Constructing a comprehensive security architecture: Pathways towards effective implementation of the new security policy in Colombia

Introduction

The change of government in Colombia, in August 2022, has sparked a public, academic, and technical debate regarding the formulation and implementation of a new security policy in the country. In May 2023, nine months after the change of government, the Colombian Ministry of Defence presented its new security policy that aims to make reality the principles of what the current administration of Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez, in their governance plan "Colombia World Power of Life", refers to as "a new policy paradigm centred around human security and total peace".

Based on the findings from a cross-stakeholder forum run by the CONPEACE initiative on 29 November 2022 with various stakeholders, this policy brief outlines various pathways identified by government actors, the international community, civil society, and academia to ensure Colombia can make advancements in the effective implementation of this new policy and construct the foundations for reform towards a people centred security architecture.

People-centred security
The approach to security that takes into account the daily experiences and perceptions of individuals and communities.

Key implications:

- For the implementation of a new people-centred security policy, the government should <u>take advantage of existing policy instruments</u>, normative designs and programmes that have yet to be put into effect to be able to act in an effective way to respond to the changing security panorama.

- The government, for example, should prioritise <u>the strengthening of already designed mechanisms for the collective protection of leaders</u> with a differential and intersectional approach. This implies, for example, supporting the institutionalization of instruments and programmes from and for indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.

- Ensuring the sustainability and materialization of the security guarantees provided for in the Final Peace Agreement of 2016 is key to the new security policy. The Colombian government, through its Ministry of Defence and the Security forces, must move towards <u>tailoring and localization when implementing the new security policy</u>, respecting territorial and community perspectives that lead to a coupling with the implementation of the Final Peace Agreement.

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- The new public policy context should be used to open an inclusive <u>social dialogue</u> that goes beyond the debate of the reform of security sector institutions and that recognizes citizen organization and civil society participation as an essential part of the design of a new, people-centred security architecture.

The CONPEACE cross-stakeholder forum

During a confidential, face-to-face forum held on 29 November 2022, issues related to the effective, sustainable and coordinated implementation of a people-centred security policy were addressed, from a regional, territorial, and differential perspective. The CONPEACE methodology consists of three steps. First, it facilitates dialogue between the different sectors to increase understanding of the security challenges in Colombia and its neighbouring countries in the current global context. Secondly, it recognizes the advances in the mitigation of adverse effects; and thirdly, it works to reach a consensus on the courses of action that define a road map towards an effective and inclusive public security policy. The forum was attended by 28 participants, including 10 women, representing various sectors: Colombian State institutions and government agencies, the international community, including UN and OAS agencies and missions, as well as various representatives of the academic world and the local civil society, including representatives of Afro-Colombian and black communities, indigenous peoples, and peasant communities.

CONPEACE Cross-Stakeholder Forum: Findings

1. Take advantage of existing policy instruments to act on the diagnosis of a changing security landscape.

The current political context in Colombia allows us to move from diagnosis to action, through the implementation of those existing instruments at the regulatory level and sectoral public policy efforts for peace, security, and development that may have a positive impact on the advancement of security with a focus on people, framed in the concepts of human security and total peace that underpin the government's program.

There is a consensus among various stakeholders in Colombia, including the international community, state actors, and civil society, that there is a broad and comprehensive diagnosis of the changing security landscape in the country. In fact, it is even possible to speak in Colombia of the existence of an over-diagnosis of the causes and dynamics that have an impact on people's security at the local level.

Some of the factors identified as part of this changing security panorama in the country over recent years include an increase in regionalized dynamics of violence, a correspondence at the local level of violence with illegal economies, as well as the fragmentation and the fragile alliances of the armed actors in the territories in conflict. In the first 4 months of 2023, 58 social leaders and 11 signatories to the peace agreement were assassinated (INDEPAZ 2023).

According to the latest OCHA report (March 2023), between January and February alone, seven thousand people were victims of forced displacement and more than twelve thousand people were victims of confinement.

Structurally, factors persist that make the security landscape more complex, such as citizen distrust in institutions, and in particular towards the public forces, the stigmatization of sectors of the population, particularly ethnic and marginalized communities, and the lack of more multisectoral and the effective participation of civil society (including women and ethnic communities).

Facing this changing security landscape requires the recognition of successful experiences that have occurred in the past at the level of existing public policy instruments. Civil and security institutions, with the support of civil society and the international community, can build on what has been built, especially in terms of the implementation of normative instruments for peace, security, and development that already exist, which are recognized by both local and international actors, and that go hand in hand for the effective implementation of a people-centred policy.

The current government of Colombia, in its recent effort to formulate and implement a public policy for "human security" and "total peace", must recognize that there are already important advances in the discussion of peace, security and development that date back to 2016, including: the provisions of the Final Peace Agreement itself regarding the security guarantees (point 3 of the agreement) or thel safeguards for minorities included in the ethnic chapter; the various tools to promote and strengthen collective protection mechanisms at the ethnic level (Decree 660 of 2018; see CONPEACE 2022).

Likewise, it must be built on policy guidelines prior to the peace deal and that have not been implemented and that help to develop a security policy centred on people, such as the strengthening of self-government and community life plans, and on the other hand, incorporate the successes of the various processes of institutional transformation, professionalization and doctrinal renewal of the military and police forces, which tried to advance but without success as a result of resistance to change and the militarization of security in recent years. The implementation of these instruments is essential to create trust and strengthen bridges between society and the Public Force (police & military) and advance in guaranteeing the life and dignity of the civilian population.

Apart from the reconfiguration of violence, several recent crises have shown the importance of people-centred security, particularly the Venezuelan migratory wave with more than 2.48 million migrants and refugees of that nationality in Colombia as of May 2023 (R4V 2023). Issues such as migration and health, therefore, must be a constitutive part of the paradigm shift proposed by the new administration focused on human security and "total peace". Re-thinking security for all citizens also includes the perspectives of people who are in the country with migrant or refugee status. In this context, regulatory advances and public policy instruments and international cooperation in recent years aimed at seeking a comprehensive response to the migration problem should be used to address the cross-border dynamics of (in)security.

2. Connect the new security policy with the comprehensive implementation of the Final Peace Agreement

To date, the lack of progress in the comprehensive implementation of the Final Peace Agreement has implied a great debt in relation to the progress of the Security Guarantees Commission, the guarantees for the protection of social leaders, and the commitments agreed between the parties for the dismantling of high-impact criminal organizations that are heirs to paramilitaries.

The lack of progress in the implementation of the Agreement since its signing, including the respective guarantees of security and non-repetition, has implied serious challenges that have become more acute in the context of a changing security landscape. On the one hand, serious risks for the signatory ex-combatants in the context of the reconfiguration of the armed actors, which affects the very sustainability of the reincorporation process, while at the same time undermining the confidence of the populations most affected by the conflict. For the civilian population, the reconfiguration of violence has meant a lack of guarantees in reparation processes and a loss of confidence in territorial transformation programmes such as the Development Plans with a Territorial Focus (PDET) and the substitution of illicit crops (PNIS).

The new security policy with its people-centred approach must, then, go through its effective implementation to regain the trust of the populations in areas that benefit most from the provisions of territorial peace and that are the focus of the Peace Agreement; including the universe of victims of the conflict, but above all in those more marginalized rural areas where there is a new re-victimization caused by the continuity of the conflict.

"In this country we have to get used to the fact that the more we talk, the less we kill each other; the more we are in a dialogue, the more we understand each other; The more we understand each other, the more security we will have between each other, and that happens because we generate trust in what the other thinks and respect in what the other believes and says."

(participant in the CONPEACE cross-stakeholder forum)

For its effective implementation, coupled with the Final Peace Agreement, the security policy must also advance the guarantees for women of ethnic communities under the safeguards established in the ethnic and gender chapter of the Agreement, as well as the signatory ex-combatants. This coupling must be the parameter of the action of the Security forces as a guarantee of the rights and protection of the civilian population with a differential and intersectional approach.

3. Open the social dialogue on the reform of the security architecture in the country.

The current changing landscape of (in)security requires rethinking, among other key issues, the security architecture in Colombia so that it attends to and protects all people. The country already has extensive experience in the process of transforming the security architecture, so it is necessary to analyse the positive aspects of these processes to prevent the debate from starting from scratch.

The Colombian National Police is, since 2021, in a transformation process, and the Army since 2017 has a new doctrine ('Damascus') that aims to face multidimensional security challenges.

Colombia also seeks to play a more central role at both the regional and global levels – for example, being a NATO global partner since 2017 and an 'exporter' of police and military strategies and tactics in the Global South.

Security is more than the effective territorial control of the state. Any security analysis and policy must include several types of 'architects': civil society, the international community, academia, the private sector, and government. It is necessary to analyse in detail the roles and missions of the Security forces and develop ways to promote security centred on people from the regional and territorial scope with a differential and intersectional approach.

"So [we must] look at what things have helped us, what things also put social leaders at risk and analyse from different approaches or from different points of view what security is for people in the territories. Let's not start creating from the top down again, but let's review what things we were doing in the territories to be able to implement and be clear about the policy that we plan to reformulate."

(participant in the CONPEACE cross-stakeholder forum)

Citizen culture is important to co-construct people-centred security, including "the justices of the peace, the community action board". In general, the opinion that "there should be other instances before going to the police" was also received positively by forum participants. Regarding the expectation that the police will deal with minor crimes, for example, one conclusion of the forum is that this absorbs many of the police resources that could be invested in more urgent tasks to face the complex challenges of the country's changing security landscape.

The need to strengthen local and regional institutions, such as indigenous self-government, in recognition of the diversity of the country, was also highlighted: "If that is achieved at some point, it will also move towards a State that is recognized as multicultural, a social State of law that allows this recognition, not to speak of a homogeneous nation, but one that is diverse and has different views, ways of life, cultural ways, and that is where we start talking about recognition and self-recognition." It is also key to go beyond the debate to think about how to improve the trust between citizens and state entities that tends to be dominant in the security debate. It was highlighted, for example, that it is also key to recognize that the Public Force "has always been present in each territory, and it has had negative dimensions for the most part and positive ones for some."

To get out of this situation, in which the presence of the State is perceived as repressive by some parts of Colombian society, it is necessary to go beyond the institutional reform of the security sector and gradually recognize citizen organization and the significant participation of the Colombian society both in the design and implementation of security policies as its pillars.

"That is precisely where… I insist that this discussion on the reform of the security sector should be made much more public, because not only the design of a policy, but also how we guarantee a good government, of the security sector; how can we guarantee that there is more oversight, that we know more about those decisions that are made in budgetary terms"

(participant to the CONPEACE inter-agency forum)

4. Strengthen civil society initiatives, particularly those with a differential and intersectional approach.

The implementation of the new security policy must begin with the people, that is, with the experiences and knowledge of the people. Likewise, in the context of a changing security landscape, another path should be the strengthening of a general framework for civil society participation with a differential and intersectional approach that respects the ethnic plurality and territorial variation of the country.

The new context of public policy that the government has promoted must be aimed at strengthening the autonomous identity and cultural self-protection mechanisms such as the indigenous guards and the *guardias cimarronas*. The international community is supporting programmes and initiatives to strengthen self-protection, sometimes in combination with the implementation of the ethnic chapter, and helping to strengthen the indigenous and *cimarrona* guards, the implementation of territorial guarantees boards, and security plans. However, these mechanisms are not yet having the expected impact as highlighted by a participant from an international organization.

To conclude, the participants call for the strengthening of the territorial levels in the implementation of the policy and the creation of institutionalized participation mechanisms so that civil society can be a "co-creator", as one participant in the event put it, in a security policy focused on people, and that allows specifying the desired paradigm shift towards human security and total peace promoted by the current administration.

"If today the Black and indigenous communities … are reactivating their historical self-protection mechanisms: Beware, we are never talking about self-defence! We are talking about autonomous identity and cultural self-protection mechanisms such as the guards, it is because the strategies and mechanisms that the state has historically offered these communities, over the last 50 years, are mechanisms that have left us unprotected"

(participant in the CONPEACE cross-stakeholder forum)

CONPEACE
From conflict actors to architects of peace

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The University of Oxford's Global Security Program is an interdisciplinary programme producing innovative academic research on global security in the contemporary world. With the purpose of highlighting the dynamic interactions between the political, economic and social dimensions of global security, our research demonstrates the connections between local insecurities and global changes in power and order.

Based at the University of Oxford's Global Security Programme, the CONPEACE Initiative focuses on changing security landscapes in marginalized spaces, especially border regions during transitions from war to peace. Founded and directed by Professor Annette Idler, CONPEACE's interdisciplinary research bridges the gap between marginalized communities and centers of political power, using a bottom-up methodology based on intensive fieldwork, non-state order frameworks, and regular forums between interested parties.