Democratização.

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Initial considerations

The theoretical framework that guides this paper is the one that emphasizes the role played by external influences over internal affairs. The main representatives of this chain include author's that advocates the relevance of the third wave of democratization in explaining the consolidation of democracy in Latin America.

The democratization theory as argued by Huntington (1991) privileges the transitions occurred during the late 70's until now. According to the author between 1974 and 1990, at least thirty countries made their transitions from more authoritarian to democratic regimes. As a consequence, the number of democracies has increased, or more specifically, has doubled during the last decades (Hyde, 2011).

The third wave of democratization has as its main characteristic the salience of international influences, as argued by Diamond (1997). Those influences can be translated as more tangible international pressures and inducements, that include: “the growth of governmental and nongovernmental forms of assistance to democratic actors, and the increasing emphasis on human rights and democracy promotion in the foreign policies of established democracies, especially the United States” (Diamond, p. 34).

O'Donnell & Schmitter (1988) supports that when saying that during the previous waves of democratization – the first and second respectively – domestic factors were more important than the external ones; a pattern that was broken with the dawn of the third wave. Pridham (1994) shares this belief and defends the emphasis posed on external influences, once most typologies of democratic transition tend to explain it through internal forces solely. At the same time he says that only recently there have been made some efforts in exploring this intellectual void.

Nevertheless, some reasons should be cited to justify the importance of external influences at the consolidation of liberal democracies in Latin America. Firstly, there is the triumph of this kind of regime as a predominant model in the majority of countries, in other words, liberal democracy has triumphed as the principal ideology in many countries. At the same time a series of changes proceeded after the end of the Cold War by emergent actors has created some incentives and pressure for change. Many countries embraced democracy envisaging benefits derived from their interaction with richer defends of this kind of regime. They choose to be democratic as a way to receive more financial support or legitimacy from others, especially allies.

Castro Santos (2010) also stresses that neighborhood changes, or regional ones, should also be considered in this explanation. For her, many transitions happened after short wars, or limited episodes of resistance, in states with a very short capacity of detaining the spread of some neighbors. The Central America region is one example of this, where the democratic imposition was the responsibility of military officials.

If a country lacks favorable internal conditions, however, snowballing alone is unlikely to bring about democratization. The democratization of countries

A and B is not a reason for democratization in country C, unless the conditions that favored it in the former also exist in the latter. Although the legitimacy of democratic government came to be accepted throughout the world in the 1980s, economic and social conditions favorable to democracy were not everywhere present. The 'worldwide democratic revolution' may create an external environment conducive to democratization, but it cannot produce the conditions necessary for democratization within a particular country (HUNTINGTON, 1991, p. 16).

Following this thought, Castro Santos (2010) argues that the democratization process, according to a vastly literature, can lead to unexpected results. For example, for Whitehead (2005), even with incomplete results, he expects that these processes may end in positive transformations when considering external factors and their more interventionist and stronger role. On the other hand, Huntington (1993), while thinking about the world politics as a bigger picture for many clashes between civilizations, sees a more negative outcome. To him some values advocated by these civilizations are incompatible with democratic regimes, like Islamism.

Huntington (1991) also addresses these changes in the Central American area to a specific relationship with the United States (U.S.). He says that Washington did a major contribution to democratizations from the 80's and on, as a "conscious and direct exercise of American power and influence" (p. 15). He means with it that what happened in the Central American area relating to democratization processes was something organized and inspired by the American example.

Seeing this is important to analyze if the same could have happened to peace processes. Firstly, as prior mentioned, the end of the Cold War brought a very unstable environment with U.S. playing a central role in the world balance of power. There was a huge preoccupation from stakeholders and academics with security issues, because many conflicts had spread across the globe and many of them were killing more than ever before (UCDP, 2015).

The wars were no longer localized and the violence was not credited solely to states, but mainly to non-state actors, such as professional armies, warlords, ethnic and religious groups, and many others. In Central America it was a time when the organized crime and the drug dealer's leaders were gaining much more power and prestige than states or governmental authorities.

At the same time, U.S. kept its influence through an alliance with not so much democratic leaders, such as Somoza, in Nicaragua, in exchange of benefits – especially trade and lobbying. Hurrel (2005) says it was a consequence of the weaker condition in which many of these states were immerse. To him, there was an illusory belief that foreigners could be successful when lobbying with U.S. stakeholders. The reality was extremely different, especially because

[...] there was a widespread consensus in and around Washington against proposals to reform IFIs [International Financial Institutions] in order to manage financial crises; and in favor of using both aggressive trade diplomacy and linkage politics to force open developing country markets and to press what Washington viewed as the 'logical' and 'natural' path to further liberal economic reform (p. 47)

For Buzan & Wæver (2003), the Central America region together with U.S. forms a Regional Security Complex (RSC), because it is a structure “with penetration by outside rival powers looking for both political influence and access to resources and markets” (p. 265). Many of the states in this region were weak, with many cases of political violence and rare achieved democracies. Nevertheless, at the height of American informal empire, much of their domestic issues were not solely domestic, “because United States was concerned about maintaining friendly regimes. Conflicts among the states were often spillovers either from domestic revolts or from controversies over relations to the United States (e.g., military bases)” (p. 281).

As the concerns about more complex international politics security issues starts to dismiss, like nuclear and extra-hemispheric intrusion (communism, for example), there is a more centralized concern with the drugs problem, which engages the U. S. on its fight. As a consequence, the hemispheric security topic will have more space throughout the North-American political agenda.

As Kurtenbach (2010) argues, this change in the way security issues were seen by the U.S. was a consequence not only of the changing international environment, but was also part of its strategic plans to create an environment more stable at the region to its negotiations, through the incentive of democracies.

Even with democratic regimes in most of the Central American countries, where there were elections considered as fair by international observers; and respect for democracy pre-conditions, such as the rule of law, civilian control of the armed forces, and assured rights of association, expression and participation, they were comprised by the outbreak of insurgent conflicts.

As a tentative to make sure the ideal environment were about to come one day, regional leaders started some processes to bring peace and stabilize relations between insurgents and state forces. Arnson (1999, p. 1), defines them as “processes of dialogue over time between r representatives of contesting forces, with or without an intermediary, aimed at securing an end to hostilities in the context of agreements over issues that transcend a strictly military nature”.

The author also observers when analyzing the cases of Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, among others, that there is a symbiotic relationship between conflict resolution in Latin America in

general and the processes of democratic transition and consolidation (ARNSON, 1999). But what interests most in this paper is to observe the role played by the U.S. in such processes, trying to establish its participation as an important factor to be considered in this causal chain.

To do this, the next sections will explore the cases of three selected countries, showing the context of emergence of their political conflicts, the dialogues established and the role played by the U.S. as a tentative to demonstrate if it could have helped or made more difficult to establish peace after violent periods of confrontations between insurgent guerrillas and the state.

1. Guatemala

The peace process in Guatemala is one of the main results of a more broadly umbrella peace process that happened through all Central America. According to Padilla (1995), it has initiated after the signing of the Peace Accord by the five Central American presidents in a meeting held in the Guatemala City in August 1987. The chiefs of states committed themselves to start peace-making and peace-building efforts in countries with severe internal armed conflicts, namely Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala itself.

The international environment was still polarized by the two superpowers, the U.S. and the Soviet Union (USSR). There was some fear between North-American leaders that communist inspired insurgencies could spread across all Latin America, and they started to take measures in its more closely Central American RSC to stop it. “The Reagan Administration was implementing its ‘roll back’ policy and a military solution was seen as the only viable alternative by most of the American decision makers at that time” (PADILLA, 1995, p. 17).

Its strategy also involved negotiations with local actors, particularly the armed ones, such as the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). The URNG acted violently during the 36 years of civil war in Guatemala and only in 1996 agreed on deploying its guns and to become an official political party, in 1998, when the peace process ended.

As stressed by Jonas (2000), Guatemala represents an important case of peace process with democratic gains, because of its particularly striking democratizing elements during the negotiation process, which involved a broad social and political participation of many groups, but also because of the content of the accords signed.

To understand this is necessary to recapture the Guatemalan modern history, beginning with the outset of the civil war. Guatemala’s civil war began in 1960, after the “CIA-orchestrated overthrow of the democratic nationalist movement of Jacobo Arbenz in 1954” (JONAS, 2000, p.

10). The next years were followed by several phases of the war between leftist insurgent organizations against U.S.-trained and supported counterinsurgency forces of the Guatemalan army (JONAS, 2000).

For many years, the army and the government, under the leadership of the Christian Democrat Vinicio Cerezo (1986-1990), refused to negotiate with the insurgent forces, even after the signature of the Central American Peace Accords (1987). Only in 1990, after some international pressure from the National Reconciliation Commission – established as an instance of the Peace Accords –, that were created conditions to start a dialogue between the parts.

Some of the efforts made included: disarming the previously warring parties and the restoration of order; the destruction of weapons, repatriation of refugees, monitoring of elections, efforts to protect human rights, reforming or strengthening of governmental institutions and promoting formal and informal processes of political participation (ARSON & AZPURU, 2003).

Azpuru (1999) says that from the very bottom of the negotiations to the end of civil war in Guatemala, before the signature of the peace accords, both democratization and the efforts for making peace had mutually influenced and reinforced each other. This is because the process of democratization paved the way for the start of the peace negotiations, at the same time, the negotiations to bring peace back had as one of its main objectives the further consolidation of democracy.

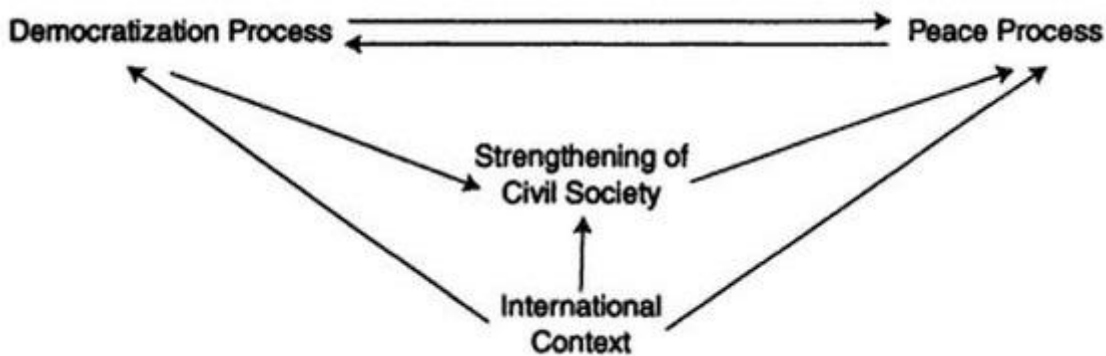
Even if the democracy is a very relative concept there are some formal minimal procedures used by many indexes to classify countries around the world as democracies. The Freedom House Index, for example, considers as its main parameters: political rights and civil liberties. The first one embraces: (1) electoral process, (2) political pluralism and participation and (3) functioning of the government. The second one is related to: (4) freedom of expression and belief, (5) associational and organizational rights, (6) rule of law and (7) personal autonomy and individual rights (FREEDOM HOUSE, 2013).

The last report, launched in 2014, brought Guatemala to a partially free democracy. They attribute much of the advances in democracy to the peace accords, however the legacy of the 36 years of civil war still commit much of its efforts to fully exercise the main parameters cited above. Former combatants from the wartime period enjoy impunity, at the same time the number of local and transnational criminal groups, such as cartels and drugs dealers in general, are increasing. On the other side, countermeasures from the government to stop these trends are not enough, and

constrained by insufficient human and material resources, when compared to those at the disposal of criminal organizations (FREEDOM HOUSE, 2013).

As Torres-Rivas (2012) states, the Guatemalan experience is different from the other cases where the cease-fire, after a long period of armed conflict, opened the way for the emergence of political parties, free elections or others characteristics attributed to the very basis of democratic regimes. Guatemala did not follow this pattern, on the contrary, to him, the efforts made to achieve peace were, actually, a consequence of the democratization process.

Figure I. Causal Relationships Underlying the Guatemalan Peace Process.



Source: AZPURU, 1999, p. 99.

The center of this scheme points out to the strengthening of Civil Society and it can be explained by the ascendancy of grassroots organizations during what was called the Serranazo. As Jonas (2000) explains, there was an attempt of a self-coup promoted by the former president Jorge Antonio Serra Elías, from the Solidarity Action Movement (MAS), where he tried to seize absolute control of the Guatemalan government.

The Serranazo, name from which the episode became known, was repudiated by most of the sectors of civil society and the international community. Many sectors such as grassroots and progressive groups, leftist trade unions, peasants, and indigenous, that had always rejected electoral participation, were manifesting political resistance. This experience was “the precursor to the eventual participation by many of those sectors in the 1995 election” (JONAS, 2000, p. 13). Besides the mass enlargement of political participation from groups before uninterested in domestic politics, there was the signature of an agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous People, in March 1995, as a guarantee of respect for the rights of the country’s majority population.

At the same time, after the election of the modernizing conservative Alvaro Enrique Arzú Irigoyen, from the National Advanced Party (PAN), at the 1996 elections, he underscored his intention to establish civilian control over the army. He intended to make changes at the army's high command and at the police. These and some other actions "created a new political climate of confidence and paved the way for an indefinite cease-fire between the rebels and the army in March 1996" (JONAS, 2000, p.14).

The final accords, in 1996, finished with a definitive cease-fire, constitutional and electoral reforms, and the transformation of URNG into a party. On the contrary of many transitions to democracy, where there was solely an agreed commitment between civilian and military elites, the Guatemalan case was articulated by the interplay of forces and empowerment of civil society based on the peace agreements.

The international context also played a major role on this picture of Guatemalan peace process. Arnson and Azpuru (2003) agrees that besides the successful demobilization of combatants, like the changing role played by the URNG; the armed forces reform and the establishment of truth commissions, all of that related to the civilian societal advances, the mere presence of United Nations (U.N.) extended mission – the United Nations Mission to Guatemala (MINUGUA) –, in other words, an external actor, was a fundamental part to achieve peace in between the negotiations.

At the same way, the authors believe that international and domestic factors cannot be seen separately, because the story of peace consolidation in Central America as a whole lies in the tension between these two elements. To them the peace was only possible because of the confluence of favorable historical circumstances, like the end of the Cold War and the changing political world order, "the interests of major actors, such that military options appeared foreclosed and key goals came to be seen as more attainable through peace than through war" (ARNSON & AZPURU, 2003, p. 198). These efforts received a great recognition by international agents, such as the U.N.

By virtue of this, it is also worth mentioning the role played by the U.S. at the peace process. Like other outsiders, the U.S. provided important additional support in tasks such as establishing human rights verification missions, in monitoring the accords made through political missions, and, sometimes, renegotiating some divergent issues of the accords when implementation faltered and some high level diplomacy was needed (ARNSON & AZPURU, 2003, p. 198) to go ahead.

Other scholars, like Jonas (1996), may argue that this role was far more intense than the picture introduced before. To her there was a "two-track double-message policy that has characterized U.S.-Guatemalan relations throughout the 1980s and into the 1990" (JONAS, 1996, p.

148). On the one hand, still existed closer ties between U.S. officials and the Guatemalan ones, on issues such as collaboration on counterinsurgency plans, CIA assistance to the army, military training etc., that were lasting since the beginning of the civil war. On the other hand, publicly, the U.S. policymakers were stronger supporters of human rights and liberal beliefs, making some pressure over the Guatemalan government to liberalize.

At this point, the U.S. started to play a decisive role in demilitarization. Together with Venezuela, Mexico, Norway, Spain and Colombia, he is a part of the Group of Central American Friends, whose task is to facilitate peace processes and support U.N. moderation. Despite its presence in the group, which purpose is to remain neutral during negotiations, the U.S. has a special tie with the Guatemalan army that does not consent it. “[...] the United States remains the only international player with the leverage to pressure for demilitarization” (JONAS, 1996, p. 153).

This is due to situations like the permanence of U.S. government support in intelligence and antidrug operations. The Pentagon, through its Office for International Security Affairs, for example, had realized exercises in Humanitarian and Civic Assistance (HCA) during the last decade in Guatemala, while advocating that the army was the appropriate institution for attending the needs of the population, such as providing basic resources and carrying out infrastructure tasks, like building schools or even, providing medical care (THE DEMOCRACY BACKGROUNDER, 1995).

Finally, it is important to mention that these constraints could have strongly thwarted the North-American role during the peace process and after. This is because its defense of human rights was an anachronism when analyzed under its special relationship within the army, which could had interfered indirectly at the peace negotiations, especially regarding discussions about institutional changes.

2. El Salvador

The Salvadoran peace process case has many characteristics similar to the Guatemalan one; at the same time it has some singularities that turn the country into an interesting study. Firstly, it is fundamental do contextualize the conflict roots and environment, and then proceed to the analysis of the peace process in itself.

As mentioned previously, the international balance of power after the bipolar period was not pending anymore to one side or to the other. It was a time when multiple cells of power were disperse. Besides that, many countries with a long-standing ethnic, religious or cultural divides had seen its rivalries and tensions intensified after the end of the Cold War.

The democratization wave was one of the new forces responsible for many changes around the world, especially in countries under the influence of the Western standard of civilization. In terms of security, it happened to be an intensification of sub-state level conflicts, with fragile states aiming to become an integrated part of the western hemisphere trade, accords and international institutions.

Conflict, intervention and war are not things of the past, although their origins are increasingly internal rather than external to states. This may be a positive sign as far as international order is concerned, but the unmanageability of present civil conflicts and their dangerous spillover effects leave little room for complacency. (FAWCETT & SAYIGH, 2000, p. 4).

In the realm of the conflict surpassed El Salvador for many years it is necessary to consider, according to Ehrenfeld et al. (2003) the aid conditionality's beneath it. Aid encompasses a lot of aspects regarding peace building and reconstruction of post-conflict societies. It is the practice of withholding aid until specific terms are agreed. Most of the countries rebuilding after intense conflict require large amounts of capital in order to restore its previous infrastructure and institutional foundations of their societies. "Such aid can serve as an incentive for peace, by enticing parties to engage in peace negotiations and abide by treaties and policies" (FAWCETT & SAYIGH, 2000, p. 59). This aid conditionality was used by exogenous agents in order to induce forced changes in countries with some domestic resistance.

The stipulated conditions to make possible third parties were able to create the necessary environment to achieve peace. The El Salvador case is one that demonstrates this better in Central America. In the beginning of the 90's, El Salvador was devastated by its civil war, at that time, a conflict with more than twelve years of existence. The origins of the conflict dated back from the 70's when an ideological struggle, between societal demands and a repressive right-wing system, gave strength to the emergence of revolutionary groups, such as the *Frente Farabundo Marti de Liberación Nacional* (FMLN).

When the San Jose Peace Accords were signed, on July 1990, between the Salvadoran government and the FMLN revolutionaries, much already needed to be done. Such as: the demilitarization of combatants and the army, with the reintegration of the combatants back to society; resettling of displaced people, much of them displaced because were trying to run away from the conflict and many democratic reforms etc (FAWCETT & SAYIGH, 2000, p. 59).

Nevertheless, the aid conditionality was not something developed after the end of the Cold War, nor was the signing of the peace agreements. In El Salvador it was already an early tactics that

had been used by international agencies, multilateral banks, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and others, to pressure for changes at the country, envisaging, between other things, peace.

Arnson and Azpuru (2003) also stress that the international community played a key role on certain settings during the negotiations to achieve peace. The U.N. had the principal outside role, although other countries of the region, as well as the U.S., provided important additional support. Furthermore, international financial institutions and intergovernmental organizations inserted significant monetary resources as a way to support the accords' commitments.

At the 80's the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in accordance with the United Nations Observer Commission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) used a lot of aid conditionality to encourage reform, imagining that "by making aid contingent on the efficacious development of the peace process and other reforms that would promote democratization" (ARNSON & AZPURU, 2003, p. 65)

There are some main tactics that donors or financial aid supporters typically use, even if with varying degrees, when imposing conditions on aid. The principal tactics are: (1) persuasion, (2) support and (3) pressure. In the USAID's case, it was an instrument of the U.S. government to support changes dealing exclusively with "... the Salvadoran government, a small band of US-sponsored NGOs and consulting firms. While the European donors took an active part in developing pluralistic models for municipal and regional reconstruction..." (FOLEY, 1996, p. 91).

USAID played an important role, for example, in helping the *Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social* (FUSADES) growth. The group created in 1983 by a team of wealth Salvadoran business entrepreneurs. Initially receiving small amounts of resources was favored by larger amounts of contributions (millions) at the following years. "The explicit aim, particularly in creating FUSADES, was to promote a package of economic policies that the administration in the United States felt was needed to foster political stability and economic growth" (FOLEY, 1996, p.72). Over the next 10 years, FUSADES became the main channel for financial aid in the civil sector, at the same time it turned out to be the most influential think tank in El Salvador (FOLEY, 1996, p.72).

Not only U.S. influenced the reconstruction of a very unstable Salvadoran society, but it had also worked straight with the military sector, through its U.S. Military Advisers Group (MilGroup). They were responsible for the training and the professional specialization of the El Salvadoran Armed Forces (ESAF). On the contrary of what has been done with the aid conditionality, which was the interest in restoring societal bounds unsettled by the armed conflict; giving training and

supporting the national army responded to changes at the North-American government, and more precisely, to objectives of foreign policy.

Washington not only supported the Salvadoran government, but also 'declared war' on the spread of communism in Central America and indirectly on any country supporting communist expansion. President Carter concluded that the Sandinista government posed a threat to the stability of Central America and to United States interests in that region. After President Reagan took office in 1981, he adopted Carter's view and then went a degree farther. President Reagan considered the situation in El Salvador to be a target of opportunity for the Soviet Union in their continual attempt to spread communism into Central America. Until the Soviet Union was stopped they would continue to try to expand their influence throughout the Americas" (CALE, 1996, p.9).

In terms of its democratization process, the intense presence of foreign forces had driven El Salvador to a situation where the elites were at the forefront of changes. At the same time, domestic organizations were the counterparts of international agencies, such as the USAID, in what Foley (1996) called a "*tutelage of AID*". Ehrenfeld et al. (2003) are critical about the real role played by such international sponsors of the democratization and demilitarization, on a broader perspective, and at the peace process, more particularly.

They argue that its functions were not very well established because its aims were not clear enough, and that they possibly could be more inclined in "inducing their private aims of market liberalization" (EHRENFELD et al., 2003, p. 66), than to achieve peace, for example. Besides that, conditionality was also imposed through the military field when aiding with capacity building, training and financial resources. But, on the contrary of the aid provided to domestic organizations, this kind of help "reflected a genuine attempt to curb the ongoing conflict by forcing armed combatants to comply with conditions in the peace process" (EHRENFELD et al., 2003, p. 67).

Boyce (1996) also criticizes the role played by the international community regarding the peace process, saying that there existed a huge lack between economic policy and the process on going. She also states that macroeconomic stabilization does not translate automatically into policies intended to build peace. So, the lack of coordination between organizations such as USAID, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Inter-American Development Bank and, also, the U.N., gave privilege to some discussions about budgetary and financial issues over others that could have really affected the peace process, like funds negotiation to rebuild domestic institutions or the reintegration of insurgents into the societal mode.

Notwithstanding, the government's own commitment to assume the compromises envisioned during the signature of the peace accords, was minimal, and did not assured the reconstruction of the former areas of conflict or the reintegration of ex-militants. All this postponed the signature of the final peace agreement to 1997. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the particular emphasis gave by the U.S. on judicial reform, mainly, with the training of judges (PEARCE, 1999).

Even with the progress made in depoliticizing the Supreme Court, for example, the judicial system were still inefficient and corrupt, giving space to the ascendancy of an Human Rights Ombudsman's office to assume a decisive role. The office was created to "investigate cases of possible human rights abuse, assist alleged victims, encourage prosecution of violators and provide educational programs to promote awareness of, and respect for, human rights in El Salvador" (HOLIDAY & STANLEY, 1993).

This is important because the negotiations, and the massive influence of international donors, may have created oblivions above some of the urgent issues to be discussed on a post-conflict situation. As argued by Arnson and Azpuru (2003), issues such as release of prisoners, dealing with the victims of violence, reforms in policing, security or the protection of human rights, were difficult to discuss and hard to get the military involved. From this point of view the support from U.S. to the reform of judiciary was fundamental to make the process of facilitating discussions between the parts progress.

As in the Guatemalan case not only political, but also societal reforms were crucial to end conflicts, in association with a democratization process. However, the peace accords are not a guarantee that the violence will deescalate, which aim, in Central and Latin America as a whole, had been associated with the idea of promotion of democracy as a more stable environment to live in. In other words, since the beginning of the third wave of democratization, there has been a strong promotion of the ideal of democracy as the regime that fits better the government's regional aspirations, such as the achievement of peace.

Harris and Reilly (1998) criticizes this thought affirming that democratic reform, which begins at the realization of elections, referenda or plebiscites, should not be regarded as the end-point of a democratic process, but instead of that "any genuine strategy for the promotion of democracy following a deep-rooted conflict needs to view elections as only the first step in a long-term process" (p. 391). They talk about elections because of its importance as an instrument to strength the fundamental basis of civil society. In the Salvadoran case, the civil society has been redirected through peace process that at the surface seems to have ended with the realization of elections, but

when looked more profoundly, reveals a very lame environment, with growing episodes of violence and an extreme unstable regime, considered by the FR as a partly free democracy.

FR also stress that El Salvador became the most dangerous country for children and Human Rights. Most of the deaths can be attributed to drug-related crime and inter-gang violence; problems that became stronger after the end of peace talks (O'BYRNE, 2014). As a component of the RSC of Central America, the country is a constant preoccupation to Washington, apprehensive that its domestic Salvadoran problems could go beyond its borders.

Finally, as seen, peace conditionality was helpful in some ways, but not so much in others. The resources implemented in aiding reforms towards democracy, such as at the judiciary realm, benefited the population through the creation of institutions specialized on the protection of human rights, at the same time, it pressed for political changes, such as the realization of elections, that initially proved to be necessary, but after, it was compromised by a lack of support from the countries' elite, not so much interested in doing changes.

3. Nicaragua

The Peace Accords signed in Guatemala was a huge conquest of Central American countries as a role. Though, there was one tiny country, Nicaragua, not so much into fulfilling its obligations after signing the accords. And from the point of view of international influence, no country was far closer to the U.S. than Nicaragua.

But, for a better explanation of what has been mentioned so far, it is fundamental to explore the origins of Nicaraguan peace accords, which dates back to 1983, with the Contadora's meeting. The Contadora group first reunion gathered Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela on the Contadora Island (Panama) to discuss regional threats to peace and security stemming from the armed conflicts whose origins were in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.

It was a time when the fights between the Sandinista army forces and U.S.-backed Contra – conformed by a variety of groups opposed to the Sandinista Junta of National Reconstruction government –, had been already spilling over into neighboring countries, such as Honduras and Costa Rica. The final Declaration of the Contadora meeting “urged the Central American nations to resolve conflicts, and expressed ‘deep concern’ regarding foreign intervention – direct or indirect – in Central American countries” (VICKERS, 1995).

Its strategy was to permit Central American governments to manage their on domestic issues, without interference, with the guarantee that they would not support armed opposition groups in

other countries. But, all of them failed because there was some resistance from the U.S. to accept an agreement where the Sandinistas would be in charge of Nicaragua. At the same time the Nicaraguan did not accepted any changes in its politics (VICKERS, 1995).

As the talks did not advance, the Costa Rican President, Oscar Arias, from the National Liberation Party (NLP), started a lobbying campaign with the U.S. congressional leaders, in an attempt to articulate a regional compromise between the U.S. and Nicaragua. His efforts became known as the Arias plan, and envisaged a cease fire between government forces and insurgents, a general amnesty for insurgents, a political dialogue of between the government and representatives of unarmed opposition groups, and finally, a democratization process with full press and political party freedom, to begin right after the signature of the peace accord (VICKERS, 1995).

Regarding Washington's relations with Nicaragua, Mexico proposed a three-point plan for reducing tensions: (1) an end to U.S. threats of military action against Nicaragua; (2) a mutual reduction of military posturing; and (3) a nonaggression pact between the two countries. Nicaragua accepted the plan immediately. The initial U.S. response was silence (LEOGRANDE, 1986, p.95).

Luckily, the plane received a great support, not only from the U.S. government, but also from the Contadora members, with adjustments. But surprisingly, the Nicaraguan government did not approved it, which led to a series of throwbacks, one of them, actually, included a reunion between Arias and the U.S. president Reagan and its congressmen. At the meeting, the congressmen did severe critics to the Arias plan, and reaffirmed their commitment with the Contras fight, providing more financial and military aid to them (VICKERS, 1995).

Roberts (1990) criticizes the Washington actions in Nicaragua saying that it played three different roles, depending on the moment. Firstly, the ideal-type explanation sees U.S. policy as an exercise of coercive diplomacy, as “a strategy in which the threat or restrained use of force is employed to pressure another nation to alter its behavior or make diplomatic concession” (ROBERTS, 1990, p. 71). From this point of view coercion was made through constraints imposed by domestic and international legal norms, political opposition, publicly criticizing statements, a waged proxy war, and others (ROBERTS, 1990).

In Nicaragua, more specifically, U.S. coercive diplomacy strategy involved the tolerance with the existence of the Sandinista regime; at the same time, it adopted coercive measures to constrain Sandinista actions and inhibit its projection beyond Nicaragua’s border with the domestic revolution

flag. Some of its measures were to support revolutionary movements in neighboring countries like El Salvador or to impose economic sanctions.

Another interpretation says that U.S. bilateral relationship with Nicaragua was based on a “bullying strategy”, that contrary to the first one introduced, did not forced Nicaraguan compliance to U.S. demands, truly, it aimed a unilateral submission, without mutual accommodation (ROBERTS, 1990). With this it means the aim of eliminating Sandinista revolutionary movement, rather than its commitment.

The third explanation sees the U.S. as “a complex, multi-tiered coercive strategy involving both maximum and minimum (or fallback) objectives” (ROBERTS, 1990, p. 73). Its idea is that the support gave to the Contra’s group could drive Sandinistas from power, producing secondary goals at the containment of Nicaraguan Revolution. However, coercive tactics imposed on Sandinistas, like warfare and economic hardship, failed to achieve a rollback (ROBERTS, 1990).

Despite all the strategies described, the peace could only be achieved after the support of other Latin American nations. The North-American coercion was so strong, and large that only after a common understanding between the five Central American presidents about the undesirable effects of Contra’s existence and their decision to dismantle it, that was possible to Nicaragua to recover from a very long conflict.

The moment was perfect because President Bush (1989-1993) had just taken office and had not yet formed his foreign policy office towards Latin American affairs. So it was great for the region’s government to formulate more integrated politics, for example, the first steps in direction to the Nicaraguan democratization. One of the first steps to do it was the realization of foundational elections. On one side, the U.S. government held a position of collaboration with the Contras, saying they should only be dismantled and reintegrated after the elections. On the other side, supported by other neighboring nations, the Nicaraguan government decided to proceed with the electoral process despite the failure to implement regional accords regarding demobilization.

In the meantime, the Bush administration decided to help the electoral process and gave support to the opposition candidate, Violeta Chamorro, from the National Opposition Union (UNO), with hope that her winning could bring some changes to the Nicaraguan political domestic scenario. At the same time, “the U.S. government consistently challenged the validity of the electoral process and declined to make a commitment to normalize relations until after the stunning victory of Chamorro” (ROBERTS, 1990, p. 96).

With so many cards at board, and a non-trusted electoral process, the Sandinista government invited the Organization of American States (OAS), together with the U.N., to monitor its 1989 electoral process, becoming the first sovereign state to accept such international monitoring of its elections (KUMAR, 1998).

According to Kumar (1998), the most obvious objective of post-conflict elections is to transfer power from a democratically installed government which enjoys national and international recognized legitimacy, at the same it has the ability to start rebuilding the country. The second objective is to initiate and consolidate the democratization process on the country. It is something seen as the first step towards fostering democratic institutions after a long period of war or other kind of violent conflicts. The third one is to promote reconciliation between the parties that were fighting against each other. It is the idea of “ballots instead of bullets”.

Kumar and Ottaway (1997) argues that there were domestic and external pressures for the realization of Nicaraguan elections. Externally, they say that the demise of the Soviet Union created some pressures to move with elections and regionally it was a momentum of convergence between Central American countries to end all conflicts and do whatever was possible to democratize. Domestically, existed some support from organizations of civil society committed to democracy and human rights that saw the electoral process an adequate way to make them a reality.

Hartzell (2002) develops the idea that the Nicaraguan peace process had three principle stages. Firstly, the Esquipulas peace process, when the five Central American presidents reached a series of agreements on the steps necessary to bring peace, not only to Nicaragua, but also to the other countries of the region. The second stage of the peace process was centered at its 1990's elections and the transition based on the basis of a political settlement between the Sandinistas and the elected incoming government of Violeta Chamorro. Finally, the final stage consisted of many disarmament and demobilization accords between the Contras and the Nicaraguan government.

Regarding the second phase, it is important to stress that when the elections were held the Contras was still in arms, which demanded more efforts in containing their advance throughout the country to make peace durable. As a consequence, the government started to worry about its actions and the population's security, because the Contras leaders said they would only demobilize when Chamorro replaced high-level Sandinista security-force commanders.

Right after that, the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA) began its mandate, with the responsibility of verifying any cease-fires or demobilizations agreed on in the region. Besides that, the mission had the aim of “conduct on-site verification of the cessation of aid

to rebel forces and the nonuse of one state's territory for attacks on others, as agreed to in the Esquipulas II Agreement" (HARTZELL, 2002, p. 365).

The U.N. also created an initiative together with governments and international organizations to facilitate this process called International Commission of Support and Verification (CIAV). Initially, based on assistance to demobilization, CIAV latter extended its mandate to facilitate the material and social insertion of Contras and their families into society. It also became associated with the OAS, to include verification of human rights violation and the exercise of justice (HARTZELL, 2002).

At this moment, the peace process had achieved a new level based on the reconstruction of basic institutions to maintain the democratization process. Despite some disagreements between government security forces and some localized rural armed groups, Nicaragua could held a second round of general elections in 1996, to reform its constitution in 1995 and to undertake structural adjustment reforms of the economy (HARTZELL, 2002).

Nevertheless, as the same observed with El Salvador, Nicaragua has yet to deal with a not so desired heritage from the conflict period. For example, it has been improving its human rights scores, but there are some issues that still constraint its development, such as persistent problems with soldiers' ethics of law enforcement duties in rural areas – with recurring incidents of violence abuse, brutality and femicide. Its judiciary is independent, although still weak, very susceptible to political influence and limited in its judgments of human rights abuse cases (HARTZELL, 2002).

Finally, the critical points observed at the Nicaraguan peace process were: the staging of fair and open elections and also the ending of external support for the opposition army, in both of which the U.S. had an impetuous role.

Final considerations

To sum up, this paper discussed in its introduction the bibliography that emphasizes the role played by external actors in peace process and democracy promotion during the third wave of democratization, regarding the Central American area. Firstly, it was introduced some traditional authors like Huntington (1991), Diamond (1997) and O'Donnell & Schmitter (1988), to briefly argue that they share some similar, but not equal ideas, about the role played by external forces when considering what could have influenced the governments of this region to opt for democracy instead of other type of regime.

Following this, it was addressed the specific case of the United States as a main defender of the democratization in countries like Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, right after the end of the Cold War. According to Buzan & Wæver (2003), this area was a part of U.S. RSC, which demanded strategies against localized threats to the establishment of peace, such as organized armed groups, that acted against the governments; drug cartels and guerrillas movements, with socialist trends.

To exemplify what has been said, it was presented some case studies where the U.S. had a huge influence. In Guatemala, the strategy developed by the U.S. for fostering peace was, particularly, its presence as a supporter of U.N. mission and as a main contributor at the demilitarization of the country. When seeing the El Salvador case, the U.S. role at the peace process was stressed through its support in rebuilding the country's judiciary system, one of the core bases for the strengthening of Salvadoran Civil Society. In Nicaragua, it was remarkable the economic coercion imposed by the U.S. as one of its basic strategies at the countries' restoring status, lost because of the ideological conflict with its roots on the 70's. Loans, financing and some donations were sometimes given and sometimes restrained, with compliance of international funding agencies and under Washington auspices.

Based on these cases, it was possible to see that the U.S. leading role in the Central American peace processes selected, even having similar strategies, such as the use of economic sanctions or the building of stronger ties with local armies, were different from each other when analyzed under a precise external influence. The tendency of putting every case into the same vessel is not as interesting for the Central American region as it could be to another region, this is because even sharing very similar societal, political, economic and historical basic characteristics, the role played by the U.S. was far more than the promotion of democracy, and had its nuances in each of them, that should not be ignored by scholars.

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