

A Game of Musical Chairs? Peace and Conflict in Chiapas

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The Background to the Chiapas Uprising

The indigenous uprising in Chiapas on New Year's Eve 1994 took public opinion by surprise in Mexico as well as abroad. It was the day that the long-heralded and carefully negotiated North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was to go into effect, and the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, entering his last year in office, was widely hailed as having worked nothing short of an economic miracle by introducing so-called "structural reforms", opening up the Mexican market indiscriminately to the forces of globalization, controlling inflation, and selling off a good part of the Mexican state's assets.

While from the "macro" side of international finance things appeared to look good in Mexico, the picture was somewhat less clear domestically. Within the framework of so-called structural adjustment policies", demanded of Mexico by the IMF and the international financial markets, real incomes had fallen drastically over the previous decade, social and economic inequality had increased, as had the number of poor and extremely poor people in the country; growth rates had declined and the domestic market had shriveled. Though the Salinas government had given much publicity to its social development programs for the poor, particularly in the rural areas (known as *Solidaridad*), it was precisely the latter who were hardest hit by the economic changes brought about by Salinas, policies. And among the rural population, indigenous communities continued to scratch out a meager living at the margins of the "economic bubble", resigned to the fact that, as so many times before, and official rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, they would once again be by-passed by "progress" and "modernization". Or were they so resigned?

Chiapas is Mexico's southernmost state, bordering on Guatemala, and it also shows the lowest social and economic indicators of well-being in the country. More than one third of its population is classified as indigenous, who live in the poorest municipalities, where demographic pressure is high, and which have been the locus of agrarian struggles, social tensions and political conflicts over many decades. During the eighties the situation deteriorated markedly, as indigenous and other settlers from the overpopulated highlands moved into the tropical forest areas and struggled over land rights with large landowners, cattle-ranchers and timber interests. Over the preceding years, numerous poor peasant farmers had found temporary jobs in local construction works and the booming oil producing enclaves; when these sources of income dried up, many attempted to return to peasant farming, only to find that competition for scarce land resources was high and government help was no longer forthcoming. Thousands of small coffee producers were wiped out when the government withdrew its subsidies to Mexican coffee exports. Frustration and disappointment among the rural indigenous population ran high. While many peasants were able to receive an allotment of public land under the old agrarian legislation (modified by the Salinas government in 1992 to favor private interests), numerous local and regional peasant associations ran into trouble with local authorities who side-tracked their demands, harassed their leaders, and generally sided with the traditional, well entrenched local oligarchy who controlled political power at the state level.

Highland Indian communities, which had maintained their languages, cultures, social structures and identities for generations, became increasingly disorganized as local traditional authorities lost their power, subsistence economic activities were no longer profitable, and the cultural reproduction of the community through the fiesta and the cargo systems and the maintenance of a deeply rooted world-view (long studied and analysed by anthropologists), which had given the highland region its cultural specificity, were no longer able to maintain the social equilibrium. New generations of Indian youth, breaking with their communities, went in search not only of new economic opportunities but also of new cultural identities.

The situation had become even more complex in recent years when thousands of Guatemalan refugees spilled across the border into Chiapas in the early eighties, fleeing from violent military repression in their country. For some government officials, Chiapas had become a “national security” issue, particularly after unfounded accusations were directed at Mexico for supposedly harboring and supporting Guatemalan guerrillas. Furthermore, for almost three decades before the 1994 uprising, the local Catholic church had become increasingly responsive to the dramatic circumstances of indigenous poverty and exploitation, under the guiding principles of the Theology of Liberation, being actively involved in the building of strong local “base” communities. In some indigenous municipalities Protestant evangelical missions had managed to make important inroads over the years, leading to numerous conflicts over local political power, that only appeared to be “religious” on the surface, but which contributed to the overall climate of social tension in the area.

Into this cauldron of inequalities, rising expectations and frustrations, political push-In-shove, population pressures, land struggles, economic modernization, and latent and overt contradictions, came a small group of left-wing political activists from central and northern Mexico, during the nineteen-seventies, who at first worked conscientiously with several Mexican government development agencies, and who later, frustrated by not being able to effect any substantial changes on the local scene, became involved in the organization of peasant and indigenous associations. While some wandered off after a while, or settled in as government functionaries, others became more and more involved in local grass-roots movements, providing the sophistication of ideological analyses and their expertise of the outside world, particularly the national political system.

During the eighties, the indigenous peasants of Chiapas were among the most highly mobilized rural folk in Mexico, organized into numerous local level and regional associations and interest groups, channeling their demands through the corporate political structure and the pervasive patron-client relationships, but also confronting local “bosses” and their private armed guards, as well as the state's political hierarchy more or less successfully. Inevitably, there were internal disputes and factional strife. one group, after a long period of organization and mobilization, decided upon armed struggle as the only viable alternative. The Mexican government was not unaware of these budding guerrilla activities (one or two armed encounters had taken place in the early eighties), but did not consider them as threatening. The armed uprising in January 1994 had, in fact, been foretold, but for reasons of state (or rather, political expediency: Mexico I s announced entry into the First World through NAFTA, the upcoming presidential election in July 1994), the government preferred not to acknowledge the threat nor deal with it. The political cost to the system of this neglect has been high indeed.

The Uprising of the RZLN

The Zapatista National Liberation Army, as the armed group called itself (after the legendary peasant revolutionary hero, Emiliano Zapata, of the early twentieth century), briefly occupied four major towns in the central highlands and the eastern region of the state of Chiapas, before withdrawing to its bases in the mountainous tropical forest areas to the east, near the Guatemalan border and the neighboring state of Tabasco, once known as the Lacandon jungle, before the environmental devastation of the last three decades took its toll. Having “declared war” on the Federal Government, the Zapatistas fought a number of skirmishes with local army detachments over the next few days. The EZLN had fielded about 3000 armed people (men and women) by some accounts. Their weaponry was modest and no match for the federal army, particularly after numerous reinforcements with armored vehicles and helicopters arrived to support the meager local army detachments.

Unofficial estimates place the number of victims of the first week of fighting at around 150, many of them civilians caught in cross-fire or mistaken as “guerrillas” by government forces. Almost twenty thousand people fled the fighting and the Zapatista-held areas (four municipalities out of 114 in the state). They became the internally displaced victims of the uprising, eventually receiving humanitarian aid from government and private sources. Many of them, as it later turned out, belonged to communities or organizations that had not joined the Zapatistas' decision to stage the armed revolt. Human rights defense organizations which rapidly converged upon the area, documented cases of arbitrary detention, torture and executions of civilians by members of the federal army in various localities.

As mentioned before, the uprising took the Mexican political system by surprise and shook it to its foundations, even as it took the wind out of President Salinas, high-flying sails. The first political victims were the Minister of the Interior, former governor of Chiapas, and the interim governor he had left in his place. In the end, the political system itself became a victim.

The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN in Spanish) proclaimed its objectives in a document known as the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, which has been widely disseminated and can be found on the Internet. It called for the overthrow of the “illegitimate” government of President Salinas de Gortari, set out its objectives in eleven points: land, labor, shelter, food, health, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice and peace, and called upon the Mexican people to join its cause. It also asked the international community to recognize the EZLN as a legitimate belligerent force to which international humanitarian law and the provisions of the Geneva Convention should be applied.

Within hours, the uprising received wide international media coverage and in the first days of January not only did numerous journalists from around the world arrive in the city of San Cristobal las Casas, which had been occupied by the EZLN (only a four hour plane and vehicle trip away from Mexico City), but also numerous national and international NGOs, concerned about peace and human rights, decided to monitor the situation.

The first reactions of the Mexican government, while confused and uncoordinated, were to dismiss the uprising as entirely unjustified, politically motivated in an electoral year, designed to undermine the prodigious accomplishments of the Salinas administration, and accused it of being the work of a handful of opportunists, bandits and adventurers without any social support, who were manipulated by “foreigners” intent upon destroying the new image of Mexico. Slowly, however, a new appreciation emerged, and official voices began admitting that there might be

historically accumulated social grievances that had long been neglected by succeeding governments, that justified the reasons for the revolt if not its armed and violent nature.

Cease-fire and the Beginning of Negotiations

As a result of growing national and international pressure, as well as the government's shrewd calculations about the political costs of a major civil war in the year of NAFTA and presidential elections, the Salinas administration declared a unilateral cease-fire on January 12 and offered to negotiate with the rebels, who accepted the offer within a few days. By that time, the government had named a number of ineffectual "peace commissioners" who had been unable to enter into negotiations with the Zapatistas. The EZLN later admitted that they had not expected such a rapid and widespread involvement of civil society a peaceful solution to the conflict, and that this had led them to revise their strategy and to decide upon a political alternative rather than continue pursuing a mainly military objective.

The first stage of the peace dialogue began with great fanfare and widespread media coverage. The Mexican government named as its chief negotiator a well-known politician, closely linked to president Salinas, but who, contrary to his expectations, had not been anointed as the official candidate to succeed Salinas. Manuel Camacho's role as negotiator in Chiapas was marred by increasing speculations that he would replace Colosio, the official candidate, in a sophisticated power play.

After several weeks of discrete contacts, and after the national Congress had approved an Amnesty Law on January 22 for rebels who would lay down their arms, talks began in the grandiose setting of the cathedral of San Cristobal las Casas, in the presence of Bishop Samuel Ruiz who had offered himself, and been accepted by both sides, as unofficial mediator. The Dialogue in the Cathedral continued for several days. The Zapatistas presented a list of 34 demands, some of which were strictly local and could be resolved at the state level. others, however, had to do with national political issues, constitutional changes and the NAFTA. The government countered by offering to consider 32 of these demands (without, however, actually agreeing to them) and rejected outright the remaining two as being beyond the scope of what it continued to label as a merely "local" conflict.

The Zapatista delegation returned to their jungle stronghold (under protection of the International Red Cross and numerous NGO's), and promised to give an answer after consulting with their "bases". In the meantime, Mexican politics became more turbulent, as the official presidential candidate, Colosio, was assassinated in a northern border city at the beginning of March, and quickly replaced by Ernesto Zedillo. on June 10, 1994, the Zapatistas announced that they rejected the government's unsatisfactory offer, whereupon Camacho resigned as negotiator, his efforts at obtaining a peace agreement a failure. The new negotiator in Chiapas, who took leave of absence from his post as president of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), was never able to establish direct communication with the Zapatistas, and returned to his job in December, at the end of the Salinas administration. (The CNDH had sent a monitoring unit to Chiapas shortly after the uprising, but it was accused by various human rights organizations as being quite ineffectual).

The Zapatistas Reach out to Civil Society

It was obvious that the EZLN no longer trusted the Salinas government and was betting on a major political upset in the forthcoming presidential elections in July. It now decided on a strategy to "jump" the military encirclement of its core area, by appealing directly to Mexican civil society and opposition political forces. One opposition presidential candidate actually met with the Zapatista leadership during the campaign, attempting to establish a "peace alternative". Heeding the Zapatistas' call, hundreds of grass-roots associations, popular organizations and activists of all persuasions organized consultations and preparatory meetings for a massive National Democratic Convention to be held in Zapatista territory a month after the presidential elections.

The-presidential elections of July 6 reaffirmed the political clout of the governing PRI (which had been in power for over sixty years) and disappointed those (including the EZLN) who had predicted a government defeat at the polls. Nonetheless, the Convention attracted about 5000 sympathizers from all over the country and abroad who met for three days with the Zaptistas in one of their communities. The EZLN, in turn, reaffirmed its commitment to a peaceful solution of the conflict, but also to the need for a total reconstitution of the national polity and the satisfaction of its demands.

While the lame-duck government of Salinas was no longer able or willing to negotiate, the EZLN sat back and waited to see how things were going to turn out with the new government, at the same time hoping that the "civil-political movement" that was to emerge from the National Democratic Convention in August would actually coalesce into something more permanent. In October, worried by signs of increasing tension in the area, Bishop Ruiz decided to form the National Mediating Commission (CONAI) --including a number of eminent personalities--, which was accepted by the EZLN as well as the government, although in a number of official sectors the Bishop's role was systematically diminished.

In November 1994, shortly before the transfer of presidential power, the EZLN, always eager to keep the initiative, staged a new political offensive by peacefully occupying 38 municipalities in the state of Chiapas and declaring the establishment of "autonomous municipalities". The government dismissed this as yet another EZLN publicity ploy. On the first anniversary of the uprising (January 1995), the EZLN called for the organization of a vast National Liberation Movement that would establish a transitional government, organize a constitutional convention, hold new elections and, among other things, recognize the autonomy of indigenous peoples and drastically modify current economic policies in favor of the poor.

Meanwhile, Mexico's new president, Ernesto Zedillo, who had taken the reins of government in December, was faced with one the country's worst financial crises in recent decades. The consequent economic measures taken by the administration further worsened the situation of Mexico's poor. Zedillo, who had exchanged a few private letters with Subcomandante Marcos of the EZLN during his campaign, reiterated his intention to pursue a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The new Minister of the Interior met with the EZLN leaders on January 15, 1995, to decide upon a number of steps to reduce tensions in order to prepare the way for the resumption of peace talks. However, nothing came of this meeting.

The Government’s “Low Intensity” Offensive

Refusing to return to the negotiating table, the EZLN appeared to be stalling for time. This impasse was broken by the government’s surprise military offensive on February 9, which allowed the army to retake a number of points that had been under Zapatista control, including the village where the National Democratic Convention had taken place the previous August. The Zapatistas retreated without offering resistance, and hundreds of indigenous families fled into the forest. Furthermore, the government announced that it had identified Marcos, the well-known masked leader of the movement and other members, and issued orders for their arrest. At the same time it detained a number of people in various parts of the country, accusing them of collaborating with the Zapatistas and storing arms for subversive purposes. The president declared that the Zapatistas were not a popular or indigenous movement, but rather a subversive organization that had emerged from other guerrilla movements of the nineteen-sixties.

Once again there was a nation-wide outcry for peace. The EZLN reaffirms its willingness to negotiate, and the CONAI calls upon the government to avoid a “military escalation” and return to the peace talks. A few days later, the governor of Chiapas (who had only a couple of months before taken office amidst widespread accusations of electoral fraud) resigns, thereby defusing one of the principal issues of contention between the Zapatistas and the government at the local level.

Negotiations Resume

At the end of February President Zedillo asks Congress to pass a “Law for Dialogue, Reconciliation and a Dignified Peace in Chiapas”, which is approved early in March, and in which, after some wrangling, the EZLN is recognized by name as one of the contending parties, and thus as a legally recognized actor. For the first time, the Legislative branch of government becomes directly involved in the conflict. Within the framework of this new law, Congress establishes a special Commission, known as COCOPA, which over the next few months becomes increasingly active in the peace process.

The third stage of the process begins early in April 1995 when both sides sign an agreement on the procedures for the forthcoming peace negotiations. By then, within the stipulations of the newly enacted Law, the orders for the arrest of the Zapatista leadership are suspended, and some of the Zapatistas detained in other parts of the country are freed for "lack of evidences. On April 22 both sides meet formally in the township of San Andres, near the city of San Cristobal. By then, the government had put together new negotiating team, and the Zapatistas had invited a large number of “advisers”, drawn from Mexico's academic and cultural institutions as well as indigenous organizations, to take part in the dialog. After six meetings over almost five months, mainly concerned with procedural aspects, the government and the EZLN agreed finally to discuss seven substantive agenda items.

The issues to be negotiated were as follows:

1. De-escalation, to prevent a renewal of hostilities (this to be achieved before the other items were dealt with)
2. Indigenous culture and rights
3. Wellbeing and Development
4. Democracy and Justice
5. The Rights of Women in Chiapas

6. Reconciliation between different social sectors in Chiapas
7. Political and social participation of the EZLN

The Commission on Indigenous Culture and Rights began its activities on October 1, 1995, and it was subdivided into six Working Groups:

1. Community and autonomy: indigenous rights
2. Guarantees of justice for the indigenous
3. Participation and Political representation of the indigenous
4. Situation, rights and culture of indigenous women
5. Access to the means of communication
6. Promotion and Development of indigenous culture

Altogether, about 600 people were involved in one or another of the various subcommissions and working groups. While important differences remained between the two parties, particularly in relation to the recognition of autonomous regions, the organization of a new Constitutional Convention, the drafting of a new Constitution, the redrafting of Article 27 of the Constitution (related to agrarian issues and land rights), and the revision of the North American Free Trade Agreement (all of which was demanded by the EZLN and rejected by the government), an agreement was finally reached on February 14, 1996. The whole process was marked by ups and downs, accusations and counter-accusations, resolutions that were tabled and withdrawn, and lack of trust of the negotiating parties in each other.

The San Andres Accord

The Agreement (covering only the first of the six substantive agenda items, that is, Indigenous Culture and Rights) essentially implied that the government would present to the Legislative Branch a jointly drafted legal initiative covering issues such as indigenous autonomy, recognition of indigenous legal practices, the cultural rights of indigenous peoples and similar issues.

In the meantime, implementing one of the earlier agreed upon points, the government proceeded to launch a nation-wide “consultation” on these issues among the fifty-six different indigenous ethnic groups-in-the country. The results of this consultation were announced in May, and they basically coincided with the points covered in the Agreement and insisted upon by the EZLN, that is, respect for indigenous rights, some form of local autonomy, government support for the development of indigenous cultures and education, and related issues.

However, after the signing of the Agreement, progress on the other agenda items was nil. The two parties did not meet again at the negotiating table. The EZLN demanded that the government proceed with the implementation of the signed Agreement before proceeding to the next item. In official circles, however, there was increasing opposition to the Agreement itself. A number of prominent legal experts and intellectuals questioned the constitutionality and the wisdom of granting special rights to indigenous groups, establishing local autonomy, and tinkering with existing constitutional precepts (the Mexican republic, though federal in form, is basically a highly unitary and centralized state, and indigenous peoples had never been legally recognized as such before a weak constitutional amendment was adopted in 1992).

A New Guerrilla Group Appears

In July 1996 another, previously unknown, guerrilla group made its appearance, staging various simultaneous attacks on police and military installations in different states. The Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR), as it called itself, appeared to have links to a small number of radical organizations which had been active in some parts of rural Mexico years before. Both the EPR and the EZLN denied having any links with each other, but the atmosphere in Mexico became more tense. In its pursuit of the EPR, the government was accused of harassing independent peasant and popular organizations in various parts of the country. By the month of September, the EZLN had again perceived the government to be stalling on its commitments. Low-intensity military harassment was increasing, and human rights violations appeared to be on the rise. No further progress had been achieved on the implementations of the Agreement signed by both parties in February. The EZLN announced that it would suspend all direct talks with the government until the latter showed its willingness to abide by what had already, after much negotiation, been agreed upon six months before.

Congress Becomes Involved as Negotiations Stall

Had the Zapatistas actually broken off peace negotiations with the government? They didn't quite state it that way, but they made it clear that it was up to the government to show some good will and take the next step. This is when the congressional Commission for Harmony and Pacification (known as COCOPA), and made up of senators and representatives (*diputados*) of the four political parties represented in the Congress, which had been established by law in 1995, begins to play an active role in the process. Both parties to the conflict agree that COCOPA should attempt to bring the negotiations back on track. After several months of "shuttle-diplomacy", helped along by Bishop Samuel Ruiz's National Mediation Commission (CONAI), COCOPA finally declares that it has drafted a text that could serve as a basis for the "legislative initiative, that both sides (meaning, essentially, the federal government) would present to the Congress. COCOPA announces in November 1996 that the basic outline of the document has been agreed upon by the parties, but that it will only make it public after the two sides have formally approved the final text. According to COCOPA the document will not admit any more changes, and the two sides are asked to either accept or reject it. This is now known in political circles as the "fast track" approach to the negotiations.

In mid-November, COCOPA members travel to Zapatista territory to present their text to the EZLN. After a few days of tense waiting, the Zapatistas announce that they are not entirely satisfied, but they are willing to accept it. COCOPA then presents the text to President Ernesto Zedillo, who asks for an extra fortnight before giving his government's answer. Surprisingly, the government announces that it has not studied the text and is not aware of some of the complex issues which it had actually signed in the February agreement. Shortly before New Year, the government rejects COCOPA's document and offers a counter-proposal which, it states, adheres to the main points agreed upon in the San Andrés Accords, while rejecting some of the principal points contained in COCOPA's text.

Though visibly angered by what they consider yet another betrayal by the government, the Zapatistas say they are willing to consult this counter-offer with their communities. While the

suspense heightens, they finally announce in mid- January 1997 that the government's new proposal is unacceptable. They also blame COCOPA for failing in its mission. Since then, the Zapatistas have withdrawn into their strongholds and have refused to make contact again with either the government or the Congressional Commission on Harmony and Pacification. They have even broken off contact with their former numerous advisers from the civil society. The EZLN has, however, made it clear that it is not breaking off negotiations entirely and that it hopes that these might be resumed at some point. The government, in turn, keeps repeating that it is willing to renegotiate the whole affair with the Zapatistas, even as it steps up local harassment of Zapatista communities and sympathizers, including international observers.

Government spokespersons argue that there were highly sensitive unresolved constitutional issues in COCOPA's text, that should have been addressed first. This refers basically to the concept of "autonomy", as well as to the recognition of indigenous peoples as legal subjects and the incorporation of indigenous customary law into the existing judicial system. To support its position, the government consulted a small group of distinguished legal scholars who advised against the acceptance of the document. For several weeks, the Mexican press gave wide coverage to debates and discussions regarding indigenous rights, the issue of autonomy, the pros and cons of legal pluralism, and related issues. After a while the controversy subsided, and the issue remains unresolved, though apparently the liberal conception of the "civic society" has carried the day (i.e. the non- recognition of special legal rights to indigenous peoples as such).

One of the specific outcomes of the February 1996 San Andres Accords, was the establishment in November of a bipartite Commission on the Follow-up and Verification of the peace accords. This is a rather unique group, inasmuch as it was set up before the negotiations have been completed. It is made up of three delegates each of the EZLN and the federal government, as well as a number of "personal and special guests" from each side, and representatives of CONAI, COCOPA and the state government of Chiapas. In the absence of direct negotiations between the two parties, this Commission (known as COSEVE) is currently the only formally established space where both sides are represented. However, as a result of the impasse in the negotiations, the COSEVE has been unable to function (and even to meet as a group) after its creation.

As of May 1997, negotiations continue to be stalled. The current legislature has ended its sessions in preparation of legislative elections in July, and the new Congress will only reconvene later in the year, when the new membership of COCOPA is named. Also, in April the federal government appointed a new chief negotiator, who has tried to make discreet contact with the principal actors of this game of musical chairs. It is highly unlikely that the peace process will move ahead any time soon within the next few months.

Chronology

- 1994
- January 1: Armed uprising in Chiapas
 - January 12: Government declares unilateral cease-fire
 - January 22: Amnesty Law approved
 - February 21: Negotiations begin between EZLN and Federal Government
 - March: Official Presidential candidate is assassinated. New candidate named
 - June 10: EZLN rejects Government counter offer to its demands
 - June 15: Government negotiator replaced. Negotiations stalled
 - July 6: Presidential elections. PRI wins. Fraud reported.
 - July-August: Indigenous mobilization. "Autonomous" regions created.
 - August: National Democratic Convention in Zapatista territory
 - October 13: CONAI accepted as mediating body. Attempts to delegitimize it by government
 - November 19: EZLN "civic" offensive, occupies 38 municipios
 - December 1: New president and new Chiapas governor assume power.
 - December: Economic financial crisis explodes in Mexico
- 1995
- January 15: Attempts at renewed negotiations fail after one meeting.
 - February 9: Government launches military/police offensive. Regains some ground, fails to apprehend movement's leaders. 40,000 military control region.
 - February: Chiapas new governor is removed
 - March: Federal Congress adopts "Law of Pacification", establishes COCOPA, recognizes EZLN by name as (unofficially) belligerent force
 - April 9-September 10: Negotiations resume about procedures, agenda and timing (Seven meetings).

1996

February 16: Agreement on First Agenda item on Indigenous Rights and Culture, signed in San Andrés

February-March: Government organizes widespread “indigenous consultations”. Results announced in May: EZ positions basically supported. (Autonomy, rights, land etc.)

July 1996: New guerrilla group, EPR appears, coordinates action in several states. EZ denies involvement.

March-September: Harassment, “low intensity warfare” continues. Nothing happens regarding agreement. Negotiations do not resume.

September: EZ breaks off talks. COCOPA takes on active role

November: COCOPA presents negotiated agreement to both parties. EZ accepts document

November: COSEVE established

December: Government asks for delay, rejects document, makes counter-proposal

1997

January: EZ rejects government counter-proposal, says it has been fooled; refuses to renegotiate, retreats into mountain bases

January-May: Nothing moves. Harassment continues. Low-level rural violence in adjacent areas continues to make victims, create tension, unrest, instability. New government negotiator is appointed.