

## Guatemala: Toward a Democratic Security Policy

By Ana Glenda Táger and Bernardo Arévalo de León

The Guatemalan Peace Accords signed in 1996 brought an end to 36 years of internal armed conflict between a repressive and authoritarian state and leftist guerrillas with more than 250,000 victims, 63 massacres and other crimes against humanity. As part of the peace process, Government and insurgency representatives reached an official Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and on the Role of the Military on a Democratic Society that detailed the need to transform the security sector institutions adapting it to the new roles required in a democratic era. But implementation of the agreement faltered: a resistant military, a distracted government, a polarised atmosphere and an un-informed public combined to allow the continuation of the conceptual and operational frameworks of counterinsurgency that represented a latent threat to peace and democratisation.

The Peace Accords dealt not only with the end of the armed confrontation and its effects in society, but addressed a wide range of social and economic issues –from women’s rights to socio-economic policy- effectively becoming an agenda for social reform. The *Part Agreement on the Strengthening of Civil Society and the Role of the Armed Forces in a Democratic Society* (AFPC, for its Spanish acronym) went beyond the usual disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration agenda to deal with issues of military reform and de-militarisation of society. It was not so much about the end of armed struggle as about the advent of democracy in Guatemalan society. It dealt not so much with the necessary redefinition of military functions as a result of the end of armed conflict and the disappearance of the subversive military threat to the state, as with the need to ensure the development of a military institution that responds to the security needs of a democratic political community. In this regard, it built upon the Central American Democratic Security Framework Treaty that had been signed by the Presidents of the Central American countries in 1995 with the explicit intention to eradicate the authoritarian regional security structures and concepts inherited from the Cold War.<sup>65</sup>

The POLSEDE (Toward a Security Policy for Democracy) initiative was launched in 1999 by two local civil society organisations, the local chapter of an academic network of research centres called the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), and the Guatemalan Institute for Development and Peace (IGEDEP), with the support of the War-Torn Societies Project (WSP International) –currently known as Interpeace- and UNDP. The research-and-dialogue process brought all the concerned parties in state and society around a collective effort to further the goal of military conversion and promoting democratisation in the spirit of the peace accords. The programme gathered relevant government agencies including the military, civil society organisations and academic institutions in a process that lasted over 3 years, holding more than 200 meetings in 6 technical working groups and a high-level Plenary, and organizing ad-hoc events such as public conferences and workshops.

The War-Torn Societies Project had developed a method of participatory action research to enable a diverse and polarised community of actors in state and society to engage in an inclusive evidence-based analysis and



Photo 37: Guatemalan bus. Photo Credit: CC/Flickr

decision-making process. The research and dialogue process provided a neutral space making it safe for people to participate across socio-political divides, working upon the principle of consensus. The combined dialogue and research methods ensured the development of policy recommendations that were both technically sound and politically legitimate. The intention was to facilitate the adoption of collaborative attitudes by undertaking the dialogue as an academic exercise instead of relying on adversarial ‘negotiation’ formats. The ‘evidence based’ nature of the process would prevent actors from engaging on discussions based upon pre-defined, often ideologically anchored notions of what the problems and the solutions were, allowing time for the establishment of sound, evidence-based parameters for the discussion. The consensus rule would reduce concerns that the exercise could be politically manipulated in favour of one side or other and eased resistance to participation from hardliners by guaranteeing they would not be ‘ambushed’ by numbers.

A critical issue was the identification of the motivational factors that would enable such a varied group of actors, often polarised about the issues, to converge around a common effort. Government authorities expressed their support for the initiative, clearly identifying the value of consensus-based policies in such a polarised subject, and specifically, the potential contribution to the implementation of lagging AFPC commitments. Civil society organisations expressed their interest in a space that would allow them to interact with civilian and military actors in government, on a topic hitherto monopolised by security institutions and key for democratisation. Although some recalcitrant military elements expressed reservations about the opening of military conversion and other SSR/D issues to civil society organisations, as an institution the Military –interested in legitimizing itself in a new political context- expressed its willingness to join a research-based effort that stood apart from the adversarial dynamics that had characterised civil-military relations. Clarity about their own and others’ motivations and transparency about the process rules and procedures enabled participants to progressively develop the trust and the shared knowledge necessary for the development of far-reaching consensus-based recommendations.

The project issued twelve documents with a range of specific recommendations that were integrated into a conceptual framework document on civil military relations, and four concrete legal and institutional reform proposals: of the national security system, of the intelligence services, and of the military functions. Beyond these concrete results, the project instilled in participant’s attitudes and skills that have enabled them to pursue cooperative engagement between state and society and strengthened civil society capacities for engagement still in evidence, long after the project ended.

A number of dialogues processes grew out of the project. The Project in Support of a Citizen Security Policy (POLSEC), was set up under the initiative of the participants in POLSEDE in response to an explicit request by the Government to transfer the analytical framework and dialogue mechanisms that were used in the project to the wider debate about public security such as initiatives in civil intelligence, criminal investigation and community-level security; The Guatemala Network for Democratic Security brought together military officers and civilians in a “security community” anchored in the new paradigm of democratic security that continued dialogue across the state-society divide. An Advisory Council on Security, created in the AFPC as a space for civil society participation in policy formulation, was finally established after Government and civil society reached agreement on the terms under which it would function. Over a dozen universities, think tanks and NGOs participated in a follow up project called FOSS (Strengthening of Civil Society Organisations Specialised

**The challenge:**

The security sector protected elite interests and undermined human security.

**Theory of change:**

As part of a peace process and wider effort at democratization, civil society worked with the security sector to reorient it toward “democratic security.”

in Security) that carried out research on different aspects of the new security agenda, from civil society engagement in community security strategies to the development of democratic controls over the state's security apparatus, that continues to function to this day. The National Congress signed an agreement with FOSS that turned its participant organisations into technical advisors of congressional committees working on security sector legislation. The result has been an empowered civil society, which has been playing important roles in the security sector policy making through technical advice, advocacy and lobbying.

This project did contribute toward progress and acted as a confidence building mechanism. It strengthened understanding on the technical issues at stake and improved research and policy capacities across the state-society divide; and a network of civilian and military actors with the skills and self-confidence necessary to continue in constructive interaction. Guatemala still has many security challenges linked to emerging security threats and forms of violence, and the process of democratizing the security legal and institutional frameworks continues. But it now has an empowered civil society that is living up to the challenge and engaging the state in constructive interaction around these issues.

## The Philippines: The “Bantay Bayanihan” Forum

*Written with Myla Leguro and Musa Sanguila*

Building on a decade of capacity building training programmes and joint programming for the military and civil society in the Philippines, a new initiative creates a permanent forum for civil society-military-police coordination and civil society oversight of the security sector. Launched in 2011, the Bantay Bayanihan forum institutionalised the goodwill that began with the 2010 formulation of the Internal Peace and Security Plan (IPSP) that included strong participation from civil society groups.

Bantay Bayanihan, known as the “BB,” engages the security sector in critical and constructive collaboration towards peace and security sector reform. The network serves as an independent oversight body in the implementation of the Armed Forces of the Philippines’ Internal Peace and Security Plan. It provides dialogue spaces for various stakeholders to come together and work towards addressing peace and security issues at the local and national levels.

The BB is a “Whole of Nation Approach” involving many diverse stakeholders. But the BB is also localised, enabling the general public at the local level to communicate directly with local security forces and local government. The map here highlights the locations of BB platforms across the Philippines. The network has grown to 15 clusters with a nationwide reach. It includes 150 civil society organisations – including human rights, religious, environmental, academic, and labour groups - together with civilian government units, leaders from the Department of National Defence, Department of Interior and Local Government, Philippine National Police, Armed Forces of the Philippines, National Security Council, and the Cabinet Cluster on Justice, Peace, and Security also participate in BB events and meetings. The BB’s National Secretariat is the Security Reform Initiative (SRI).

According to the BB’s website,<sup>66</sup> “The universal message of Bantay Bayanihan is about working together towards winning the peace. By sharing the gains and duties of laying the groundwork for conflict resolution and community development, it creates a

### **The challenge:**

The security sector recognised the need to improve relationships with communities but lacked a structure for dialogue.

### **Theory of change:**

Create a forum for the security sector to meet with civil society to discuss security challenges, security strategies and to monitor and evaluate security sector performance together.