

Salvadoran counter-insurgency war has strengthened anti-reformist elements within that country. Militarization and conflict have eroded trust between the states in the region, and have made confidence-building an extremely difficult task. Since a negotiated settlement remains elusive, and neither side is capable of defending the other militarily, the prospects for protracted or escalated conflict remain very high.

THE CONTADORA INITIATIVE

The Contadora nations have consistently argued that military approaches to the region's conflicts are counter-productive. "The use of force," noted the group in the *Cancun Declaration* of 19 July 1983,

is an approach that does not dissolve but aggravates the underlying tensions. Peace in Central America can become a reality only in so far (sic) as respect is shown for the basic principles of coexistence among nations: non-intervention; self-determination; sovereign equality of states; cooperation for economic and social development; peaceful settlement of disputes; and free and authentic expression of the popular will.

During 1983 and 1984 the Contadora ministers and several teams of experts worked in consultation with the Central American governments to devise a comprehensive framework for regional conflict resolution. On 7 September 1984, the group presented the heads of the Central American states with the Contadora Act for Peace and Cooperation in Central America. The Act also included a Protocol which, if signed by Washington, would have bound the US to respect the agreement. The key commitments of the 1984 Act were:

- a halt to the arms race in all its forms;
- the launching of a process for negotiated arms reductions;
- the cessation of all support, including sanctuary, to irregular forces;
- the prohibition of international military manoeuvres;
- the elimination of foreign military bases and schools, and no authorization of new foreign military facilities;
- the immediate promotion of national reconciliation processes;
- the establishment of representative and pluralistic political systems guaranteeing the effective organized participation of all social sectors in decision-making.

The Act was initially well received by all five Central American governments and by Washington. On 21 September Nicaragua announced that it would accept the treaty without revisions. Costa Rica, Honduras and El Salvador announced that they had reservations about the draft. They objected to the clauses on the withdrawal of foreign military bases and advisers, and expressed concerns about the weakness of the verification measures. One month later, these countries presented a counterdraft which did not include a prohibition on US military exercises or military installations in the region.

Canada's view of the situation in Central America has always been similar to that of the Contadora countries themselves. In January 1985, at the request of the Contadora ambassadors, Canada presented the group with a document outlining ways in which the 1984 draft treaty could be improved. The Government suggested that the framework for financing control and verification operations be clarified, that the Central American states be brought onto the Commission which was to oversee the operations, and that the Commission's freedom of movement and access to communications media be guaranteed. It also recommended that a sponsoring political institution (such as the UN Security Council) was desirable and that a time limit be established for the Commission's mandate. Several of these suggestions were incorporated into the 1985 draft.

On 12 September 1985, after another year of difficult negotiations and the near collapse of the process, a second Act was presented to the Central American heads of state. The new draft contained improved guidelines for national reconciliation as well as for control and verification. Three new protocols were added to lay the legal basis for involvement by external powers in enforcing the treaty. The treaty appeared to meet the Reagan Administration's four basic demands with respect to Nicaragua, namely the cessation of external subversion, the reduction of military capabilities, the reduction of military ties to socialist countries, and the establishment of genuine pluralism.¹⁷

The 1985 draft did not, however, meet key Nicaraguan concerns. The treaty would have sanctioned US military exercises in the region (as suggested by the 1984 counterdraft) and would have forced Nicaragua to send home most of its non-military advisers in addition to its foreign security personnel. Most significant, however, was the absence of guarantees binding the United States to the agreement: without an explicit US commitment to non-aggression (both direct and indirect), the Nicaraguan Government argued that its security could not be safeguarded. Negotiations were pursued on