

I.

THE SITUATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA

The shadow of the United States was a primordial factor in the assertion of a Latin American political, diplomatic and cultural identity since the nineteenth century. Whenever Latin America has moved to deal radically with its conflictive heritage, it has clashed with the incapacity of the United States to come to terms with four intimately interrelated issues: Nationalism and Change, Redistribution of Power and Negotiations.

Carlos Fuentes¹

1. The Contadora Process

The accord signed in Guatemala by the Presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua on 7 August 1987, represents a historic step forward in the search for peace. Entitled "Procedure for the Establishment of a Strong and Lasting Peace in Central America," the Guatemala Accord is the result of: a tenacious four-and-a-half-year negotiation process led by the Contadora Group, composed of Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela; the diplomatic backing provided by the Contadora Support Group — Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Uruguay; and a ten-point peace plan presented by Costa Rica's President, Oscar Arias Sanchez, in February 1987. For his part in this process President Arias was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October, 1987.

The document signed by the Central American Presidents, and variously referred to as the Guatemala or Esquipulas II Accord or Agreement, reflects historic change within the inter-American system. It is an assertion of Latin American autonomy and determination to chart the region's future. The five Presidents agreed on a modified version of the Arias proposal in the negotiations conducted with the participation of the Contadora and Support groups; they did not consider a significantly different proposal which was presented by the President of the United States on 5 August 1987.

The Contadora Group was formed in January 1983 to seek diplomatic solutions to the escalation of conflict in Central America. Since then, several versions of a comprehensive draft treaty, the latest in June 1986, have been presented by Contadora for consideration by the region's governments. These draft treaties have included provisions for the

¹ Carlos Fuentes, *Latin America at War with the Past*, Montreal: CBC Enterprises, 1985, p. 45.