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THE CONTADORA PROCESS FOR PEACE IN CENTRAL AMERICA (1980s)

The study of foreign policy relations in Latin America does not always attract enough attention from researchers in Ukraine. After all, despite their remoteness, the countries of the region are similar to Ukraine in their relationships with bigger hegemon, and the constant presence of conflicts (internal or external) has pushed them to find peaceful ways to resolve state issues. Topicality of this issue is also emerged due to the fact that nowadays there is a return to geopolitics of the 80's – the peak of confrontation between Western countries and communist states in the Cold War. Although we do not know at what stage the modern Cold War is now, it must be acknowledged that in order to have better understanding of today's processes, it is necessary to study the peculiarities of resolving complex and ambiguous conflicts and determine whether such paths are relevant in modern world.

The Latin American direction of foreign policy research is more relevant for foreign researchers, however in Ukrainian scientific society you can also find studies on this topic. Basically, most of them are devoted to the general development trends of an individual country or integration processes within the region. In this case studies of the T. Walker, W. LeoGrande, D. Phillips, F. Taubman, M. Ojeda Gómez, B. Bagley, V. Iskenderov can be highlighted.

Despite the significant amount of studies devoted to the Latin American region, there are few specific publications on the analysis of the peace processes in the region that took place during the most active phase of the Cold War. The aim of the study is to analyze the Contadora process for peace in Central America in the 1980s. The study of this phenomenon will allow us to see alternative ways and tools for conflict resolution in the modern world.

A lot of countries had a special interest in the results of the conflicts in Central America. The US saw the presence of the Soviet Union and of Cuba in the guerrilla wars in El Salvador and Guatemala, and since 1979 in the revolutionary government of Nicaragua. America fumed about outside interference in its traditional sphere of influence and was awared with the potential revolution export commanded by the Sandinista government¹.

To better understand the process, the reasons for the combined efforts of Latin American countries to resolve a number of conflicts in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua should be explained. The main ones are the following:

1. The principle of non-interventionism, which was followed by Latin American states. The countries of the region were among the first to talk about equality in international politics.
2. Historical experience of collective solution of various conflicts in the region
3. A large number of unilateral and bilateral plans for conflict resolution in Central America.
4. The Falklands War, which demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the inter-American system and the OAS, after which Latin American states began to pursue an independent foreign policy².

The origins of the Contadora process may be traced to a series of challenges and responses by regional actors in 1982. On March 23, for example, Honduran foreign minister Edgardo Paz Bárnica proposed a six-point plan concerning disarmament in Central America in his speech before the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States. He called for reductions in foreign military advisors, procedures and mechanisms to halt the regional arms traffic, respect for national boundaries, a permanent multilateral dialogue leading to internal political reconciliation, the full exercise of civil rights throughout region, and monitoring and control of compliance with compromises assumed by regional governments. The first serious efforts of Venezuelan and Mexican activity aimed at promoting Central American peace was contained in their joint Declaration communicated to President Reagan on September 7, 1982. They presented a regional Program of Cooperation, which resulted from a summit held in San José, Costa Rica on May 8. The Lopez Portillo and Herrera Campins initiative of September 7 assigned part of the blame for regional tensions to Nicaragua whose military was said to be responsible for poor relations with

¹ Sims, H. D., Petrash, V. (1987). The Contadora Peace Process. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 7 (4). [online], [access on 11.06.2021]. Access in World Wide Web <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/view/14775>

² Искендеров В. *Контадорский процесс и мирное урегулирование в Центральной Америке*. Москва 1991, p. 11.

her northern neighbor, Honduras. Nicaragua, of course, took issue with that interpretation in its response to the initiative on September 24. The Sandinistas called for the start of a «constructive dialogue» with representatives of the Honduran government. Reacting to the formation of a Latin American bloc interested in Central American issues, on October 4 the United States promoted a second Declaration of San José, backed by a 'Forum for Peace and Democracy'. As illustrated, a flurry of activity preceded the launching of the Contadora Process, and from the outset, the United States was clearly in disagreement over Central American security issues with several of the participants³.

The Contadora negotiating process was initiated in January 1983 at a meeting of the foreign ministers of Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama on Contadora Island in the Gulf of Panama. The idea of a purely Latin American diplomatic effort to stabilize the Central American situation and prevent either military confrontation between neighboring states or direct military intervention by the United States was attributed to then-President of Colombia Belisario Betancur Cuartas. These «Core Four» countries served as mediators in subsequent negotiating sessions among the five Central American states⁴. In addition, these countries saw Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua as large markets for their own goods and potential investment.

Contadora has acted as a sieve for the different and sometimes contradictory objectives that have been presented in the search for a solution to the Central American conflict. On the one hand, Contadora has fundamentally tried to create conditions conducive to respect for the Central American government's ideological diversity. On the other, the US Administration has used all means at its disposal to attempt to reverse the Nicaraguan revolutionary process. The majority of the Central American diplomats who were consulted informally stated that the US government seemed interested only in ensuring that, once the Contadora negotiations were finished, all of Central America would once again fall under US control.

This strong conflict of interest has been reflected in the different stages of the Contadora negotiations. At certain stages, Contadora has supported the Nicaraguan position of demanding respect for the reconstruction of its country within a context of nonalignment. This support has been based on universally acknowledged principles of self-determination and nonintervention in the internal affairs of sovereign nations. At other stages, the US has heavily pressured the Contadora

³ Richard A. Haggarty, ed. *El Salvador: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1988, p. 8–9.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

countries with the intent of forcing them to emphasize the acceptance of one sole model of political democracy for the Central American area⁵.

In general, there are several stages in the Contadora process for peace, the most important was January 1983 – September 7, 1984 – the development and adoption of basic documents for resolving conflicts in the region: *Document of Objectives*, *Contadora Act for Peace and Cooperation in Central America*. The latter was a draft peace treaty, which included democratization and internal reconciliation, an end to external support for paramilitary forces, reductions in weapons and foreign military advisers, a ban on foreign military bases, and reactivation of regional economic mechanisms such as the Central American Common Market⁶. Fulfilling the terms of the agreement would significantly reduce tensions in the region, but due to the heteropolar orientation of some countries (Guatemala, Honduras – USA; Nicaragua – USSR), this process has been significantly slowed down.

In August 1985, the efforts of the Contadora group were supported by Brazil, Argentina, Peru and Uruguay, which formed the Contadora support group. That is, since then, 8 countries have begun to resolve the conflict. Their goal was to form a joint forum to resolve the Central American conflict⁷.

Particular attention should be paid to the United States. Their position on the Contadora process has been extremely negative from the outset. They saw the Central American region as their exclusive sphere of influence, their «backyard», so this initiative, founded by other Latin American states, was perceived by them as almost interference in their internal affairs. The United States and the Contadora initiative had radically different views on resolving the conflict. If the eight countries tried to resolve everything peacefully, the United States sought by all means, even military, to impose democracy in Nicaragua instead of the Sandinista regime.

The United States has given itself a «leading role in resolving the conflict in the region»⁸ and the Contadora process could in no way be an alternative. Thus, the United States began to block the initiative and called for consideration of peace in Central America within the OAS, where they had a leading role and the opportunity to exert pressure in decision-making.

⁵ The Contadora Negotiations: Expectation and Reality. *Revista Envío*, 9 (39), 1984 [online], [access on 11.06.2021]. Access in World Wide Web <https://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/3805>

⁶ Supporting the Contadora Process: Report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, on H. Con. Res. 283, p. 26, 29.

⁷ *Contadora support group*, [w:] *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia* [online], [access on 6.06.2021]. Access in World Wide Web: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contadora_support_group

⁸ Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America. – Washington 1984, p. 72.

As for the rest of the world, Contadora's activities have gained wide publicity and support. The peacekeeping activities of the group were supported by the UN in the person of its Secretary General Jose Perez de Cuellar, as well as the Non-Aligned Movement and a number of European states⁹.

A detailed study of the Contadora process led to the identification of weaknesses in this initiative. The main problem, of course, was the lack of attention to the role of the United States in resolving the conflict. In addition, internal and territorial conflicts in other countries of the region have not helped the overall peace process.

Another shortcoming is the desire of the initiative group to solve all the existing problems in the region with a single agreement, which significantly slowed down the work and created many bureaucratic issues.

Although a general peace treaty was not signed and the group did not achieve much of its end result, the initiative was nevertheless able to contribute to the stabilization of the region. Thanks to the work of the Contadora group, it was possible to reduce tensions between the countries of the region and reduce contradictions between the participating countries. In addition, the potential open US intervention in Nicaragua did not take place due to the work of the group, although the United States still found ways for an undeclared war, using its own intelligence and contras rebels. The further democratization of such states as Honduras and Guatemala, where peaceful forces came to power instead of military regimes can be also considered as the consequence of Contadora's activities¹⁰.

With the progress of time, the Contadora process moved forward mediation of the Central American crisis. Aware of the value of constant exchanges and of the possibilities that unity offered in the international arena, the countries making up the Contadora negotiating process became the Río Mechanism (Mechanism of Political Consultation and Consensus Building). First meeting of this initiative was in April 1987, ten months after Contadora Act for Peace and Cooperation in Central America (June 1986) and four months before the signing of the Esquipulas II treaty.

The decision to turn itself into a regional mechanism was not a gratuitous one. The Contadora Group had failed in its effort to get its document accepted, and, though it would continue as a mediating process, it was clear that, after four years of being boycotted by the United States, its role as a negotiating body was exhausted.

⁹ Урегулирование центральноамериканского конфликта [online], [access on 7.06.2021]. Access in World Wide Web: https://diphis.ru/uregulirovanie_centralnoamerikanskogo_konflik-a1480.html

¹⁰ В. Искендеров, *op. cit.*, p. 17–18.

The solidarity forged and the returns obtained in four years of laboring together had ended up imposing a dynamic, so these countries decided to maintain the group and give it a larger identity than that of mediation in the Central American conflict. Contadora process remained working by the name of the Río Group until 2011 and was made up of twelve countries — all of South America plus Mexico and Panama, as well as two non-permanent members: one from Central America and one from the English-speaking Caribbean¹¹.

In 1986, a mechanism for political consultations of the Central American states (Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica) was formed, which was called the Esquipulas Group. Results of the group's further work and usage of the previous results of the Contadora states helped to conclude and sign a peace treaty (Esquipulas II), which made provisions for reconciliation of Central American states, dialogue with opposition forces, free elections, refugee assistance, disarmament of illegal paramilitaries and rejection of illegal activities against neighboring countries¹². Although Contadora's activities did not bring visible results, it was modified and still caused changes in the Central American region.

To sum up, Contadora process made Central American states more visible on the world map, which in turn contributed to the provision of various humanitarian and economic assistance by individual states and international organizations.

Drawing some parallels, one can see the similarities between Contadora's activities and the Minsk talks on a halt the war in the Eastern Ukraine. In both situations, the process is sabotaged by the reluctance of the larger international player to give up its interests and the lack of understanding that other states are not their own «back-yard» but seek to pursue independent foreign and domestic policies.

Although the Contadora process and the subsequent events it provoked were greatly underestimated, it set a precedent for smaller states to emerge from the shadows of larger ones and demonstrated ways and tools to fight for independent policy.

KEY WORDS:

Contadora Process for Peace, Contadora group, Contadora support group, USA, Central America, Sandinistas

¹¹ Contadora and Esquipulas Ten Years later. *Revista Envío*, 11 (196), 1997 [online], [access on 11.06.2021]. Access in World Wide Web <https://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/2048>

¹² *Procedure for the Establishment of a Firm and Lasting Peace in Central America (Esquipulas II)*, United Nations Peacemaker [online], [access on 10.06.2021]. Access in World Wide Web: <https://peacemaker.un.org/centralamerica-esquipulasII87>

Резюме

В даній статті автор аналізує Контадорський мирний процес у Центральній Америці та певним чином намагається порівняти його з нинішнім урегулюванням конфлікту у східній частині України. З цією метою виокремленні основні причини, перебіг, інтереси залучених сторін та результати процесу. Особливу увагу приділено Сполученим Штатам Америки та їхній позиції щодо намагань центральноамериканських держав до самостійного мирного урегулювання конфліктів у регіоні. Проведено аналіз причин, які призвели до невдачі конкретно Контадорського процесу та його поступового переходу в інші регіональні структури. В результаті проведеного дослідження автор дійшов до висновку, що процес не досягнув своїх цілей, в тому числі, через саботування його зовнішнім актором – США, які не бажали поступатися своїми інтересами та вважали регіон Центральної Америки своєю виключною сферою впливу.

Контадорський процес був особливою формою мирного урегулювання в часи, коли Холодна війна була на своєму піку, а оскільки все частіше сучасний стан справ у геополітиці вважають поверненням до того періоду, то дослідження даного феномену стає ще більш актуальним.

Ключові слова:

Контадорський мирний процес, Контадорська група, Група підтримки Контадори, США, Центральна Америка, сандіністи

Резюме

В данной статье автор анализирует Контадорский мирный процесс в Центральной Америке и определенным образом пытается сравнить его с нынешним урегулированием конфликта в восточной части Украины. С этой целью выделяются основные причины, ход, интересы вовлеченных сторон и результаты процесса. Особое внимание уделено Соединенным Штатам Америки и их позиции относительно попыток центральноамериканских государств к самостоятельному мирному урегулированию конфликтов в регионе. Проведен анализ причин, которые привели к неудаче конкретно Контадорского процесса и его постепенного перехода в другие региональные структуры. В результате проведенного исследования автор пришел к выводу, что процесс не достиг своих целей, в том числе, в результате его саботажа внешним актором

– США, которые не желали отступать от своих интересов и считали регион Центральной Америки своей исключительной сферой влияния.

Контадорский процесс был особой формой мирного урегулирования во времена, когда Холодная война была на своем пике, а поскольку все чаще современное положение дел в геополитике считают возвращением к тому периоду, то исследования данного феномена становится еще более актуальным.

Ключевые слова:

Контадорский мирный процесс, Контадорская группа, Группа поддержки Контадоры, США, Центральная Америка, сандинисты

RÉSUMÉ

W niniejszym artykule autor analizuje proces pokojowy Contadora w Ameryce Środkowej i niejako próbuje porównać go z obecnym rozwiązaniem konfliktu we wschodniej części Ukrainy. W tym celu identyfikuje główne przyczyny, przebieg, interesy zaangażowanych stron oraz wyniki procesu. Szczególną uwagę zwraca na Stany Zjednoczone Ameryki i ich stanowisko w sprawie wysiłków państw Ameryki Środkowej na rzecz samodzielnego rozwiązywania konfliktów w regionie. Analizuje przyczyny, które doprowadziły do niepowodzenia procesu Contadora i jego stopniowego przechodzenia do innych struktur regionalnych. Autor doszedł do wniosku, że proces nie osiągnął swoich celów, m.in. ze względu na sabotaż zewnętrznego gracza – Stanów Zjednoczonych, które nie chciały rezygnować ze swoich interesów i uznały region Ameryki Środkowej za swoją wyłączną sferę wpływu.

Proces Contadora był szczególną formą pokojowego uregulowania sytuacji w okresie szczytowego okresu zimnej wojny. A ponieważ obecny stan geopolityki jest coraz częściej postrzegany jako powrót do tamtego okresu, badanie tego zjawiska nabiera jeszcze większego znaczenia.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

proces pokojowy Contadora, Grupa z Contadory, Grupa Poparcia Contadora, USA, Ameryka Środkowa, Sandinistas