

Security and Reincorporation: Threats and Challenges

Two and a half years after the reincorporation of former FARC-EP members started in the Territorial Spaces of Territorial and Reincorporation (TSTRs), there are worrying signs that require the implementation of stronger security measures. Out of a total of more than 10,000 ex-combatants that were registered in 2017, today only 26% of them are in the TSTRs, while the rest have followed different reincorporation paths, including in New Regrouping Points (NRPs), located in rural areas with a strong presence of armed groups and illegal economies. The geographical dispersion of ex-combatants is the main challenge regarding security, due to a lack of a legal framework that allows the deployment of the armed forces outside the TSTRs. In this snapshot, we present the main threats, institutional actions, and challenges in terms of security that the reincorporation of former FARC members face.

Threats

In December 2019, the UN Mission in Colombia registered 77 deaths of former combatants during that year, which represented the most violent year since the peace accord was signed, with a total of 178 murders, around ten forced disappearances and thirty attempted murders. Of particular concern are the murders of Dimar Torres, in the Catatumbo region (Norte de Santander) by members of the Colombian Army in April 2019, and Alexander Parra who was murdered inside the security perimeter of the TSTR of Mesetas (Meta) in October of that year. These crimes diminish trust in armed forces and increase the feeling of insecurity among former combatants and local communities.



Following the murder of César Herrera in Ituango (Antioquia) in January 2020, former combatants who are in the reincorporation process have decided to leave the TSTR within two months. The misconception that those who leave the TSTRs go back to arms is distorting the public debate and putting at risk former combatants who remain committed to the peace agreement, despite the difficulties.

Institutional Actions

There has been progress in the institutional and normative framework, the creation of coordination and follow-up mechanisms, and in the deployment of protection schemes set out in the peace agreement. To date, the armed forces have maintained security in the surroundings of the TSTRs through the National Police, the Army's Joint Transitional Strategic Command, and the 'Blue Tent' meetings devised specifically for tackling security issues. According to the Special Investigation Unit reported, 80% of attacks against ex-combatants are linked to criminal organisations. Despite progress being made, with 21 cases receiving sentences and a further 13 at trial, difficulties persist in dismantling the structures behind the murders: only 9 out of the 67 suspects that have been detained are the instigators of attacks. Most of the murders have been attributed to the Gulf Clan, ELN, EPL, and FARC dissident groups. However, the motives of the murders remain unclear and it would be a mistake to make illegal armed actors the only explanation. As pointed out by the Ideas for Peace Foundation, these murders must be read in a broader context in which vacuums of regulation, illegal economies, and the State's lack of capacity to provide security and justice across the country, all converge.

The Colombian Ministry of Defence has stated that it will continue to provide security for the TSTRs. Nevertheless, it is equally important to bring security to the NRPs and other areas with even more precarious conditions, applying existing mechanisms, as well as non-military measures.



Challenges

The criminal organisations that have been identified as the main aggressors towards former FARC combatants must be dismantled. This requires a change of approach towards security efforts in the most affected areas, going beyond reactive measures and focusing on local capacity building and community reincorporation. The insecurity felt by former combatants cannot be separated from the dynamics of violence and criminal activities that also affect the rest of the population.

Embrace Dialogue recognises progress in specific cases, but there is much more to be done to investigate the motives behind these killings and those who are ultimately responsible for them. Security for former combatants must be approached from a local perspective that considers political and socioeconomic issues.

