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**POLICY PLANNING CASE STUDY
CEASEFIRE REFLECTIONS: GUATEMALA**

Prepared by the

**Public International Law & Policy Group
and
Milbank LLP**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Objectives	2
<i>Separation of forces</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Demobilization</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Verification of the process</i>	<i>4</i>
Roles	4
Stakeholders	5
Outcomes	5
Lessons Learned	5

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 ceasefire processes and agreements with military and policy experts. These ceasefire case studies are part of a range of work products produced by the PILPG Ceasefire Policy Planning Ukraine Working Group. The full range of work product and more information about the Working Group is available [here](#).

This case study is based on an interview with Donald J. Planty. 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 Peace Accords ("Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace") which marked the end of a 36-year internal armed conflict.

In 1954, the United States assisted in a coup of the democratically elected Guatemalan Government. This led to the installation of the first in a series of U.S.-backed military governments in Guatemala. By 1960, the Guatemalan public was increasingly discontent with its leadership, resulting in a failed coup attempt by left-wing junior officers against the government of General Ydigoras Fuentes. Following immediate suppression from the Guatemalan government, surviving officers organized themselves into four guerilla groups based around left-wing politics: 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"). The frustrations of these guerilla forces' centered around the loss of Guatemala's democratic foundation, the country's ineffective leadership, and high levels of poverty. This rising discontent ignited a significant and protracted conflict involving widespread social discontent, the formation of insurgent groups, and brutal military government control and violence across Guatemala. The thirty-six year conflict ended only in 1996 with ceasefire and the signing of the Accord for a Firm and Lasting Peace ("Peace Accord").

The Guatemalan ceasefire process was unique from other ceasefire processes, in which there is often a long formal period of negotiation before the signing of a peace accord. In contrast, the Definitive Ceasefire in Guatemala was

signed on December 4, 1996 and the Peace Accords were signed only three weeks later, on December 29, 1996. The short timeline between the Definitive Ceasefire and Peace Accords is attributed to a period of informal negotiations and ceasefire discussions that took place prior to the signing of the Definitive Ceasefire.

For at least a year prior to the Definitive Ceasefire, there was an informal ceasefire in place that added validity to the overall Peace Accord. Although there was a *de facto* understanding already present on the ground, this understanding had to be formalized.

“It was hard to find even one Guatemalan family that was untouched by the conflict.”

Objectives

The ceasefire in Guatemala had three main objectives, which operated as phases to its execution: (1) the separation of forces; (2) demobilization; and (3) verification of the process by the United Nations. Each of these phases was accompanied by a specific timeline, which was based on the time that had passed since a defined date (identified in the ceasefire as the “D-Day”).¹ The parties had agreed that the D-Day would be set by the United Nations, who would verify the process.

At the time the Definitive Ceasefire was signed, no D-Day had been set as the language concerning the verification of the process by the United Nations had been a later addition to the document. The United Nations observer group became fully operational on March 3, 1997, which became the designated D-Day.

Separation of forces

The Definitive Ceasefire identified the importance of separating the disputing parties during the peace negotiations. Assembly point camps were established in six different sites throughout Guatemala, which hosted either the Guatemalan Army or the guerilla forces, the Union Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG).

¹ Agreement on the Definitive Ceasefire, done at Oslo, December 4, 1996, 36 I.L.M. 312 (1997), from UN Document S/1995/1045, of December 17, 1996, Annex, *available at* https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GT_961204_AgreementOnDefinitiveCeasefire.pdf.

Army camps were required to be six kilometers away from guerilla camps. Guerilla camps were also required to be at least twenty kilometers away from the Guatemalan-Mexican border. Army forces could not enter the camps hosting guerilla forces. Only United Nations personnel or Guatemalan police forces in coordination with United Nations personnel were permitted to enter. Each camp had identified regionalized or localized routes and entrance to the camps was not permitted outside of these routes.

The guerilla forces, the Union Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG), were separated into groups and assigned to designated camps at assembly points throughout Guatemala. The guerilla forces were required to give the United Nations lists of their combatants and an inventory of their arms and ammunition. Guerilla members were obligated to formally disarm on arrival, surrendering all their arms before entering into the camps. The movement of these groups outside of the camp was restricted and only allowed in limited circumstances: for medical attention, humanitarian reasons, coordination with other groups, aiding in locating landmines, and disposing of weapons outside the camp.

“I was in one of the camps in the Quiché province when one of the guerilla columns came in. A very large and long column of not only fighters, but also their families. Right outside of the camp, they threw their arms, their long arms and side arms into dumpsters as they filed into camps.”

Demobilization

Along with demobilization of forces, the ultimate goal of the ceasefire was to have the guerilla forces (URNG) leave the designated camps and reincorporate into Guatemalan society.

The ceasefire agreement noted three overlapping stages to the arrival of combatants: (i) within a ten day period prior to D-Day, the United Nations would deploy its personnel and equipment to verify the ceasefire;² (ii) between two to ten days after D-Day, or earlier, the Guatemalan troops would be redeployed;³ (iii)

²Agreement on the Definitive Ceasefire, done at Oslo, December 4, 1996, 36 I.L.M. 312 (1997), from UN Document S/1995/1045, of December 17, 1996, Annex, *available at* https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GT_961204_AgreementOnDefinitiveCeasefire.pdf, Clause 5.

³ Agreement on the Definitive Ceasefire, done at Oslo, December 4, 1996, 36 I.L.M. 312 (1997), from UN Document S/1995/1045, of December 17, 1996, Annex, *available at* https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GT_961204_AgreementOnDefinitiveCeasefire.pdf, Clause 17.

between eleven to twenty-one days after D-Day, or earlier, the guerilla forces (URNG) would move towards the assembly point.⁴ Once the URNG troops were in the assembly point, their movement was restricted and their munitions were surrendered. The ceasefire provided that the URNG troops would leave the camps in a staggered manner and that members of the guerilla forces would legally re-incorporated into Guatemalan society and into political life.

Verification of the process

At the request of the Guatemalan government and the guerilla forces (URNG), the United Nations established an observer group to monitor the due diligence of the assembly point camps. The United Nations provided a small peacekeeping force, comprising approximately eighty individuals dispersed across the assembly points.

Roles

Ambassador Planty was involved in negotiations with the comandantes related to a kidnapping incident that had occurred during the preceding informal ceasefire process. During this informal ceasefire process, one of the guerilla groups had kidnapped the matriarch of a leading business family in Guatemala. This had escalated tensions between the Guatemalan government and the URNG, with calls to stop peace negotiations altogether. At the request of the Guatemalan government, Ambassador Planty took steps to negotiate directly with the URNG, which led to the URNG removing the individuals involved with the kidnapping from the peace negotiations to restore credibility in the process and trust between the negotiating parties.

Ambassador Planty also helped secure funding for the assembly point camps at the end of the United States government's fiscal year. On the Guatemalan government's request, Ambassador Planty contacted his colleagues in Washington D.C. to inquire whether funds could be provided to finance the camps established as part of the ceasefire agreement. Securing funds at the end of a fiscal year can often be challenging, as funds have already been allocated and spent according to the initial budget. However, Ambassador Planty's compelling message for funds was received by an individual in the United States Agency for International

⁴ Agreement on the Definitive Ceasefire, done at Oslo, December 4, 1996, 36 I.L.M. 312 (1997), from UN Document S/1995/1045, of December 17, 1996, Annex, *available at* https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GT_961204_AgreementOnDefinitiveCeasefire.pdf, Clause 18.

Development (USAID) who had experience working in similar peace processes and was able to allocate funds for the process from their department's budget.

Ambassador Planty also served as support to negotiating individuals from both the Guatemalan government and from the URNG during the formal ceasefire process. The United States did not have an official role in the process, but was an important presence due to its power in the region. Due to the United States' importance and Ambassador Planty's role as a neutral party who was technically outside the negotiating process, he was able to help facilitate informal discussions between guerilla and government officials and support progress on key issues.

Stakeholders

Ultimately, there were three teams at the negotiation table – the URNG, the Guatemalan army, and a mediator appointed by the United Nations. The ceasefire was formally signed in Oslo, Norway on December 4, 1996. Ambassador Planty was present at the signing with several other members of the peace process. The Peace Accord was signed on December 29, 1996.

Outcomes

The phases of the ceasefire were completed successfully. Between 43 to 48 days from the D-Day, 30% of individuals from the demobilization centers had moved out, between 49 to 54 days, 66% of the individuals had moved out and between 55 to 60 days, 100% of individuals had been demobilized. There was no violation of the ceasefire during this time.

“When I interviewed some of the guerilla combatants, the first question I would ask them was ‘Do you trust the army?’ This was such a brutal conflict and they acted so brutally, including major human rights abuses and there were atrocities on both sides. The answer was, ‘Yes, we trust the army and we trust the army because we’ve gotten to know them during this informal period. We share the same goals. We want to reintegrate. This has gone on too long.”

Lessons Learned

“An ambassador is not just a messenger. Any good ambassador worth his or her soul drives policy from the field and doesn't rely on the capital to come up with solutions. You will grow old waiting for solutions.”

Implementing the 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 being proactive in providing funders with a well-reasoned funding need, as well as a commitment from Guatemala that it would also contribute its own funds. This approach was successful and helped Guatemala secure \$1.9 billion (USD) in funds from the international community.

The ceasefire in Guatemala was largely seen as a success due to the lengthy informal ceasefire phase and relationships between the negotiators and allies of the negotiating process. Ambassador Planty emphasized that the informal ceasefire added validity to the entire process, helped smooth over conflicts throughout the ceasefire process as they arose, and built trust between the parties.