

Analysing the Conflict Resolution: The Example of Zapatista Movement

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the Zapatista conflict in Chiapas, Mexico; in terms of the conflict analysis techniques. The history of the conflict illustrates that it is a need based conflict. At first glance, although the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional seems that they resist the neoliberal economic policies of Mexican government, the main motivation of the resisters is to reach food, water and energy sources. As a consequence, this paper claims that there is a need for applying more sophisticated conflict resolution techniques to solve the need based conflict.

Keywords: Chiapas, Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), Emiliano Zapata, Panco Villa, Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, Mexico, NAFTA.

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to analyze the Zapatista conflict in terms of the conflict resolution literature. At the distinguished book of Wallensteen, conflict resolution is defined as a situation “*where the conflicting parties enter into an agreement that solves their central incompatibilities, accept each other’s continued existence as parties and cease all violent action against each other.*” (Wallensteen, 2002: 8) Moving from this definition; any conflict might be analyzed firstly by first the basic and complex levels of analysis of the conflict; than understanding the role of the state; understanding the trichotomy of the conflict; and applying the trichotomy of conflict and peace. (Wallensteen: 2002)

After examining the history of the conflict the core conflicting parties will be identified in this paper. Moreover, the internal subgroups and constituencies of Zapatista movement will be mentioned and the possibility to distinguish the positions of the parties will be evaluated. In addition the positions, interests and needs of the parties will be mentioned in order to understand the qualitative and quantitative asymmetries between the conflicting parties. And also the conflict is the result of different perceptions of the parties, the causes of the perceptions of EZLN and Mexico State will be evaluated. Then the current behaviours of the parties will be examined in order to understand that the conflict is escalatory or not.

To add the context of the conflict will be evaluated in order to understand the global, regional and state-level factors, who are the meddlers of the conflict; to understand the positions of the actors serves to find a permanent solution to the conflict.

1. History of the Conflict

To begin with, Chiapas is one of the thirty two states of Mexico. It surrounded Guatemala in the south, Tabasco in the north and Oaxaca in the west. In these thirty two states, Chiapas is most impoverishing state in the Mexico. On the other hand, Chiapas is a richest zone in Mexico as natural resources like oil, forests, grassy areas, effective cultivable areas, and it is also the centre of café planting. 2/3 of the country’s electricity produces in this region. 55% of hydroelectric energy and 20% of electricity of Mexico producing in Chiapas but only 1/3 of the homes have electricity. On the other hand, 35% percent of the total clean water produced in Chiapas and there is no clean water to drink in the homes. In Chiapas, one thousand people drop a medical clinic. The literacy rate is very low.

The starting point of the conflict in the country goes back to five hundred years ago, when Spanish invaders arrived the country. When the European conquerors had arrived to the American continent, recession started for the native people. From the beginning of 16th century to 19th century, Mexico has colonized by Spain government with the logic of “colonies for motherland”. (Varli and Calis, 2010: 893) Also, as a result of wars and pressures, a great amount of population had murdered. The native population in the 17th century was twelve million but; in 1720 the number of the population decreased to one million. The native people had forced to live under the domination of different forces. This context was occurred a situation which the whites became dominant and they changed the socio-cultural view of the country. Under the name of civilization the language, religion, and the cultures of native people changed by systematic policies; so they forced to live with poverty. The native people could not protect their traditional structure so they have been assimilated by the white men and became the second class citizens in their own land.

The great rebellion of natives pushed down by imperialist government in 1521. On the other hand, the uprisings in 1810 and 1814 could not reach a success for natives. In 1823, Mexico got its independence with a military uprising, but they lived under the politic and economic hegemony of European States. The feudal structure, from

Spain imperialism period, paved the way the crises later. After the independence of Mexico (declared at 27th September 1821), Mexicans faced some difficulties due to the reason of its land structure. After the independence, the great social and political progress occurred between the years of 1910-1917 under Emiliano Zapata and Panco Villa with the revolutionary intervention. Poor rural people paved the way the “rural revolution”, and at that time great administrative and social reforms realized. With the revolutionary process, the strict feudal structure started to be solved. The constitution has changed to provide the land appropriately, but mostly stopped with the assassination of Zapata in 1919. (Stephen, 2002: 167)

In 1929, Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) came to power and later governed the state about eighty years. From the 1920s until its defeat in 2000, the PRI was the only political party to rule Mexico. (Higgins, 2004: 128) It included different groups from society like rightists, leftists etc. But later, the party became autocrat and finally raked off, and the people became poorer under the strict and autocratic government. Political crises occurred. On the other hand, in 1960s, independence movement news from Asia and Africa activated local identities. At the second fifty years of the 20th century, indigenous peasants of the Chipas were loyal to the PRI. (Collier and Quaratiello, 2005: 126) After the government changes, assimilation and the second class position of native people have continued. Discrimination is continuing reality for native people. Even so, the natives continue their battles to use their cultures freely and to reach legal citizens status.

Another reason of the conflict is the global economic politics. Free trade agreements created negative conditions for the small producers and native people in Mexico. Especially, after 1980's the liberalization process reached its top in 1994. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), is in effect since January 1994. However, witnessed the dramatic manifestation of the rebellion army that had for so long existed in secret. Indigenous peasants made invisible by the modernist image and practice of a neoliberal Mexico made them visible for the first time under the banner of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. (Higgins, 2004: 151) As an extension of neoliberal politics North American Free Trade Area, NAFTA, practiced and it made the country the market of global companies, so the small producers and the people living with soil sentenced to live with poverty. (Jamie, 1996) On the other hand, in the base of the economic crises, liberal politics lied down. The country reality and social-economic problems could not solve on the paper. From the beginning of the 1980s, IMF and World Bank studied to perform global economic politics in the whole Latin America. (Chossudovsky, 2003: 20) With these politics, privatization program started and some public places like land and forests opened to private property. For these reason, the rural people who depend to the soil for agriculture, they faced with unemployment, because they used public land for agriculture, when the land sold they had have no place to farm and to live.

Beginning of the events in Mexico, lie down the constitutional changes after 1988. The government accepted the demands of international firms and changed the constitution to make trade liberalization, privatization, and to open the country to foreign investment. And, the aids had cut to small farmers. Local producers could not rely to this liberalization. The NAFTA agreement provided land and wealth to the Canada and US but did not to Mexico. It created polarization between the local producers and state supporting global companies. For this polarization, small producers damaged. Also, Mexico was not ready to join the global economic system. It had not real company to compete with global companies. Also, in the southern part of the country people were live on state territory.

Recently for the reason of to support local people's rights against Mexican government, Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) established after especially signed of NAFTA. EZLN is a guerrilla organization that declared war against the Mexican state in 1994. EZLN was also continuation of Zapatista movement which is started in the beginning of the 20th century. EZLN is also against the neo-liberalism.

2. The Conflicting Parties and Conflict Issues

2.1. The core conflicting parties

The core conflicting parties are Zapatista and the Mexico State. The name of Zapatista comes from its old leader Emiliano Zapata and it established at 17 November 1983, but it started to practice after NAFTA signed on January 1, 1994. On January 1, 1994 Zapatista seized all public buildings and began warfare against Mexico government in the San Cristobol de las Casas which is the capital city of Chipas.

Mexican government announced this movement as an illegal movement, and gave response strictly. The government bombed the region intensively for two weeks and after the conflicts 150 people killed. The conflicts temporarily stopped with the efforts of international pressure and public opinion, the two sides announced ceasefire for a moment. In this warfare, EZLN took the control of some parts of the region, and it started to govern them. At that time the leader of the guerrillas was sub-commander Marcos. According to him, free trade agreements are the death warrant for the native people. (Hertoghe, 2010: 111)

2.2. Internal subgroups and constituencies of Zapatista

Chipas includes a lot of different cultures, people and ethnic groups. 55% Mestizo, 40% Indigenous, and Maya people live in Chipas. Most of them are on the border of losing their culture completely, because of the free trade and opening the country to global companies and they want state to support for their integration to the system. Their land was on the public area and after liberalism, the state decided to sell its areas to mostly foreign

companies. As a consequence the rural people became homeless and unemployed. (Gall, 1998) For these reasons, the members of the Zapatista constitute mostly native people which were live in Chipas more than five hundred years. Recently more than sixty native and indigenous peasants represented by EZLN.

2.3. Possibility to distinguish between positions, interests and needs

It is possible to claim that the native people only desire to govern more democratically. They want to be governed by a more democratic government, in order to reach their democratic and economic demands. At Chipas, the natural resources exploiting from foreign companies but local people are lack of basic food, clothing and energy sources. People without access to basic necessities, hope to seek help from the revolutionary movements. Moreover native language rights, protection of local culture and traditions is essential for Chipas people. The TIME journal lists the main demand of Zapatista as: land, food, health, independence and freedom, justice, peace and democracy. (Time, 21.01., 1994) However the Mexico government, with a liberal view, perceive the liberal policies as the unique way to increase the wealth of all Mexican people. Also, to reach a peaceful solution, a critical ideological shift is needed. At that point, Cruz (2008) emphasizes that new president Felipe Calderón came a new position to criticize the neo-liberal economic policies and economic relations with the US.

2.4. Qualitative and quantitative Asymmetries between the conflicting parties

As a quantitative asymmetry; Zapatista represents ten million native people, government represents about 120 million people. On December 22, 1997 in the mountains of Chiapas, paramilitary forces aligned with the ruling part massacred 45 villagers accused of being Zapatistas. (Stahler-Sholk, 1998) The death included ten men, twenty one women, and fourteen children. On the other hand, after Zapatista first attack, the state military bombed Chiapas nearly one week with its tanks and jets. Later, Mexican state deployed 5000 new troops to a place called Chiapas. As qualitative asymmetries; there are some cultural differences between the people who live different parts of the country.

2.5. Different Perceptions of the Causes among the EZLN and Mexico State

EZLN is supporting about 10 million native people but the Mexican State is representing about 120 million people which are from sixty different cultures. For this reason, the Mexican State has responsibility to protect the rights of the whole citizens. If it gives immunity to a federal state, what will be the others? On the other hand, after the uprising became popular in international arena, the topic became more sensitive than before; because of that is the sides make wrong thing, the movement can transform as globally uprising movement to the neo-liberal economy or global capitalism.

The Zapatista National Liberation Army stands against one party rule of Mexico and the oppression that this reign has brought on people of Mexico. Zapatistas in Chiapas protested the poverty faced in Native Americans & other farmers. Indigenous peasants were also upset because of changes the government had made in land ownership laws. After the Mexican Revolution, the constitution granted land to people, no matter how poor they were. Now this right was being taken away. The Zapatista's say their enemies are the rich class and the state.

In the 'First Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle', Zapatista outlined their fundamental demands are explained as:

"To the people of Mexico: We — men and women, whole and free — are conscious that the war we have declared is a last — but just — resort. For many years, the dictators have been waging an undeclared genocidal war against our people. Therefore, we ask for your decided participation to support this plan by the Mexican people who struggle for work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace. We declare that we will not stop fighting until the basic demands of our people have been met, by forming a government for our country that is free and democratic." (Khasnabish, 2010: 112)

On the other hand, Zapatistas could not live their cultures for years. Also, they are excluded from the system with privatization and left to the poverty. New generations had forced to forget their languages, traditional attitudes, clothes etc. they found themselves in the space. For this reason, they want to participate to the system in the free conditions.

2.6. Current Behaviours of the Parties: Escalatory Conflict

It is difficult to say in today's context that the conflict situation will come back. In latest years, warm conflicts did not realized in the area. Even so, the both sides do not leave military precautions. Currently, Zapatista have about 60-70.000 guerrillas and the government holding the same number soldiers in the region. But, even so, there is no permanent solution to the problem. Besides, the conditions are matured to recognize the native people.

2.7. The Leaders of the Parties

Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos (he changed his name as Delegado Zero) is the current leader of Zapatista and Felipe Calderón the president of the United Mexican States. Some objectives of Marcus line these that creation of free and democratic atmosphere; end of nationalization and creation of large federation to recognize political, cultural and economic rights of the natives in the regions; to give some parts of the natural resources to these natives to establish their infrastructure; redesign of NAFTA, in the rural are the farmer's rights of work,

health, nutrition, education, home rights should be provided. Zapatista struggle was to reclaim dignity, hope and the possibility for a more just, free and democratic future. (Khasnabish, 2010: 199)

EZLN today represented 10 millions native people. Marcos's charismatic leadership played more important role in EZLN success. Marcos is the popular in international press, he make a press conference regularly with his mask.

"We don't want to impose our solutions by force; we want to create a democratic space. We don't see armed struggle in the classic sense of previous guerrilla wars that is as the only way and the only all-powerful truth around which everything is organized. In a war, the decisive thing is not the military confrontation but the politics at stake in the confrontation. We didn't go to war to kill or be killed. We went to war in order to be heard." (Gresh, 2009)

There are eleven points which Zapatista National Army focused on work, land, shelter, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace. On the contrary; Felipe Calderón *"attempts to create and train anti-Zapatista paramilitaries within the state by establishing various programs that can be tapped to yield land grants that often are in EZLN-occupied zones"*. (Cruz, November 20, 2008)

3. The Context: Global, Regional and State-Level Factors

3.1. At the State Level

In 1995, the government forces started the great attack to Zapatista and forced them to fall back upon Chipas Mountains. After that attack, mediators entered into situation and in April 1995, peace process started on the table. It continued 10 months, and EZLN and government bureaucrats created Congress Peace Commission (COCOPA) and they could met on some common demands. (Stephen and Collier, 2008) The sides agreed some principles on to recognize native people and their cultural rights.

San Andean Agreement was signed in 1996; it envisages reaching legal citizens status of native and indigenous peasants' tribes more than sixty in Mexico. Moreover this agreement included to protect and respect to local people's cultures, languages, traditions. Also, it included giving autonomy to local people in their own places. So, at the end of the peace process, EZLN save important prestige. But, San Andean Agreement could not perform. After that the two sides created study groups, to produce some legal decisions to make structural reform of the areas which is the local people live. But, the process a time later stopped.

The reason of the cutting the peace process is a Marxist organization's (EPR) military attitudes against the state. EPR has the radical leftist ideas and their main aim to come to power. For these reasons the government cut the process. In 1996 the process started again. The government did not accepted land reform, to recognize rights of cultural and democratic rights of indigenous people. After that the Zapatistas recognized to distribute their attack all around the country. The leader of Zapatistas Marcos punished at 1994 in an interview that: *"... We do not struggle to take power; we struggle for democracy, liberty, and justice. Our political proposal is the most radical in Mexico."* (Chiapas Revealed, 2001: 3)

Mexican government choose to find some support from other states to fight against this uprising. At the same time EZLN prepared an international conference in Chipas and it started a new process. The name of the conference was "First Continental Meeting against Neo-Liberalism". Artists, intellectuals, opposites etc. a lot of people accepted the conference from all over the world. These kinds of conference continued in different places like Europe, after this conference. With this struggle, they tried to find global support. At the end of the process they succeeded to take international support. This situation changed by the eighty-one years government in Mexico, and Vincent Fox from PAN came to power.

At that time EZLN decided great walking from Chipas Mountains to Mexico City. Marcos made a speech in the main area in front of the Presidential Palace in Zocalo in Mexico City: *"The President should recognize native people. I will not leave from the capital city until the draft accepted in the assembly. We are Zapatista and we will stay Zapatista. We are rebellions and we will stay rebellions."* (Lucero, 2008: 4) And the Zapatistas could not find their find the capital and turn back to the mountains. (ibid) Zapatistas stated what they want, it was clear that they want to be a part of the country with their specificity. They wanted to be governing by democratic, justice and freedom. Main objective was Democratic Republic which lies down constitutional equality.

In April, the draft accepted in the senate but Zapatista did not want this draft. It was very limited. Zapatista states that it was unacceptable. But, after that time there is no warfare between state soldiers and Zapatista guerrillas. And a rumour occurred that the Zapatista collapsed. But, on January 1, 2003, Marcos prepared a press conference and said that "EZLN will continue for the whole people in the world until to make honoured place in human life". Henceforth, the new creation occurred. Thirty eight autonomous municipalities have eighty villages and municipalities connected to Caracoles. So, in this form direct democracy performed. Also, the caracoles are also social centres, they included library, school, hospital, cultural centres etc. but in 2005 Marcos announced that they stopped the ceasefire because the pressures according to him. They decided to turn back to the forests and mountains. With these decisions these centres closed. Marcos announced that their activities will continue but secretly and mobile. And EZLN warned the international civil society organizations to withdrawn from the

region because of their own security.

3.2. At the Regional Level

Insecurity against present political systems paved the way to shaken political systems in Mexico. If we look at the Latin American countries, they are looking for a bomb which is ready to explosion. The most powerful guerrilla organizations staying in these countries and still warm conflicts continue in a lot of regions in the continent. With some differences they met under the same ideology, the opposition identity, they find great supports from the population in the continent.

3.3. At the global level

Many observers claim that Mexico is a satellite of the United States of America. For the continental security and to protect the stability of the United States related to events in the “back garden”. And, it is supporting the present oppressive governments. This region constitutes as an export market of the United States. Evidently, 80% of the foreign trade of Mexico is being realized to the United States. Consequently, an action against the interests of Mexico means against the United States.

Firstly, Mexico located between the South and Middle America. It has rich oil resources with Venezuela and Colombia, and may be an alternative oil resource to the Middle East. Moreover, Mexico is the most important oil producer country, outside of OPEC countries. The US realizes its 50% oil import from the continent of America, and 12% of it from Mexico. For these reason, Mexico sustain a very important position for industrialized countries, and primarily for the US. On the contrary, the great opposition against the current global economic system comes from Mexico. The US is supporting to Mexican government and military to pressure the uprising with the reason of narcotic trade. Possible spark can expand all middle and South America, and later the whole continent. Mexico can be a centre of the conflict.

Conclusion

To sum up; Zapatista movement have three affects on Mexico. First, it transferred national public movements to public place and provides international support. Secondly, in 2000, it paved the way the collapse of PRI party which was 70 years on the power, caused to democratization process. Thirdly, Zapatista movement changed the life of local populations in Chiapas and other places of the world, it became an example of how the local and regional participatory democracy works. Recently if the states do not take care the ethnic and cultural minorities there are the possibilities of the creation of movements like Zapatistas. This situation can be seen in Mexico which more than 60 cultures living within the country. The Zapatista movement is also collect the sympathy of world international society.

Zapatistas today become are seen as a symbol of the movement against globalization. The Zapatistas’ objective is not to come power; their main aim is to start a real democracy process not only in Chipas; in all around the country. Zapatistas do not want to change political system of their country; they are not against capitalism but its form of exercise. As a consequence, as Wallenstein (2002: 78) emphasises: “*Chiapas, Mexico, which erupted violently in 1994, is more a question of central government policy than an issue of autonomy for a poverty-stricken region.*” So, it can be claimed easily that to seize a need based conflict is needed more sophisticated conflict resolution attempts.

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