The Weight of the Olive Branch: Determining the Effectiveness of Accommodating Terrorists Groups
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This paper was written for Dr. Tures' Latin American Politics course.

On February 2, 2010 the BBC featured an article on their website about the London Conference on Afghanistan. The author, Ahmed Rashid, noted that the Conference was “being billed as a dud,” a “hastily conceived, under prepared and potentially a political face-saver for two unpopular leaders, Britain’s Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Afghanistan’s President Hamid Karzai.” (BBC 2010) But to the surprise of many international observers, the conference was, as Mr. Rashid details, a major step forward in reigniting international support for developing a better future for Afghanistan. (BBC 2010)

But what was it that brought about this change in attitude regarding this increasingly unpopular war? Well, it can be summed up into one, now controversial, word: Negotiation. Mr. Rashid remarked that, “There is broad agreement that talking to the Taliban is the only way to bring the insurgency to an end.” (BBC 2010) The broad opinion of the international community is that the war has developed into a stalemate, of sorts. And military success now seems to be an almost nonviable solution. The proposal has brought about its fair share of criticism, most of it coming from the United States. But with this option now on the table one must wonder, will it work?

The purpose of this paper is to examine two routes taken by nations in dealing with ideological insurgents: that of accommodation and repression. This is a case study in examining what weight negotiation carries, if any, in dealing with insurgent groups and, to a greater extent, whether the society benefits more from the negotiations or from simply repressing the opposition. And if the current state of the Afghan conflict is any indicator, I believe that accommodating insurgent demands will lead to a more stable society, and that stable society will come about from a quicker recovery time.

The Experiment

I will be examining the infrastructural growth of two post-conflict countries: El Salvador and Peru. El Salvador is a nation which resolved its conflict through negotiation via accommodating insurgent demands. For the purpose of this experiment, it will help to determine what effects, if any, accommodating rebel demands will have on the stabilization of a society. Peru's policy stands in stark contrast to El Salvador's methods. Where the Salvadorians sought, with UN assistance, to negotiate an end to the fighting, Peru was determined to resolve their conflict through a drawn out military response, more specifically intelligence based operations to dismantle the insurgency.

To determine which policy led to a faster stabilization, I will be examining the Gross Domestic Product, the Gross Domestic Income, and the level of conflict in each of the countries following 1992. I chose this year because it represents an important epoch in the history of the two conflicts. For El Salvador, this year marked the end of a three year long series of peace negotiations, putting an end to the fierce insurgency. This will be discussed in more detail later on in the paper. For Peru, the leader of the infamous rebel group Sendero Luminoso, or in English the Shining Path, Professor Abimael Guzman was captured by government forces along with other prominent leaders of the movement. This too will be discussed in greater detail later on in the paper.

The reason that these variables will be my indicators of each country's stability is that economic progress and infrastructural growth is often associated with strength and progress of a society. I will also compare how long each country took before their economies began to recover, thus investigating which tactic led to a quicker recovery of the nation's infrastructure. This dependent variable is designed to add support to any results derived from the experiment, seeing as any real support for the efficacy of the independent variable (government accommodation) can only be found in the speed at which these nations get back on their feet. If say the Salvadorian economy jumps directly after negotiations have finished while the Peruvian economy still stagnates, we would have grounds to conclude that the Salvadorian model of conflict resolution is more effective than government repression. While if the Salvadorian economy either suffers no growth, or rises and falls at the same points the Peruvian economy does, then we might suggest that government accommodation of rebel demands doesn't lend itself to making a more stable society. That, in fact, repression of rebels, terrorists, Jacobins, or all around violently vicious dissenters is just as effective, or possibly more effective, than simply meeting them half way.

Along this same vein, I will also use the level of conflict as an indicator for instability. In determining when combat has finally ceased, we can gauge the efficacy of each policy.

The Peruvian Affair: The Shining Path and Government repression.
Sendero Luminoso, or the Shining Path as it's known in the United States, can have its roots traced back to the early 1960s, though the violent nature of this group didn't appear until the 1980s when it began to take control of portions of Peru's Andes territory. The organization is a Maoist guerilla network that has grown in the back country of Peru's rural regions. Max G. Manwaring noted about the group, “the Sendero Luminoso movement represents a militant, revolutionary commitment to a long-term and very disciplined approach to clean government, a sense of social purpose, and national tradition.” (Manwaring 1995, 158) In a more global context, the birth of this Maoist organization provides “militant reformers, disillusioned revolutionaries, and submerged nomenklaturas all over the world with a more orthodox and sophisticated
The movement is generally associated with its most infamous leader Dr. Abimael Guzman. Its original motives were to create a nationalistic, populist democracy with a recognition of the nation’s indigenous roots. (Manwaring 1995, 158) Like many indigenous movements in Latin America, the model of government that it proposes is based off an idealized version of native life during pre-Columbian America. More specifically for the Shining Path, the recognition and return to Quechua Indian Community values both represented an American demand for a socialist society as well as their movement’s historical legitimacy. (Manwaring 1995, 158)

Manwaring documents that during the early stages of the Shining Path’s existence, Guzman focused heavily on the indoctrination of its members as well as leadership training. (Manwaring 1995, 161) Slowly building relations with Peru’s peasant community, the movement began to establish a base of operations in the highlands near the city of Ayacucho. This is where the organization would define a new state outside the authority of the Peruvian Government, and would subsequently challenge the national state for legitimacy to govern.

The organization, though catering to the peasant population, was predominately run by educated individuals. This led to a misperception on the part of the government who initially underestimated the quality of the fighters produced by Sendero Luminoso. In reality, Manwaring notes that “50 Percent” came from educated families and the organization’s leaders had a university background. (Manwaring 1995, 160) “The upper levels of the Sendero Luminoso organization are composed of men and women who have an understanding of the why and how of subversion, insurgency, and governance.” (Manwaring 1995, 160)

In the 1980s, as the Peruvian state began to return to civilian rule, the organization began its offensive. The movement targeted elements of the state that represented the “glue that holds the society together,” with the overall objective to remove the elements of the state that are capable of governing, thus allowing the Shining Path to move in as the new state heads. (Manwaring 1995, 162) And for the most part, the movement took over areas that were abandoned by the state. They established their own style of governance and put to use the training they’d received for over twenty years.

One of the most potent tools noted by Manwaring for creating a state of terror was the use of coordinated assassinations, beatings, and general threats. (Manwaring 1995, 162) After organizing faux trials and subsequent executions in ‘liberated areas’, the group would publish “death lists” for those in the next area who were on the court’s docket.

Up until the Fujimori administration, Manwaring states that, “Sendero had extended its presence into 114 provinces across all departments of the country, including the area that produces about 60 percent of the world’s supply of coca leaf (and ultimately illegal cocaine, the Huallaga Valley.” (Manwaring 1995, 163)

Philip Maurceri does an excellent job noting the initial government failures in trying to tackle the insurgency. In his early article “Military Politics and Counter-Insurgency in Peru,” he notes that, “The government was slow to respond to the insurgency, displaying little sense of the dimension and nature of the problem. During the first two years of the Belaunde administration, there was a general unawareness of the type of organization and aims that Sendero represented. Government officials usually referred to members of Sendero as ‘common delinquents’ or ‘cattle thieves.’” (Maurceri 1991, 90)

Instead the government’s response in dealing, “with the situation was confined to using the police force. However, the police found themselves hampered by a number of factors, prime among which was a lack of the training and resources required to fight a full-scale, counter-insurgent war.” (Maurceri 1991, 90) With this in mind, it’s blatantly obvious that The Shining Path was able to spread so quickly and inflict so much damage in just a few years. Maurceri notes that after three years of pitiful police efforts to combat the insurgency, the military finally got involved. In the highlands region a state of emergency was declared for 60 days. This too was ultimately ineffective.

Once involved, the military’s strategy was one that overlooked any abuses of human rights. The military called for a state of emergency that lasted for 60 days, only to be reinstated by a presidential act. (Maurceri 90, 1991) These actions caused an outcry from opposition leaders at the time, associating any crime caused by the institution as a crime against the institution. (Maurceri 1991, 92)

What actually turned the war around was the use of, as noted by Lewis Taylor in his work “Counter-Insurgency Strategy, the PCP-Sendero Luminoso and the Civil War in Peru, 1980-1996,” elite intelligence and undercover operations in the early 1990s.

…a state is to successfully handle an insurgency, with such an apparatus ideally being located within the police force. Significant moves along these lines occurred in March 1990, when the Grupo Especial de Nacional. Its activities had a crucial impact on the course of the civil war. Staffed by professionals who rejected the practice common in the DIRCOTE of rounding up numerous ‘suspects’ and extorting money from detainees, the agency was to be instrumental in markedly improving the state’s ability to strike at the PCP-SL’s political structure… (Taylor 1998, 51)

This improvement was ground breaking in the battle against the insurgency, and two years after the new agency’s inception, Guzman and most of his top officials were captured through well run undercover operations. This marked the downward trend for the Shining Path.

El Salvador and FMLN

The circumstances that gave birth to the FMLN are similar to many bottom-up revolutions. The Salvadoran state was
riddled with many have-nots and only a few haves. But to magnify the situation most of the land in El Salvador was owned by a select few, leading to excessive overcrowding in public areas. Thus, the inequalities of El Salvador lent themselves to the inevitability of a popular uprising. Joquin Villalobos observed this fact in his work “Popular Insurrection: Desire or Reality.” Villalobos states, “It is no coincidence that the most complex revolutionary popular war in Latin America has unfolded in El Salvador. This can only be explained by the depth of a class struggle generated by the endemic misery of a heavily populated country lacking resources.” (Villalobos 1989, 10)

Economic downturns during this era excited the tensions of an already downtrodden society, and gave way to reignite the adversarial relations of a historically rebellious people. “This should not be seen as a common economic crises affecting just any people, but rather a serious economic crisis that is provoking a well-organized people with a tradition of struggle. Once again there is the possibility of social upheaval, not generated by will or desire, but by historic and structural reality.” (Villalobos 1989, 10) Villalobos exemplifies his point of a tradition of struggle with four somewhat violent epochs in El Salvador’s history. First, the peasant insurrection of 1932; second, the mass uprising in 1944; third, the Student Struggles and eventual coup d’etat of 1960; and finally the electoral struggles of the 1970s. (Villalobos 1989, 10) These events, Villalobos notes, had socialized Salvadorans to be a somewhat wily people in the face of state repression and economic inequalities.

Though the first portions of resistance were limited to strikes and mostly non-violent mobilization, the brutal nature of the government lent itself to more radical (and, thus, more violent) forms of resistance. “For the masses—faced with massive layoffs, selective assassinations, and the lack of victories in their struggle for better conditions—to continue to use only these forms of struggle in order to enlarge their forces would be an illogical and suicidal course of action leading to the demobilization of the popular movement. The shift to radicalization has been taking place in the masses because of the conditions imposed by a regime which not only refused to make concessions but also repressed and frustrated them.” (Villalobos 1989, 17)

Francisco Alvarez in his work “Transition before the Transition: The case of El Salvador” defined the origins of the FMLN into three stages. The first that he notes occurs between 1970 and 1979. This portion took place in metropolitan areas, such as San Salvador. “It was characterized by intense organization, mobilization, and struggle by different popular sectors for the fulfillment of their demands. The level of military development at this time was quantitatively and qualitatively inferior to that achieved subsequently.” (Alvarez 1989, 84)

The second stage occurred during the final months of 1979, and could be defined as the first signs of real militarization in FMLN. “Although the regime’s counterinsurgency forces unleashed widespread repression against the popular organizations at this time in an attempt to disrupt and destroy them, the revolutionary forces began to move to rural sectors where peasant organizations had already achieved a high level of development.” And it was in these rural areas that FMLN established the military foundations that would represent the conflict in the following years of resistance. The transition to the third stage was the actual insurgent offensive which took place in 1981. “(I)t was not until the beginning of 1981, the ‘general offensive,’ that the conflict undeniably took on the character of irregular insurgent warfare with military activity shifting from the cities to the countryside. It was at the beginning of this third stage that the FMLN began to direct its military forces towards widening the theater of the war and enlarging its zones of control as its rearguard.” (Alvarez 1989, 84)

Following the first stages of FMLN’s general offensive, the United States began its involvement with the conflict. In El Salvador, the Reagan administration, on the basis of an erroneous concept of national security, attempted to prevent a revolutionary victory by modernizing the dictatorship, thus giving birth to a new kind of dictatorship with a civilian façade. El Salvador thus became a new model of dictatorship with a very complex and sophisticated political mask. It became the pilot plan of the “low-intensity” strategy which combined three elements: first, genocide (fifty thousand fatalities and a million displaced persons between 1980 and 1981) as a way of keeping the revolutionary upsurge in check; second, the military escalation of the war, with the United States taking absolute control of the Salvadoran army; and third, a civilian façade for the government, that is, demagogic speeches about reforms and attempts to bring about reforms in order to win over the people they were slaughtering. (Villalobos 1989, 19)

The results of the US led counterinsurgency were simply the useless slaughter of Salvadorans in the hopes of defeating the rebel forces. Around 1988 and 1989 it was becoming quite clear that the conflict in El Salvador had reached a stalemate. Every attempt to squash the FMLN would lead to excessive human rights violations, which in turn would boost recruitment and general support for the rebel forces. Alvarez noted in his work that the FMLN had developed collectives within their controlled zones that produced food and creating legal structures that could carry out the duties of the state. The point of this was very simple; it delegitimizes the political authority of the Army and the PDC (Christian Democratic Party). Along this vein, the FMLN then advanced its own perception as the only viable organization who can govern El Salvador. Any actions by the state to repress the supporters of FMLN only reinforce this perception, and any economic down turns can be associated with the technical government and not the FMLN controlled states.

Through international pressure, the United States began to change its tune on the Salvadoran conflict, and the decision to negotiate was carried forward. This, coupled with the 1989 military offensive reinforced the perception that the conflict was truly irresolvable through military action. (O’Shaughnessy and Dodson 1999, 102) Thus, the UN led a three year long process to develop a resolution to the conflict.

Two treaties were established to bring about stability in El Salvador. The 1991 San Jose peace accords which first,
“set the peace process in motion, producing a cease-fire, the legislation of the FMLN, and sweeping constitutional reforms. Specifically, it proposed creating a national police force independent of the military, abolishing existing security forces, reforming the judicial system, creating a new electoral tribunal, and establishing a Truth Commission to investigate human rights violations committed during the war.” (O’Shaughnessy and Dodson 1999, 102) These accords were followed up by the Chapultepec Accords which accomplished the dissolution of the Rapid Deployment Infantry Brigades (BIRIs), which had been set up to fight the counterinsurgency war, the dismantling of the security forces (National Guard and Treasury Police), the disbanding of the civil defense units, which had long been used to promote military control over rural society, and the removal of police intelligence functions from the military command structure.” (O’Shaughnessy and Dodson 1999, 103)

In return for these overtures of goodwill, the FMLN agreed to lay down their arms and reinstitute themselves as a political party, now working within the governmental institution, instead of waging war outside of it.

![Economic Growth in El Salvador after negotiations](image)

*Data Provided by Penn World Tables*

As you can see from the graph, El Salvador shows a steady increase directly following the 1992 Chapultepec Accords. Now in comparison to the Peruvian economy.

![Economic Growth in El Salvador after negotiations](image)

*Data Provided by Penn World Tables*

We see a more delayed increase. In fact, following the 1992 capture of Guzman, the economy stagnates for a year.
before any growth is seen. For El Salvador, the Gross Domestic Product and Income reaches over 4000 by 1994. The Peruvian economy doesn't see those kinds of numbers until a year later, and lacks any further growth until 1996. This leads me to conclude that from an economics standpoint the El Salvadoran model for conflict resolution, that of accommodating insurgent demands in order to achieve peace, led to a faster and more stable recovery of the society than in Peru.

The numbers on the level of conflict in the country seem to indicate the same thing.

![Level Of Conflict](image)

- Numbers provided by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program

As you can see from the diagram above, El Salvador went from a minor/low intensity conflict in 1991 to a No-Conflict zone the next year. Peru on the other hand maintained a minor conflict status up until 1999. Therefore it is evident that the Peruvian method of government repression is not as effective in ending conflict when compared to the Salvadoran model of negotiated peace.

So how does one begin to account for the evident success of the Salvadoran model in comparison to the Peruvian method? O'Shaugnessy and Dodson associate the success of El Salvador's peace process with the development of hard, real institutional changes that create a more just society with the cooperation of the political elites in accommodating insurgent demands. The authors note that the “Underutilisation of power by participating elites” (O'Shaughnessy and Dodson 1999, 101) is essential in creating a stable society after armed conflict. It appears necessary for those with power to recognize the limits of military action in the face of meaningful negotiations. Gerardo L. Munck held a firm belief that an acknowledgement of this fact would bring about meaningful stability.

Muncks article “Beyond Electoralism in El Salvador: Conflict Resolution through Negotiated Compromise” details the transition this nation has made from the harsh civil war to a UN sponsored peace accord. Written in 1993, he states a glowing opinion of the possibilities now granted from the El Salvadorian model for conflict resolution.

“The recent signing and implementation of a peace accord in El Salvador, in bringing to an end a 12-year civil war which took the lives of some 75,000 people, is one of the most remarkable recent cases of conflict resolution. The study of El Salvador is thus important, and of interest, in and of itself. But going beyond the peculiarities of the case, an analysis of El Salvador can provide us with some valuable pointers concerning how negotiations can resolve differences in long-lasting polarized situations.” (Munck 1993, 75)

To add on to Munck’s initial aspirations I feel that the eventual acceptance of the just proposals made by FMLN into El Salvador’s government lends itself to my theory that more stable societies are derived from accommodating insurgent demands rather than repressing them. It bears the elements of a more democratic, and so a more legitimate society.

“...the development of strong democratic institutions can be seen as an extension of the practices that have made the negotiation and implementation of the peace accord possible... The ongoing prospect of peace is indeed linked to the vigour and stability of the democratic system.” (Munck 1993, 87)

I suspect that economic growth and, to a greater extent, the stability of a society is spurred by the perception of a legitimate democracy, and as Munck notes in his work this perception was given to the Salvadorian government through the negotiations. Edwin G. Corr comes to the same conclusion in his work, “Societal Transformation for Peace in El Salvador.” He notes that victory in low intensity conflicts is achieved, either by military victory or by successful negotiations, through the perception of the people that their government is legitimate and moral. Corr states, “Rather, the outcome will be determined by (1) the legitimacy of the government… (3) the type and consistency of support for the targeted government…the most important factor in small wars is legitimacy, the moral right to govern.” (Corr 1995, 146)

To support claims that the negotiations led to meaningful reform, thus a more stable society, Corr notes that economic growth and societal improvement started almost immediately after negotiations had finished in El Salvador. “The reforms redistributed wealth and political power to previously ignored sectors of society... Macroeconomic indicators in nearly all areas improved dramatically and have remained high. Annual growth in gross national product has been around 4 percent
The perception of state concern for human rights appears to be a major factor in creating stability in the Salvadorian conflict. Though this might not have the potential for induction to all regional insurgencies, it appears to have a positive lure. The O'Shaughnessy and Dodson expand on these points by listing,

"First, for a democratic transition to be meaningful, the military’s traditional impunity had to end. No longer could the armed forces be seen as above the law, nor free to disregard human right in the name of national security. Second, it was important to coordinate FMLN demobilisation with the government’s disbanding of the security forces, reforming the judicial system, providing land to ex-combatants, and deploying the new National Civil Police (PNC)." (O'Shaughnessy and Dodson 1999, 103)

Peru’s response to accusations of human rights abuses stands in stark contrast to El Salvador’s. Philip Maurceri stated, ““Even more disturbing have been government efforts to limit investigations into human rights abuses committed by security forces. In 1995, in the wake of conclusive evidence that secret paramilitary forces had been involved in the assassination of students at the University of La Cantuta, the Congress, at the behest of the executive, passed a blanket amnesty for military officials involved in human rights abuses and rejected calls for further investigations into the matter.” (Maurceri 1997, 907) Continuing on that note, Maurceri states, “Human rights violations have continued and, despite several reform efforts, the judiciary remains far from being an independent body.” (Maurceri 1997, 909)

The continued abuse of human rights in Peru gives organizations like the Shining Path the ability to create an alternative option to the state. In Manwaring’s 1995 article “Peru’s Sendero Luminoso: The Shining Path Beckons” he associates the growing power of the Shining Path with their foundation as a legitimate authority, while displaying the state as illegitimate. “The revolutionary challenge is rooted in the concept that the incumbent governmental system is not doing what is right for the people and that the Sendero Luminoso political philosophy and leadership will. Thus it is regime legitimacy that is key to this conflict. A campaign that fails to understand this fact and responds only to enemy military forces is likely to fail.” (Manwaring 1995, 159)

After Guzman’s capture the state refused to account for its human rights violations and left the judiciary in a pitiful state. With no real reform, the rebel movement could easily point to these factors and state that the government lacks concern for the people and attempt to demonstrate that their Peru wouldn’t have such authoritarian tendencies.

In fact, recently the Institute for Counter-Terrorism noted that the Marxist insurgent group seemed to be staging a comeback. “The organization carried out two violent attacks against military forces and civilians earlier this month. This was followed by an incursion into a mining camp which netted the militants enough explosives to carry out a renewed bombing campaign." (Shahar 2008) Running along this same vein, UPPSALA UNIVERSITET has noted a resurgence of violence in 2007 that has continued up until 2009 (where their records end). (UPPSALA Conflict Data Program)

Conclusion

It is evident from the information provided that the Salvadoran model for dealing with insurgencies leads to a faster and more sustained economic growth with no further combat seen on each side. This stands in contrast to the results found in Peru, where simply aggressive military action and unchecked police led investigations led to short stagnations in the economy and continued violence on the part of the rebels. It is apparent that negotiated compromises which lead to meaningful institutional changes that accommodate insurgent concerns provides a more fertile ground for society to grow. This is the result of the state adopting a more legitimate image, lending itself to the promotion of effectual democracy. As we can El Salvador has had steady economic growth sense the peace accords with no recorded reemergence of FMLN revolutionaries. This cannot be said for Peru.

The lessons that can be taken from this are that a negotiated compromise as well as the adoption of meaningful institutional changes based on opposition concerns can, and has, quell insurgencies. Perhaps elements from El Salvador’s experience can be applied to the war in Afghanistan or other long term, polarized conflicts. In any case, it is apparent that the creation of state legitimacy through meaningful compromise should be considered a cornerstone in dealing with insurgencies. Discontent is born from somewhere, and it is obvious in Peru’s case that continued ignorance of opposition dissatisfaction is costly in, not only economic terms, but continued violence. In gauging the weight of the olive branch, we can see that negotiated compromise cuts years off conflict and is worth its weight in gold in the potential economic growth.

Bibliography

