

**POLICY PLANNING CASE STUDY
DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND
REINTEGRATION REFLECTIONS: LESSONS
LEARNED FROM GUATEMALA**

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Introduction

This document has been developed out of a conversation with PILPG Senior Peace Fellow Ambassador Donald J. Planty and is one in a series of expert interviews on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration processes with military and policy experts. These disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration case studies are part of a range of work products produced by the PILPG Security Sector Reform Policy Planning Ukraine Working Group. The full range of work product and more information about the Working Group is available [here](#).

Ambassador Planty is the former United States Ambassador to Guatemala and served in this role from July 18, 1996 to August 14, 1999. As U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala, Ambassador Planty played a key role in the negotiation and implementation of Guatemala's ceasefire ("Definitive Ceasefire") and the historic 1996 Peace Accords ("Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace") which marked the end of a 36-year internal armed conflict.

Set out below is a summary of the key points that emerged from a discussion with Ambassador Planty on his reflections of the DDR process in Guatemala. Ambassador Planty's experience in the Guatemalan context is valuable in identifying areas that will require particular attention as Ukraine moves ahead with rebuilding post-war. The document is not a verbatim account but draws upon the insights of Ambassador Planty's experiences to highlight important reflections and lessons learned from the DDR process in Guatemala and potential takeaways for Ukraine.

Background

The Context Underlying the Conflict

The conflict in Guatemala can be traced to the 1954 US-sponsored coup d'état that overthrew the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz. The coup leaders subsequently installed Guatemalan Army Colonel Castillo Armas as President. Castillo Armas was assassinated by a member of the Presidential Guard in 1957 as he strolled through the palace with his wife. Several ineffective and unpopular military regimes succeeded Castillo Armas culminating in the 1958 presidency of General Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes. Ydigoras presided over a period of economic decline and harsh rule prompting an attempted coup against his administration in 1960 by a group of disgruntled Guatemalan army officers. The attempted coup was crushed by Ydigoras with the support of the United States.

The remaining revolutionaries fled to the mountains, organizing themselves in four different groups, all with leftist ideals: the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (“EGP”), the Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms (“ORPA”), the Rebel Armed Forces (“FAR”) and the Guatemalan Workers Party (“PGT”). These four groups acted independently of one another until 1982, when they formed an umbrella organization called Union Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (“URNG”). In this period, they also shifted their headquarters from Guatemala to Mexico City, although guerilla fighters remained in the mountains.

The conflict in Guatemala continued for 36 years, with gross human-rights violations on both sides and numerous civilian and military casualties. The conflict was not considered a civil war, as large segments of the population were not involved in the fighting. Rather, it was considered an armed internal conflict -- a classic guerilla insurgency against an established government.

Negotiating Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (“DDR”)

In 1985, a democratic constitution was reestablished in Guatemala. At this point, democratic elections took place and removed the military government. There were an estimated 12,000 guerilla fighters in Guatemala at this time. By 1985, both the government and URNG were exhausted by the war. Nonetheless, peace negotiations were not formally initiated until President Arzu took office in January 1996. A “firm and lasting peace” was ultimately signed in Guatemala City on December 29, 1996.

The lead-up to the 1996 peace accords was not simple nor straightforward. In 1986, several Central American States that were experiencing similar internal conflicts organized to meet in Guatemala and establish the Esquipulas process. This process was meant to provide a framework for peaceful cooperation in the region. While the Esquipulas Process was successful in other States in the region, it did not directly lead to any peace accords or agreements on Guatemala’s conflict. In 1991, then-President of Guatemala, Jorge Serrano Elias started a peace process. The process was stalled on May 25, 1993 by President Serrano’s attempt to seize absolute power in Guatemala (the so-called “Serranazo”). However, Guatemalan society, businesses, and the army united to oppose Serrano’s moves, leading to his departure from Guatemala on June 1, 1993.

On January 10, 1994, the interim government headed by former government ombudsman Ramiro de Leon Carpio adopted a Framework Agreement for the Resumption of the Negotiating Process. In the same year, a United Nations Mediator was appointed to assist with the negotiations and an

informal organization called “Friends of the Peace Process” was established. The United States was a member of the Friends of the Peace Process.

When President Álvaro Arzú was elected in January 1996, he was elected with an absolute majority in congress, giving him a significant amount of political strength. This political strength was important to the URNG, as it gave them the reassurance that the government could be relied on as a negotiating counterparty to establish a firm and lasting peace. One of President Arzú’s inaugural programs was the launch of a new peace process. By this point, there was already an informal ceasefire between the army and the guerrillas in place in Guatemala. This informal ceasefire was significant, as it created trust to make the formal negotiation process much more manageable.

Objectives

The guerillas were interested in re-integrating into the democratic process without being penalized or subject to criminal actions, for example for treason. Specifically, the guerillas wanted to transition into a political party that could stand in democratic elections. This objective was included within the peace accords, which provided a substantive blueprint, not just for DDR, but for the improvement and development of Guatemala altogether. The DDR process itself was targeted at reintegrating the estimated 12,000 guerilla fighters who were still in the mountains. Educational and vocational training would be provided to the former guerillas and their families in the reintegration camps.

Stakeholders

There were other external actors, in addition to the United States, who played important roles in the Guatemalan peace process. It is worth mentioning: (i) the Central American countries, especially Costa Rica with its leader Oscar Arias; (ii) the “Friends of the Peace Process” (in addition to the United States, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Spain, Norway, Sweden), who provided outside assistance at crucial points during the process, and (iii) the UN Mediator, who took part in the negotiating table.

It is also worth noting that, despite the United States’ involvement in recent Guatemalan history (for example, the 1954 *coup d'état*), Guatemala looked to the United States for support throughout the entire process, as its most important political and economic partner.

Outcomes

The reintegration camps themselves were highly successful. On May 4, 1997, United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright joined Ambassador Planty in personally observing a guerilla column enter a camp in Quiche

department and deposit its weapons in dumpsters. A small group of United Nations blue helmets was installed in the facilities as peacekeepers to oversee the process. However, the peacekeepers were able to depart early due to the lack of conflict within the camps.

It is important to note that a majority of the Guatemalan population today descends from indigenous populations. A significant number of this population lives in abject poverty, with almost no cash income. These segments of the populations are not fully integrated into society, are often disengaged from political processes, and have poor access to health care and education.

Role in the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Process

Ambassador Planty played an important role in the funding of the Guatemala DDR process, specifically through securing funds and expertise for the reintegration camps. In October 1996, Guatemala's Foreign Minister, Eduardo Stein, phoned Ambassador Planty to request \$20 million to build the reintegration camps. Ambassador Planty passed on the Guatemalan government's request for funds to build the camps to Washington D.C. Due to the wide distribution of Ambassador Planty's message, it reached a special advisor in the United States Agency for International Development ("USAID"). This advisor had previous experience with peace processes and helped secure \$23 million of funding from USAID and personally volunteered to supervise construction and operation of the reintegration camps.

In addition to the request for monies to build the camps, Ambassador Planty drafted and transmitted to Washington a detailed set of policy recommendations designed to shape the future of US-Guatemalan relations post peace accords. His request received significant attention in Washington D.C., and he received a call indicating that he would have to defend his request in front of an interagency group. The interagency group later approved Ambassador Planty's recommendations and the US was able to pledge \$230 million in support for implementation of the peace accords at the January 1997 Consultative Group meeting in Brussels, Belgium.

Ambassador Planty was also involved in resolving events that placed the success of peace negotiations in jeopardy, including the kidnapping of Mrs. Olga de Novella, the matriarch of one of Guatemala's most prominent families. Mrs. de Novella had been kidnapped by a guerilla group for ransom. This escalated tensions between the Guatemalan government and the URNG which led to a suspension of the peace negotiations. At the request of the Guatemalan government, Ambassador Planty was instrumental in resolving the standoff between the parties and negotiations resumed after an apology from the URNG,

a pledge to cease kidnappings and guerilla propaganda activities; and removal of the guerilla group that kidnapped Mrs. de Novella from the negotiation table..

Lessons Learned

“The international financial institutions have to be engaged ahead of time.”

Implementing the 1996 Peace Accords was a costly endeavor that Guatemala would have been unable to fund on its own. The Guatemalan government consulted with Ambassador Planty to request the United States government’s help in securing funds from the international community. Ambassador Planty stressed the importance of engaging the international financial community as quickly as possible and that the Guatemalan government must pledge its own funds beyond what the international community might provide. This approach was successful and helped Guatemala secure \$1.9 billion (USD) in funds from the international community at the January meeting of the World Bank’s Consultative Group meeting in Brussels, Belgium.