CANADA AND MISSIONS FOR PEACE
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CANADA AND MISSIONS FOR PEACE

Lessons from NICARAGUA, CAMBODIA, and SOMALIA

Edited by Gregory Wirick and Robert Miller

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE
Ottawa • Cairo • Dakar • Johannesburg • Montevideo • Nairobi • New Delhi • Singapore
To the memory of
Gregory Wirick (1952–1998),
a valued friend, colleague, and
leader in the new field
of peacebuilding.

— RM
## CONTENTS

**Foreword**  
— Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Canada .......................... ix

**Preface**  
— Robert Miller and Necla Tschirgi ........................................................... xiii

### Chapter 1

**Introduction: Conflict in an era of radical change**  
— Gregory Wirick and Robert Miller ......................................................... 1  
The international response: an agenda for peace ......................................... 5  
Defining missions for peace ........................................................................ 10  
The changing international climate ............................................................... 11  
The Canadian response ............................................................................... 13  
The case studies ......................................................................................... 18

### Chapter 2

**Nicaragua: History, social conflict, and missions for peace**  
— Andrés Pérez ......................................................................................... 21  
Agency and structure in the history of political conflict and  
political change in Nicaragua .................................................................... 24  
The peace process ..................................................................................... 34  
The nature of the peace achieved ................................................................ 41  
Did the peace process fail? Lessons for Canada ......................................... 43  
Conclusions ............................................................................................... 46

### Chapter 3

**Cambodia: Foreign policy and missions for peace**  
— Gérard Hervouët ..................................................................................... 49  
Canada and Indochina: the historical landmarks ......................................... 51  
A policy of taking position ......................................................................... 59  
Success by default .................................................................................... 68  
Recent developments .................................................................................. 75
Chapter 4

Somalia: When two anarchies meet
— Kenneth D. Bush ......................................................... 79
Missions for peace ......................................................... 81
The evolution of crisis in Somalia ........................................ 84
A bolt from the blue: Canada-Somalia relations before and after UNOSOM ........................................... 90
When two anarchies meet .................................................. 93
Learning the right lessons and building on hidden successes .................................................. 104

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Linking peace and development
— Gregory Wirick and Robert Miller ........................................ 111
Nicaragua: historical space and national consensus .................................................. 113
Cambodia: the role of foreign policy .................................................. 116
Somalia: anarchies and missions for peace .................................................. 118
Lessons learned .................................................. 121
Recommendations for policy .................................................. 125
Final words .................................................. 127

Appendix 1

Biographies of contributing authors .................................................. 129

Appendix 2

Abbreviations and acronyms .................................................. 131

Bibliography .................................................. 133
A mission for peace is an initiative "launched during a violent conflict which seeks to foster and support sustainable structures and processes which strengthen the prospects for peaceful coexistence and decrease the likelihood of the outbreak (or reoccurrence) of violent conflict" (Bush 1994, p. 1). The conflicts that missions for peace try to resolve are usually caused by institutionalized social tensions and contradictions. The processes whereby these tensions and contradictions generate violent conflict remain controversial and complex.
Canada and Missions for Peace

subjects of inquiry. Equally complex is the phenomenon of the rearticulation of peace and its subsequent maintenance. This complexity is not well understood in current discussions of missions for peace, which tend to provide mainly ahistorical and voluntaristic analyses of social phenomena. These analyses emphasize political will, political motivation, and political decisions as the main factors determining the impact of these missions. These analyses fail to grasp the complex relationship between political agency and the structural and historical limitations affecting the impact of missions for peace.

The ahistorical and voluntaristic approach, characteristic of conventional interpretations of missions for peace, has resulted in a distorted view of their potential and actual contributions to world peace. This distortion is reflected in the inflation of the concept of missions for peace, which demonstrates impatience with historical complexity and a desire to apply holistic solutions to the problems of politically polarized and socially divided societies.

Previously, politicians and analysts spoke of "peacekeeping," "peaceobserving," and "peacemaking." Increasingly, missions for peace hope to offer all these, plus "peacebuilding," which is a central element of An Agenda for Peace (Boutros-Ghali 1992). Peacebuilding has been defined as "the development effort that attempts to reduce conflict by improving social and economic conditions and meeting fundamental human needs" (Child 1992, p. 3). The central assumption behind this idea is that "economic and social injustices must be addressed in order to provide the basis for a permanent solution to conflict" (Child 1992, p. 3). To assume that missions for peace should include provisions to resolve institutionalized social tensions and contradictions in war-torn societies is unrealistic. This is especially true today, when the demand for peace intervention seems to be exceeding the financial capabilities of the leading peacekeeping countries (Gizewski and Pearson 1993).

The inflation of the concept of missions for peace has resulted in the amalgamation of social variables and institutional mandates under the truism that everything is interrelated. The idea and practice of development, for example, have been transformed into a "phase" of the peace process (Cox 1993, p. 8). Never mind if this is the final phase, the longest phase, or the phase that nobody knows how to deal with. This mixing up of variables and institutional mandates has its dangers. The increasingly unrealistic expectations that social scientists, politicians, social activists, and the public have of missions for peace may lead to the failure (perceived or real) of these initiatives. The result of this failure could be the invalidation of the important functions of peacekeeping,
peace observing, and peacemaking. Another possible danger is the illusion of order and accomplishment that an all-inclusive concept of missions for peace can create among government and international organizations. Often, these organizations assume that they shift and rearrange reality by shifting and rearranging concepts and that a more inclusive concept of missions for peace represents a better understanding of the world.

One can speculate that the tendency to inflate the concept of missions for peace has more to do with the organizational needs of the institutions involved in these missions than with the need to understand the nature of social conflict in war-torn societies. These institutions need to demonstrate that they are capable of coordinating their role and their functions to match the complexity of the processes in which they operate. They need to demonstrate that they know what they are doing. All this is perfectly understandable. What is not understandable or acceptable is to forget that the resolution of institutional problems is very different from the resolution of the conundrum of history and development in war-torn societies.

The main argument of this chapter is that a mission for peace should not be conceived of as a form of intervention designed to solve the social, political, and economic problems of a polarized society. The most that missions for peace can hope to achieve is the deactivation of destructive historical forces and their temporary reorientation to more manageable levels. By doing this, missions for peace create new historical opportunities that the elites of politically polarized and socially divided societies can use to begin to construct a minimum social consensus as the foundation of a durable peace.

In this chapter, a case study of the Nicaraguan peace process is used as the basis for an analysis of the role of missions for peace in the reconstruction of social processes. The first section reviews the institutionalization of the social tensions and contradictions that formed the background to the Contra War. The second section reviews the Central American peace process as it applied to Nicaragua; the purpose of this section is to show the interplay of political agency, domestic historical forces, and external conditions that resulted in the signing and implementation of the peace accords. The third section analyzes the nature of the peace achieved in Nicaragua. This analysis forms the foundation for the fourth section, which evaluates the Central American peace process and the mission for peace in Nicaragua and presents some lessons for Canada.
Agency and structure in the history of political conflict and political change in Nicaragua

Social peace depends to a large extent on a minimal social consensus on the organization of political conflict (see Sartori 1987). The institutionalization of consensus, which in liberal-democratic countries is an expression of the correlation of forces among domestic power contenders, has never had a chance in Nicaragua. Throughout this century, US governments have, by their "acts of commission and omission" (Whitehead 1986, p. 230), formed artificial domestic alliances, switched the correlation of power within the country, supported dictatorial and illegitimate governments, eliminated political forces, and created new ones to force Nicaragua's political evolution to conform to American political objectives, policies, and strategies for the region.

Determining the political development of Nicaragua has been a perpetual dilemma for US governments. American democratic traditions and institutions required that interventions in Nicaragua be justified by the same principles that rationalize political life in the United States. Thus, the principles of democracy had to be used to legitimize US interventions in Nicaragua. However, democracy creates uncertainty (Przeworski 1986), and this does not sit well with the overwhelming desire for certainty that the United States has traditionally shown in its relations with Nicaragua. US governments, therefore, have conveniently interpreted and manipulated the meaning and practice of democracy, particularly the meaning and practice of elections, to overcome this dilemma. In so doing, they have severely impeded Nicaragua's ability to create a social consensus with regard to the rules that govern political life and political competition.

One of the legacies of US interventionism in Nicaragua is the development and institutionalization of a political culture in which alliances between national groups and foreign interventionist powers have displaced internal discussion and compromise as mechanisms for conflict resolution. For this reason, the independent exploration of political options has not found fertile soil in this country — political decisions have largely been made at foreign embassies and at foreign capital cities.

The mission for peace in Nicaragua was hampered not only by Washington's historical perception of Nicaragua as part of its backyard and by the virulent anti-Americanism of the Sandinistas but also by a political culture in which domestic politics was perceived as a by-product of alliances between national power contenders and their
external supporters. The following is a review of the political history of Nicaragua that explains the complexity of this culture and the nature of the historical forces that conditioned the work of the mission for peace in this country. This review is necessary because it helps to transcend the ahistorical and voluntaristic interpretations of social conflict and social order in conventional analyses of missions for peace. It is offered as a reminder that "what is past is prologue" (*The Tempest*, Act II, Scene 1 [William Shakespeare]) and that missions for peace have limited capacities to transform the historical and structural conditions in which social disorder and violent conflicts take place.

The United Kingdom was the most influential external power in the political development of Central America during the first three decades of its independent life, particularly during the federalist experiment. In Nicaragua, this began to change with the expansionist policies of the James Knox Polk Administration (1845–49), the discovery of gold in California in 1848, and the emerging need for cross-continental transportation routes (Karnes 1961). The gold mines in California made the Rio San Juan interoceanic route in Nicaragua a valuable asset, and consequently it became a source of tension between the United Kingdom and the United States. In 1850, they signed the Clayton–Bulwer Treaty, which guaranteed cooperation between the two countries and established that neither would have exclusive control of the Nicaraguan interoceanic route. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom maintained control of large areas of Nicaragua’s Atlantic coast.

The Clayton–Bulwer Treaty marked the beginning of the decline of the United Kingdom’s influence in Nicaragua and the rise of the United States as the most important external force shaping the political evolution of this Central American country (LaFeber 1984). Henceforth, Nicaraguan domestic politics would be shaped by US pressure to accommodate US interests, and Nicaraguan politicians would be unable and often unwilling to resolve their differences within the legal and political boundaries of Nicaragua as a sovereign state. This became painfully evident during the civil war of 1854, fought between the Liberals and the Conservatives for control of the state and, more specifically, for control of the transisthmian route developed and exploited by the US transportation magnate, Cornelius Vanderbilt (Vazquez 1983; Slotkin 1985).

The Liberals hired William Walker, a “filibuster” from Nashville, Tennessee, and 55 mercenaries to fight the Conservatives. Filibusters, as Slotkin (1985, p. 243) explained, "were private military expeditions, usually invited and organized by Latin American patriots-in-exile or
embattled in-country partisans, whose aim was to use American man-
power and firepower to achieve victory.” Earlier, Walker had led a failed 
expedition with the objective of creating a slave state out of Lower 
California and Sonora (Morison et al. 1980). In Nicaragua, however, he 
proved that he had what Slotkin (1985, p. 244) described as a fili-
buster’s most important qualification: “the ability to act swiftly and 
decisively, making the maximum use of temporary military advantage 
to create a political fait accompli.”

Walker’s forces defeated the Conservative army and, with the col-
laboration of members of the Nicaraguan elite, gained control of the 
country. He changed the Nicaraguan electoral system — which since 
independence had restricted political competition and political partici-
pation to a small segment of society — and allowed mass participation. 
(For a description of electoral procedures and regulations in Nicaragua 
before the 1856 elections, see Alvarez Lejarza [1958].) In 1856, Walker 
stood for office, manipulated the electoral process, and became the head 
of government. (For analyses of the illegitimate and fraudulent nature 
of this election, see Scrooggs [1969]; Bermann [1986]; Torres Rivas 
[1987].) As President, Walker made English an official language, pro-
mulgated laws to establish peonage and slavery in the country, and 
encouraged immigration from Europe and the United States.

Apart from Walker’s popularity in the United States and the 
strong support he received from some US organizations, the questions 
most relevant to understanding Nicaragua’s political development in 
the mid-19th century are the following: How did Walker manage to 
radically alter the rules of political competition in Nicaragua? How 
could he have gained collaboration from important sectors of the coun-
try’s elite? Bermann (1986, p. 58) asked this question and provided an 
answer to it:

*How could a small handful of North American adventurers, virtually 
overnight, take control of an independent nation? Luck, superior 
armaments, the shortage of professional officers among the native 
troops — all these played a role, but were not decisive. The most 
important part of the answer lay in the conditions of Nicaraguan 
politics.*

Torres Rivas (1987, p. 80) proposed a similar inquiry: “We should 
inquire into the cultural, political, and economic meaning of the 
ritual by which authority was transferred from the Nicaraguan provi-
sional President Ferrer to the American filibuster Walker.” Answers to 
these questions are to be found in the weakness of Nicaragua’s political 
formation, that is, in the absence of national values and national
Nicaragua: History, Social Conflict, and Missions for Peace

institutions and in the “predominance of regional and particular interests over national ones” (Lanuza 1983, p. 100).

Walker’s presence in Nicaragua, together with his expansionist ambitions, threatened the Central American oligarchies, who united against the US adventurer and managed to drive him out of Nicaragua in 1857. It is important to note that Walker’s defeat was possible only with the assistance of the United Kingdom and Cornelius Vanderbilt. The recourse to foreign assistance — this time to oust Walker — was a clear example both of Central America’s weakness and of Nicaragua’s frailty as a nation-state (Morison et al. 1980; LaFeber 1984). Walker’s defeat marked the beginning of 36 years of oligarchical Conservative rule and relatively stable electoral politics in Nicaragua. The constitution of 1858 reestablished capital and property requirements for participation in competition for public office (Alvarez Lejarza 1958).

At the turn of the century, new tensions developed between the Conservative oligarchy and the Liberal elites as the latter’s economic capabilities expanded with Nicaragua’s integration into the international coffee market. These tensions created the conditions for the successful Liberal revolution of 1893, led by Jose Santos Zelaya (Wheelock 1980; Vargas 1990). (For a vivid description of the social and political life of Nicaragua during the emergence of the Zelaya government, see Selva [1948].)

Zelaya, who represented the interests of the elites associated with the coffee business, transformed the social and political structure of the country to suit its new economic reality. He developed the basic financial and physical infrastructure necessary to encourage the production, processing, and export of coffee. These changes were accompanied by a radical transformation of the country’s legal structure and by the organization of a strong central state apparatus. Social services and a public education system were established, and universal suffrage was introduced (Vargas 1990).

Zelaya was a nationalist dictator, as well as being a social reformer. In 1894, with the support of the United States, he recovered the areas of Nicaragua’s Atlantic coast controlled by the United Kingdom and reasserted the territorial integrity of the Nicaraguan state. The United States tolerated Zelaya’s nationalism as long as it was directed against the United Kingdom but considered it an intolerable menace when it began to affect US interests in the region (Barahona 1977). It is interesting to note, however, that Selser (1984) cast some doubts on Zelaya’s nationalism and anti-imperialism. Cancellation of some concessions to American businesses on the Atlantic coast, the rejection of
the financial conditions imposed by US bankers, Zelaya's decision to obtain financial assistance from the Ethelburg Syndicate of England, and more importantly his intention to negotiate the construction of a canal through Nicaragua with Germany and Japan convinced Washington that this Nicaraguan government was a threat to US interests. The US solution was to instigate Zelaya's overthrow by supporting an armed counterreformist Conservative movement, which won power in 1910. Vargas (1989, p. 142) argued that the overthrow of the Zelaya regime "castrated the possibility to consolidate a Nicaraguan nation-state."

The persistence of Liberal nationalist forces in the country and the Conservatives' incapacity to consolidate their power after Zelaya's overthrow prompted the United States to occupy Nicaragua in August 1912. First, US marines forced the Liberal troops in Granada to surrender. Then, on 4 October, they launched a decisive attack against the army, which was commanded by General Benjamin Zeledon and positioned on Coyotepe Hill outside the city of Masaya (Millet 1977). Zeledon refused to surrender and died "in defense of his country, of his army, and of his race" (Wheelock 1980, pp. 110–111). His body was paraded through the streets of Masaya and buried in the town of Catarina.

US-controlled presidential elections were held in 1912, 1916, 1920, 1924, and 1928. (For analyses of these elections, see USDS [1932], Envio [1984], and Vargas [1989].) The Liberals were not allowed to stand for the 1912 and 1916 elections, which ensured victories for Conservative, prointerventionist presidents. The exclusion of Liberals was in accordance with the US State Department's written disapproval of "any revival of Zelayaism" (USDS 1932, p. 21). Washington's decision to exclude the Liberals from political competition was ratified by Nicaragua in Agreement No. 4 of the Dawson pacts, signed on 27 October 1910.

The Liberals were allowed to participate in the 1920 election and, following the 1924 election, were able to join a Government of Reconciliation. This election was held within the framework of a new electoral law approved by the Nicaraguan Congress in 1923 (Greer 1954; Kamman 1968). It is important to point out that by 1920, the Liberal Party had practically abandoned Zelaya's nationalist position (Vargas 1989). In the preceding 10 years, the United States had succeeded in changing the political orientation of the party. This process of political sterilization reached its apex three decades later, when the Somozas took control of the political organization.
In 1925, the Government of Reconciliation was overthrown by the Conservative caudillo Emiliano Chamorro. A civil war in 1926 led to another occupation of Nicaragua by the United States, lasting from 1927 to 1933. The United States never recognized Chamorro as president, and he was forced to resign in favour of another Conservative, Adolfo Diaz. This was the second time Washington had selected Adolfo Diaz to be president of Nicaragua. In 1911, he had assumed the presidency after Juan Jose Estrada was invited to resign by Elliot Northcott, the American representative in Nicaragua. Diaz was an accountant for the La Luz and Los Angeles Mining Co. before he became president in 1911. The owners of this company were legally represented in the United States by Secretary of State Philander C. Knox’s law firm (Selser 1981). After Diaz was made president, Washington sent Colonel Henry Stimson, a lawyer and former Secretary of War (1911—13) under William H. Taft, to investigate and, if possible, “to straighten” Nicaragua’s problems (Stimson 1927, p. 42). Stimson soon managed to pressure the Liberals and Conservatives into a compromise, which resulted in the Stimson–Moncada Pact, better known as the Tipitapa Pact or Pacto del Espino Negro. The Conservatives drafted the terms of the pact, and Stimson conveyed the terms to the Liberals. These terms included the following (Stimson 1927):

- Immediate general peace in time for the new crop and delivery of arms simultaneously by both parties to US custody;
- General amnesty, return of exiles, and return of confiscated property;
- Participation of representative Liberals in Diaz’s cabinet;
- Organization of a Nicaraguan constabulary on a nonpartisan basis, commanded by US officers;
- Supervision of the election in 1928 and those in succeeding years by Americans, who would have ample police power to make such supervision effective; and
- Temporarily continued presence of a sufficient force of marines to make the foregoing effective.

Jose Maria Moncada, the military commander of the Liberal forces, agreed to these terms of reference, with the exception of the implicit acceptance of the continuation of Adolfo Diaz as President of Nicaragua to the end of his term. Moncada wrote of these negotiations
that he had pointed out to Stimson that the US government was making a mistake in allowing the Conservative government of Diaz to continue in power until the 1928 election. According to Moncada (1973, p. 6), Stimson replied, “my government has recognized President Adolfo Diaz and the United States of America does not make mistakes.” Augusto Cesar Sandino, who had returned from Mexico in 1926 to join the Liberal forces, refused to accept the pact and went into the Segovia mountains to initiate his heroic anti-interventionist struggle.

The Liberals won the 1928 election. As Vargas (1989) explained, this favoured the United States for at least three reasons: first, a Liberal victory helped neutralize Sandino’s cause; second, Moncada’s election put the Liberal Party under the control of the United States, which wanted to eliminate the possibility of a nationalist revival within the party; and, third, the election of a Liberal government eliminated the need for the United States to support the unpopular Conservative Party. The Liberals were elected again in 1932. One year later, the US Marines ended their occupation of Nicaragua, thus allowing Sandino to negotiate peace with the government of Juan Bautista Sacasa. Sandino was assassinated in Managua in 1934 during the negotiations.

The regimes of the US-controlled elections of the post-Zelaya era proved to be fragile and artificial solutions to Nicaragua’s domestic political problems, as demonstrated by the instability and the high levels of political disorder prevalent in the country after 1910. At least 10 armed rebellions were launched against the Conservative governments between 1913 and 1924 (Wheelock 1980). These governments did not represent the actual balance of power among the different sectors of Nicaraguan society. They were, rather, an expression of the United States’ overbearing power, as exercised through Nicaraguan elites, who lacked both the power and the will to lead the economic and political development of their country (Barahona 1977). The United States gained control of Nicaragua’s political and economic life through these elites. Furthermore, the Chamorro–Bryan Treaty of 1914 granted the United States perpetual rights to the construction of an interoceanic canal through Nicaragua and a 99-year lease on the Gulf of Fonseca and the Corn Islands.

When the US Marines withdrew from Nicaragua, they left behind the newly created Guardia Nacional (national guard) as Washington’s main instrument for maintaining social order. This military organization was placed under the control of the ruthless Anastasio Somoza Garcia, the founder of the Somoza dynasty and the man whom Franklin D. Roosevelt later described as Washington’s “son of a bitch”
Nicaragua: History, Social Conflict, and Missions for Peace

Somoza had made a favourable impression on Henry Stimson, who wrote in his diary, “Somoza is a very frank, friendly, likable young Liberal and his attitude impresses me more favourably than almost any other” (Millet 1977, p. 55). In 1936, Stimson’s favourite deposed President Sacasa and appointed himself the Liberal Party’s official candidate for the election in November of that year. He became the elected president of Nicaragua on 1 January 1937.

Somoza immediately initiated a process of constitutional reform that would allow him to extend his presidential term to 8 years. Master of legal technicalities, he resigned temporarily, appointed himself interim president, organized new elections, then ran for the presidency once again and was elected, through fraud and coercion, with 99% of the vote. (The chronology and data on elections under Somocista rule presented here are mainly based on the excellent account of the Somoza dynasty given by Diederich [1981].)

In the 1947 election, Somoza engineered the victory of his presidential candidate, Leonardo Arguello. Arguello was overthrown by Somoza less than a month after his inauguration. Somoza then installed a new president, deposed him, and finally took direct control of the government himself. The dictator’s scandalous political behaviour forced the United States to criticize his electoral abuses. He responded by placing his uncle, Victor Roman Y Reyes, in the presidency. Washington accepted Somoza’s concession.

Somoza was elected again in 1951, this time for a period of 6 years, and the constitution was changed before his term was over to allow him to run in the 1957 election. Somoza’s presidential career, however, was almost over. On 21 September 1956, the dictator was assassinated by the Nicaraguan poet Rigoberto Lopez Perez. Anastasio Somoza was dead, but the Somoza dynasty was just beginning.

Luis Somoza, Anastasio Somoza’s eldest son, was immediately appointed president by the National Congress, with a mandate to finish his father’s term. Luis then declared himself the official candidate of the Liberal Party for the 1957 election. He won this election and ruled Nicaragua until 1963. His brother, Anastasio Somoza Jr, was head of the Guardia Nacional. To diffuse domestic and international criticism, the Somozas appointed Rene Schick as the official Liberal candidate for the 1963 election. Schick was elected president; Luis was appointed to the Senate; and Anastasio maintained control of the armed forces.

In March 1966, Anastasio Somoza Jr announced his candidacy for the presidential election of February 1967. He won and was inaugurated for a 4-year term. His brother Luis died of a heart attack in
April of that year. The constitution did not allow Somoza to run for the presidency in the elections of 1972; consequently, he stepped down temporarily while constitutional changes were made to facilitate his reelection later. In the meantime, a Somoza-controlled junta was formed to run the country.

In 1974, Somoza was once again elected president, this time for a 6-year term ending in 1981. Meanwhile, his son, also named Anastasio, was being rushed through the ranks of the national armed forces as part of his preparation for the presidency of Nicaragua. The triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in July 1979 brought a dramatic end to the Somoza dynasty.

The Somoza's power was based on their control of the armed forces, the complicity of the economic elites that benefited from their rule, and above all the political, economic, and military support of successive US governments, which saw the Somozas as protectors of US interests in the region and as bastions against communist penetration in Central America. In this sense, the Somocista regime was the expression of a correlation of domestic political forces determined by the United States. In this externally determined balance of power, elections had no democratic significance, as their results never reflected the actual correlation of political forces in the country. The Somozas manipulated constitutional reforms and the electoral technology of democracy to legalize their illegitimate regime.

The end of Somocista rule and the military victory of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN, Sandinista national liberation front) in 1979 provoked a reaction in Washington similar to that caused by the Zelaya government in 1909. With the socialist Sandinista government, Nicaragua's political future was once again uncertain and once again out of US control. Washington reacted by launching an undeclared war against the Nicaraguan government. An economic embargo was imposed on the small Central American nation, and a series of covert US military operations was carried out in an attempt to overthrow the Sandinista government. Later, a counterrevolutionary army, better known as the Contras, was organized and financed by the United States for the alleged defence of freedom and democracy in Nicaragua.

The Sandinistas' view of the US government was shaped by the historical evolution of relations between Nicaragua and the United States. One of the central principles of the Sandinista revolution was its anti-imperialism. For the Sandinistas, this meant anti-Americanism, as in, for example, the organization's official anthem, which proclaimed the revolutionary obligation "to fight against the Yankee, enemy of humanity."
The Sandinistas organized an election in 1984 in an attempt to undermine Washington's justification of its support of the Contra army. The United States refused to recognize the election because Washington anticipated a Sandinista victory. When the ballots were counted, the Sandinistas had received 66.97% of the vote in an election considered fair and clean by many foreign observers. Washington labeled the election a sham and continued its attacks on the Sandinista government, still hoping that the Contras would make the Sandinistas cry "uncle."

In this context, both regional and extraregional players launched several peace initiatives in Central America. The search for peace in Nicaragua required attempts to negotiate differences between the US and Sandinista governments, as well as negotiating differences between the Sandinistas and their domestic opponents. All this took place in the context both of a history of conflict and aggression between Nicaragua and the United States and of a Nicaraguan political culture unconducive to domestic political negotiations and compromises. This context affected the potential success of any peace initiative and, therefore, had to be taken into consideration by those involved in the peace efforts.

The existence of both institutionalized historical relations between Nicaragua and the United States and a domestic political culture unconducive to peace and social consensus does not mean that the scope of political agency was predetermined by historical forces. Institutionalized social practices should not be seen as placed "beyond the reach of interest and politics" (DiMaggio 1988, p. 11). A depoliticized view of institutionalized patterns of social relations eliminates the possibility of political action in the making of history. Social structures, as Giddens (1984, p. 25) pointed out, "are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize." As outcomes, structures enable and limit political agents; as mediums, they become the vehicle through which societal systems are maintained or changed by such agents (Giddens 1984). This means that "structure qua structure does not produce patterns, nor does it actively coordinate and control social systems.

All of these activities involve the exercise of agency" (Cohen 1989, p. 199). Agency, then, constitutes the very structures that condition human freedom of action and choice. Therefore, political action can expand the framework of historical limitations and circumstances within which political action takes place. Nevertheless, "to choose a possibility in a given situation is to choose under limits" (Guerreiro Ramos 1981, p. 26). Therefore, "the subject of a choice in a process of
change can only be successful if he behaves considering the concrete limitations of his choice" (Guerreiro Ramos 1981, p. 26).

The following section reviews the Central American peace process, especially as it applied in Nicaragua, to highlight the relationship between agency and structure in the search for peace in Central America. Two lessons can be derived from an analysis of this relationship. First, the design and implementation of the Central American peace process required those involved in the mission for peace in Nicaragua to assess both the will of the actors of the region and the way structural conditions — such as the historical relations between Nicaragua and the United States, along with the Nicaraguan political culture — affected the possibilities for peace. Second, an analysis of the relationship between agency and structure in the search for peace in Nicaragua facilitates an understanding of the limited capacity that the mission for peace had to radically transform the structural conditions that generated conflict and war in this country. This understanding is important in view of the tendency of conventional analyses of missions for peace to use ahistorical and voluntaristic interpretations of social phenomena. This chapter has argued that missions for peace should not be conceived of as forms of intervention designed to resolve the social, political, and economic problems of a polarized society. The Nicaraguan case demonstrates that missions for peace should be conceived as forms of interventions designed to create new historical opportunities that the elites of politically polarized and socially divided societies can use to construct a minimum social consensus as a foundation for consolidating order and peace.

THE PEACE PROCESS

Like Nicaragua, the other Central American countries are plagued by internal social tensions and contradictions and by a history of conflict with the United States. In the 1980s, guerrilla movements in El Salvador and Guatemala, following the example of the Sandinista revolution, were attempting to overthrow the governments of these two countries. Honduras was caught in the middle of the US–Nicaragua conflict, with its territory being used by the Contras as a military base for operations against the Sandinista government. Meanwhile, Costa Rica was under tremendous pressure from Washington to collaborate in the war against the Nicaraguan government; at the same time, Costa Rica was suffering the effects of massive Nicaraguan migration.
Two events marked the opening of this chapter of violence in Central America: the Sandinista victory in July 1979 and the inauguration of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States in January 1980. The Sandinista victory energized popular movements and guerrilla organizations in El Salvador and Guatemala, whereas the advent of the Reagan Administration ideologically, economically, and militarily invigorated the most conservative social sectors of those societies. This dynamic created the conditions for a war that in several instances threatened to engulf the whole region in a spiral of domestic and international confrontation. The first efforts to establish peace in Central America included proposals from Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Honduras in the last months of 1981: Costa Rica’s initiative of October 1982; the Plan de Paz proposed by Mexican President José Lopez Portillo in February 1982; and a joint initiative by Mexico and Venezuela, launched in September of the same year (Bernales and Fernandez 1990).

However, a solid, credible, and systematic search for peace in Central America only emerged when the Contadora peace process was initiated by Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela on the Panamanian island of Contadora in January 1983. The Contadora process confronted both the political and the military dimensions of the Central American conflict. It included provisions to promote national processes of reconciliation, cease-fires, democratization, free elections, and decrees of amnesty. The Contadora process also proposed that the Central American governments stop assisting irregular forces or insurrectionist movements and using their territories to destabilize other governments in the region and start negotiating on matters of security, verification, control, and limitation of armaments, caring for refugees and displaced persons, and cooperating for peace and development. Finally, the plan established a mechanism for international verification and follow-up of the agreements (Moreno 1994).

From 1984 to 1986, three drafts of this plan were presented to the Central American governments (North 1990). None of these satisfied the demands and expectations of all parties involved because the Contadora process took place at a time when the historical tensions between the United States and Nicaragua were magnified by the Cold War, the fierce anti-Communist position of the Reagan Administration, and the Manichean understanding of international politics espoused by the Sandinistas. In other words, the scope for political compromise and negotiation during this period was severely constrained by the polarization of
both domestic political forces in Nicaragua and the relations between the Sandinistas and Washington.

During this process, Nicaragua and the United States each operated under the assumption that it did not have to compromise, as both assumed they would eventually prevail over the other. For example, on 2 December 1985, US Secretary of State George Schultz expressed to the four Contadora ministers that the Sandinista government was a "cancer" that required a "surgical solution" (Sklar 1988, p. 306). Nevertheless, it was necessary for both Nicaragua and the United States to express interest in negotiation, compromise, and peace. Therefore, they agreed on generalities and disagreed on the practical details of peace.

In Nicaragua, the polarization between the Sandinistas and Washington made it impossible to develop a feasible domestic process of political competition in which opposition against the regime was not viewed as collaboration with the United States. Nor was it possible to support the revolution without going along with the fierce anti-American rhetoric of the FSLN. Therefore, to adopt a political position in Nicaragua, one either had to be a collaborator with the United States or had to become anti-American. Furthermore, to be anti-American in Nicaragua meant one was necessarily pro-Soviet, as the logic of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" was an implicit principle of Sandinismo. Very soon, Nicaraguan domestic politics was subsumed under the logic of the Cold War. Opponents of Sandinismo begged for Washington's support while the leaders of the FSLN negotiated in Moscow to find ways to institutionalize the revolution.

The international and domestic conditions affecting the negotiations and the Contadora process also affected efforts to establish direct negotiation between Nicaragua and the United States. The most significant of these efforts was initiated by Mexico in 1984. This culminated in the Manzanillo talks, which lasted until January 1985, when the United States suspended the bilateral negotiations (Bernales and Fernandez 1990). These direct conversations between Managua and Washington had little chance of success, as the participants still assumed they did not have to compromise on their positions.

At their meeting in June 1986 at Esquipulas, the Central American presidents rejected what would be the last Contadora peace proposal. They condemned the assistance approved by the US Congress to the Contras, declared support for the principles of the Contadora process, and launched a new peace initiative that became known as the Esquipulas process. Launching the Esquipulas process represented the "centroamericanization" of the peace process. This was an important
step because it removed nationalist resentments that had been created by the leading roles of extraregional Latin American governments during the Contadora process. More importantly, the centroamericanization of the peace process imposed more direct responsibility for the outcome of the negotiations on the governments of the region. This responsibility required these governments to deal with the tensions that existed between the interests of the United States and those of the people and governments of Central America. These tensions included the increasing fears within the Honduran government and military that the conflict with Nicaragua could result in a war between the two countries; the problem that the continuous military support given by the United States to El Salvadoran armed forces represented for the Honduran military, with El Salvador being viewed by Hondurans as its rival; the concern of the Guatemalan government that the intensification of conflict in the region could exacerbate the domestic problems in that country; and the fear of the Costa Rican government that continuous Nicaraguan immigration and the possible expansion of the war could involve Costa Rica in a regional confrontation. The increasing visibility of these situations helped to develop a degree of political pragmatism among Central American governments that was decisive in the success of the peace process.

The crucial point of departure for the Esquipulas process was the meeting of Central American presidents in Guatemala City, 6–7 August 1987. In essence, Esquipulas was a natural continuation of the principles and objectives of the Contadora peace process, as acknowledged in the preamble to the Act of Accord produced at this meeting. Esquipulas proposed the initiation of processes of national reconciliation; amnesty; cessation of hostilities; democratization; free elections; cessation of aid to irregular forces and insurgent movements; nonuse of territory to attack other states; negotiations on security, verification, control, and limitation of weapons; and solutions to the problem of refugees and displaced persons. The implementation of the plan included the establishment of the Comisiones Nacionales de Reconciliación (national reconciliation commissions) in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua and the Comisión Internacional de Verificación y Seguimiento (CIVS, International Commission for Verification and Follow-up). The three national reconciliation commissions comprised a representative of the government and an alternate; a representative and an alternate proposed by the Conference of Bishops and chosen by the government from a list of three bishops; a representative and an alternate from opposition political parties; and an eminent citizen and an alternate belonging to
neither the government nor the governing party. These commissions were to be responsible for “verifying genuine implementation of the process of national reconciliation and also unrestricted respect for all the civil and political rights of Central American citizens” (Moreno 1994, appendix 5, p. 191). The CIVS comprised the Secretary-General of the United Nations or his representative, the ministers of foreign affairs of Central American countries, and the Contadora group and its support group. The commission was responsible for verifying and monitoring whether the governments were keeping the commitments made in Esquipulas.

Needless to say, the issue of verification was complex and sensitive. The physical conditions for doing the job were extremely difficult. Moreover, the verification of the Esquipulas accord was perceived as a threat by Honduras and the United States, whose anti-Sandinista operations in the region were in direct violation of one of the key clauses of the accord. This clause required the five countries of the region “to prevent the use of their own territory by persons, organizations or groups seeking to destabilize the Governments of Central American countries and to refuse to provide them with or allow them to receive military and logistical support” (Moreno 1994, appendix 5, p. 195).

The first report of the CIVS was presented to the five Central American presidents in January 1988 at San José, Costa Rica. As expected, the report was critical of Honduras and the United States, and it provoked a strong reaction from El Salvador and Honduras, the main US allies in the region. As a result, the work of the commission was suspended, and its members were reduced to the five foreign ministers of Central America (Envío 1989).

The opposition to the verification mechanism of the Esquipulas process highlighted both the superficiality of the peace negotiations and the contradictory positions of the governments. The objective of the verification accord was to change words into deeds, that is, to move from the rhetoric of peace to the actual process of negotiation and compromise that would result in the reduction and possible elimination of conflict. For the United States and its regional allies, the transition from rhetoric to action would be costly, as it would involve the removal of the anti-Sandinista military, their most important negotiating card. For the Sandinistas, on the other hand, verification and the success of the peace process meant at the very least putting an end to their confrontation with the United States and its regional allies. More importantly, it would provide the Sandinistas with an opportunity to control to some extent the domestic crisis in Nicaragua.
In Central America, progress toward compromise and peace required a significant change in the international structures responsible for the polarization of relations between Managua and Washington and of those among Nicaraguan contenders for power. This change came with the rise to power of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. The improvement in relations between the two superpowers initiated by perestroika and glasnost had decisive effects on the Esquipulas peace process. The most dramatic of these were the loss of the Sandinista's symbolic position in the eyes of the US government as regional representatives of the “Evil Empire”; and the reorientation of US foreign-policy priorities away from Central America. At the same time, these events lessened the symbolic and strategic value of the Sandinista government for the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union reduced its political, military, and economic support for the Nicaraguan revolution, and this directly affected the negotiating capacity of the Sandinista government in the Esquipulas peace process.

On 14 February 1989, at Costa del Sol, El Salvador, only 1 day before the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the five Central American presidents signed the Tesoro Accord. This accord reopened the difficult process of verification, essential for the success of the peace process. The heads of state also promised “to elaborate, within 90 days, a joint plan for the demobilization, voluntary repatriation or relocation in Nicaragua and in other countries, of members of the Nicaraguan Resistance and their families” (Moreno 1994, p. 203). Meanwhile, Nicaragua announced that an election would be held in February 1990. These resolutions were eventually put into effect by three different groups: the newly created Comisión Internacional de Apoyo y Verificación (CIAYV, International Commission of Support and Verification), which would assist in the voluntary demobilization and repatriation or relocation of the Contras; the UN Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA), which would monitor the security commitments of Esquipulas; and the UN Observer Mission for Verification of Elections in Nicaragua, which would monitor the Nicaraguan 1990 election (Baranyi and North 1992).

At this time, the recently elected President of the United States, George Bush, insisted on maintaining the Contras to keep pressure on the Sandinistas. Nevertheless, it was clear by then that the Bush Administration was not as committed as the Reagan one had been to a military solution in Nicaragua. In fact, Bush used the Esquipulas process as an opportunity “to shift from an obsessive and exclusively military focus on Central America to a policy designed for Latin America as a whole,
one which would widen Reagan’s narrowly geopolitical focus to emphasize more pressing ‘geo-economic’ issues: debt, drugs, and trade” (Envio 1989, p. 5).

The resolutions reached at Costa del Sol were ratified at the Cumbre de Tela meetings on 5–7 August 1989. The results of this meeting were important because they represented significant progress on the details and implementation of the Esquipulas peace process, including the disarming and dismantling of the Contras and the establishment of dates and conditions for the Nicaraguan elections. In this sense, Cumbre de Tela’s most important achievement was the activation of both ONUCA and CIAV (Tinoco 1988).

Why did the Esquipulas process succeed? To answer this question, one must consider both the role of political agency and the changing international conditions under which the process took place.

In Nicaragua, perestroika and glasnost represented not only a major blow to the anti-imperialism of the FSLN but also a legitimization of liberal-democratic politics, criticized and condemned by the FSLN. Furthermore, the events in the Soviet Union reduced Managua’s economic capacity to sustain its war effort. By 1989, the gross domestic product per capita had fallen to 42% of its 1977 level; the total export value, to 53%; and real wages, to 24%. Moreover, Nicaragua’s accumulated foreign debt per capita was the highest in Latin America: US $3,000, or 33 times the value of export goods (GON 1992). And the poor economic conditions were aggravated by the social wounds resulting from the war. According to Oquist (1992, p. 7),

The increasing illegality of US support for the Contras, along with the Contras’ inability to achieve significant political or military victories, encouraged Washington to find another solution to “the Nicaraguan problem.” More important, however, was the end of the Cold War, which compelled the United States to shift its foreign-policy priorities away from anticommunist crusades in Central America and to place more emphasis on political methods to displace the Sandinistas. As Robinson and MacMichael (1990, p. 32) pointed out, “the slogan in Washington changed from ‘support the freedom fighters’ to ‘democratization in Nicaragua’.” Washington’s new strategy
Nicaragua: History, Social Conflict, and Missions for Peace

coincided with the Esquipulas peace process, which focused on the use of elections to achieve peace in the region. In this context, the Sandinistas scheduled the national election for February 1990. As Peter Rodman, a National Security Council representative, stated in his testimony to the Bipartisan Commission on Free and Fair Elections in Nicaragua, Washington saw this election as an opportunity “to test the Nicaraguans, to mobilize all international pressure possible against [the Sandinistas] ... to transfer the conflict in Nicaragua to the political terrain” (Robinson and MacMichael 1990, p. 32).

The United States provided technical and financial support for the Nicaraguan opposition coalition, the Union Nacional de Oposición (national opposition union), and continued to put military and economic pressure on the Sandinistas. From 1989 to 1990, the US Congress paid US $12.5 million to try to influence the Nicaraguan political process (Robinson and MacMichael 1990). If a similar calculation is made for the 5-year period before the February 1990 election, “the covert and overt support to Anti-Sandinista political groups in Nicaragua,” according to Hemisphere Initiatives, “totalled $26.1 million” (Fine et al. 1990, p. 35). Cortés Domínguez (1990) calculated that the external support for the anti-Sandinista opposition between 1984 and 1989, including funding from sources other than the United States, was US $29.6 million.

The softening of the positions of both the US government and the Sandinistas created better conditions for achieving peace. The success of the Esquipulas process was based on the ability of its promoters to exploit the new opportunities opened by the weakening of both Managua and Washington. The weakening of these two adversaries facilitated the deactivation of destructive political trends and helped create new opportunities for a political negotiation of the crisis.

THE NATURE OF THE PEACE ACHIEVED

The end of the Cold War created new historical conditions that induced Nicaraguan domestic contenders and the US government to put an end to the Contra War. From this perspective, the most important contribution of the mission for peace in Nicaragua was to take advantage of the opportunities presented by new relations between East and West to create the historical conditions for Nicaraguan political actors to construct a minimum social consensus as the foundation of social order and peace.
However, the articulation of this consensus was a difficult task in a country that achieved peace as a result of predominantly external circumstances that forced power contenders to stop killing each other. The peace achieved in Nicaragua was not the result of an autonomous domestic process of negotiation and compromise among the primary Nicaraguan power contenders. It was not a process whereby power contenders reached some fundamental agreements regarding the organization of the social, political, and economic life of the country. Peace in Nicaragua was simply a stop to the war, forced by external conditions that made it impossible for the Sandinistas and the Contras to continue their military confrontation. The success of the mission for peace in Nicaragua was not based on its capacity to bring the power contenders to an agreement about the future of the country; rather, the mission for peace succeeded because of its capacity to use the opportunities created by the end of the Cold War to officialize an *alto al fuego* (cease-fire).

This is not to deny the value and significance of the specific terms and conditions of the peace agreement, especially those concerning the organization of national elections. However, the international conditions under which the peace process took place made these terms and conditions almost inevitable. The mission for peace in Nicaragua simply facilitated the identification of the modality and process whereby Nicaraguans would comply with the requirements of the emergent new world order. These requirements included the dismantling of the centrally planned economy and the political structures established by the Sandinistas and their replacement with a free-market economy and a democratic electoral system. In this framework of historical limitations and opportunities, Nicaraguans now have to articulate a minimum social consensus that can create the conditions for durable peace.

In other words, the normative framework for the consolidation of peace in Nicaragua is the result of external pressures, rather than being the product of a domestic process of negotiation and compromise (to talk about a normative framework is to talk about a set of premises, principles, and priorities that determine the nature of relations between the state, economy, and society that one wishes to attain). From this perspective, electoral democracy in Nicaragua gives people the capacity to choose the governments in charge of administering states that function predominantly in accordance with the principles and requirements of the international economic system as expressed by the policies of the international organizations making up the “Washington consensus.” Democracy does not offer the Nicaraguan people the opportunity to condition and determine the functions and priorities of the state. This
situation may widen the traditional gap between state and society in Nicaragua and intensify the unresolved social tensions and contradictions that have plagued Nicaraguan society.

The separation of the Nicaraguan state from its society and its increasing dependence on external forces reduces the possibility of using state power as an effective instrument for the articulation of a social consensus on the future of Nicaraguan society. Without the state as a central point of reference for political participation and competition, the object of political conflict in Nicaragua may be displaced onto civil society and reoriented outside established political processes and institutions. The deinstitutionalization of conflict in Nicaragua may intensify political fragmentation and create conditions for a “war of all against all.” Evidence of this fragmentation can be found in the crisis of governability, the low levels of legitimacy enjoyed by the state (see Delgado Romero 1995; IEN 1995), and the unprecedented levels of suicide and criminal activity in both urban and rural areas of the country. According to statistical information compiled by the Ministry of Health, the proportion of violent deaths by suicide went from 6.02% in 1992 to 6.95% in 1993, to 8.08% in 1994, and to 10.10% in 1995 (El Semanario 1996). (For the problem of crime and security in Nicaragua, see Cuadra Lira [1997].) Further evidence can be found in the persistence, in the north-central region, of armed groups that continuously challenge the authority of the state. The growing levels of poverty and social inequality are also indications of fragmentation in Nicaragua: it has been estimated that 37% of the Nicaraguan population suffers from “extreme poverty”; 30%, from “poverty” (see Martinez Vega and Ghysels 1995). Other indications are the serious cultural divisions created by the Nicaraguan diaspora; the return to Nicaragua of thousands of exiles after the elections of the 1990; and the tendency toward the politicization of religious loyalties, as expressed in the formation of evangelical political parties and the increasing political influence of the Roman Catholic Church.

DID THE PEACE PROCESS FAIL? LESSONS FOR CANADA

The above analysis might lead one to conclude that the Central American peace process has failed in Nicaragua. This conclusion is valid only if one assumes that missions for peace are designed to eliminate conflict. I argue that the most a mission for peace can achieve in a country like Nicaragua is the deactivation of destructive historical forces and their
temporary reorientation toward manageable levels. This is no minor accomplishment. Missions for peace can create new opportunities that the elites of politically polarized and socially divided societies can use to construct a stable social consensus. At minimum, this consensus "must include agreements regarding the permanent rules governing the competition for public office; the resolution of conflict; the reproduction of capital; and the appropriate role of the state, particularly the military and the bureaucracy" (Karl 1986, p. 10).

The limited expectations of the effectiveness of missions for peace expressed here should not be interpreted as a fatalistic assessment of the capacity of political will to shape history. The existence of structural limitations does not prevent political activity from deactivating, or even reversing, historical trends. However, to assume that missions for peace can by themselves solve the historical tensions and contradictions that generate violent conflict in countries like Nicaragua is to fall victim to a voluntaristic understanding of social conflict in which human will, political decision, and legal accords are considered the most important determining factors in the shaping of history.

Canada played a useful and important role in the Central American peace process. At the technical level, Canada contributed to the difficult and crucial task of verifying the security commitments of the Contadora and Esquipulas processes. At the political level, Canada participated in an international coalition that provided political support for the search for peace in Central America. By operating at these two levels, Canada not only supported the implementation of the Contadora and Esquipulas processes but also helped to expand the political space within which these initiatives evolved. Canada contributed to the creation of a new political space for the Central American peace process by actively promoting an interpretation of the sources, nature, and implications of the Central American crisis that was significantly different from that of the United States. Whereas Washington considered the Central American conflict a product of East–West tensions, Ottawa felt that the crisis was the result of domestic social conditions (see YCISS 1986). In 1988, the first report of the House of Commons Special Committee on the Peace Process in Central America indicated that "the root causes of conflict in the region are mass poverty and recurrent cycles of economic collapse" (GOC 1988, p. 21). According to this multidimensional view of the roots of the Central American crisis (GOC 1988, p. 3),

The region has been beset by multiple conflicts for many years. Factionalism and the power of the military have impeded the
development of civil governments, and, indeed have made them impossible in some countries for long periods of time. Disputes between states have poisoned the atmosphere throughout Central America. Intertwined has been a geo-political dimension: the intimate involvement of the superpowers, historically, the United States and more recently the Soviet Union, has immensely complicated attempts at reconciliation.

This interpretation of the roots of the Central American crisis is consistent with those presented in both the report of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on Canada's International Relations in 1986 (GOC 1986) and that of the Subcommittee on Canada's Relations with Latin America and the Caribbean in 1982 (GOC 1982).

The report of the Special Joint Committee on Canada's International Relations argued that "human rights violations in Central America arise from the failure of economic development, the frequent absence of political alternatives to dictatorships and military regimes, social upheaval, increasing cycles of violence, and external intervention" (GOC 1986, p. 111). The final report of the Sub-committee on Canada's Relations with Latin America and the Caribbean pointed out that (GOC 1982)

The mounting violence in Central America, which is threatening to engulf the entire region, arises primarily from internal causes. It is however, reinforced and spread by the injection of outside ideological concerns and by the provision of military assistance to both repressive governments and revolutionary groups.

By contributing to the technical implementation of the peace process and by creating new political space for peace negotiations, Canada supported "the solution of internal political, economic and social problems by the countries and peoples of the region themselves" (Charland 1984, p. 4).

Rather than expanding the role of missions for peace to include the highly desirable but impractical objective of peacebuilding, Canada should explore ways to develop its political capacity to support the creation of opportunities for negotiation and compromise among power contenders in polarized societies. This is because the complete transformation of the social structures responsible for violent conflict lies beyond the legal, political, and institutional capacity of missions for peace.

A neutral forum for continuous dialogue among the affected country's political contenders can be very helpful for the continued
Canada and Missions for Peace

success of a peace accord. Canada can provide such a forum through institutions such as the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development. This dialogue should not be considered a substitute for the domestic political process essential for the consolidation of peace. The value of a neutral forum provided by Canada would be in enabling participants to receive information and analyses that help them identify the conditions that limit their political choices and strategies. It would be an opportunity for power contenders to avoid the narrow focus and intensity of the political discussions that always accompany the aftermath of peace negotiations. Such discussions obscure the structural conditions within which political competition takes place. They reduce politics to a competition for power and to a clash of wills that can easily degenerate into violence. By clarifying the structural conditions, an organized neutral dialogue can help identify points of convergence and common ground among power contenders. Such assistance would be compatible with Canada's noninterventionist position in the Third World, limited finances for participation in the promotion of global peace, and solid international reputation for fairness and impartiality.

Needless to say, dialogue for the stabilization of peace in Nicaragua or any other polarized society involves the risk of failure. In the final analysis, all that missions for peace can do is to facilitate the creation of opportunities within which members of a polarized society can reach a social consensus as a foundation for a durable peace. A realistic approach to missions for peace must face the fact that no amount of political support or financial aid can prevent a country from destroying itself.

Conclusions

Missions for peace should not be conceived of as a form of intervention designed to solve the social, political, and economic problems of a troubled society. The most that they can hope to achieve is the deactivation of destructive historical forces and their temporary reorientation toward more manageable levels. By doing this, missions for peace can create new historical opportunities that the elites of politically polarized and socially divided societies can use to begin to construct a minimum social consensus as the foundation of a durable peace.

The peace process in Nicaragua brought about the end of that country's civil war and prevented the conflict from spreading to
neighbouring countries. Although conditions for peace in Nicaragua remain fragile, the prospect of a regional war has all but disappeared. In this context, then, the two most important achievements of the peace process were the deactivation of the historical and structural conditions and trends that from 1979 to 1990 progressively moved toward the regionalization of the war; and the creation of opportunities for the stabilization of peace. The maintenance and protection of these opportunities can be enhanced if Canada involves itself in the organization of a neutral forum for a continuous dialogue among the political factions of the country. This forum would help Nicaraguans identify points of convergence among political rivals that would be useful in recreating the Nicaraguan state.