IN DEPTH

Peace infrastructures

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Those of us who dedicate ourselves to peacebuilding could learn a lot from the military. The armed forces represent one of the most complex and organized systems in many countries. In Columbia their purpose is to defend sovereignty, independence, the integrity of the national territory and the constitutional order.[1] They have developed various means to fulfil this purpose, taking the form of a security support infrastructure. Under the direction of the President of Colombia and with the support of the Commander General of the Military Forces, the armed forces represent a complex and interdependent system of institutions, resources, values and skills. They are composed of three forces- the Army, Navy, and Air Force- from which a wide array of associated institutions are deployed: general headquarters, directorates, military units (divisions, brigades, joint commands, etc.), military preparatory and training schools, media, etc. They also have important resources in the form of personnel, buildings, quarters, recreational centres, administrative bodies, hospitals, weapons systems, and others. This institutional framework is supported by a series of military values (principles, mandates, hierarchies, command lines), policies (strategies, directives, plans, orders), control mechanisms (military justice) and mechanisms for quality management. They even have an assigned budget, which represented approximately 3.28% of Colombian GDP for the year 2012.[2]

In the Colombian context, there is no doubt regarding the role played by the Armed Forces within the state for the consolidation of peace. But does Colombia have at its disposal a complex and interdependent system of institutions, resources, values, strategies and abilities to bring about a sustainable peace? In this article we present some ideas about the institutional structures Colombia requires to build peace.

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The concept of “peace infrastructures” has been developed in recent years based on the experience of more than 30 countries that have been able to transition from war to peace (South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Nicaragua, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan and the Philippines, among others).[3] In accordance with the UNDP, an infrastructure for peace is *a network of interdependent systems, institutions, resources, values and skills held by the government, civil society and communities which promotes dialogue and consultation, prevents conflicts and enables peaceful mediation when violence occurs in a society.*[4] It is made up of a group of actors and organizations with a formal mandate, as well as the necessary means for peacebuilding.

The importance of this approach consists in the clear understanding that peacebuilding is a fundamental responsibility of all Colombians. An endogenous process of transformation and innovation, to be sustainable and resilient, can only emerge from the people, communities and institutions of the country, including the poorest and most excluded, victims, women, young people, ethnic populations, the actors in the conflict and others.[5] The approach must be innovative in terms of the institutional development of the country, creating a transitional infrastructure in support of peacebuilding.

This understanding of peacebuilding is not necessarily contrary to that which was reflected in the agreement that opened up the current process of dialogue between the National Government and the FARC, as well as in the partial agreements which have been reached so far.[6] These agreements state that peacebuilding is the responsibility of all Colombians, and they prescribe certain ideas about institutions to help make the transition from the end of conflict to peace (for example, the creation of a National Committee for Reconciliation and Coexistence is mentioned, as are Regional

Committees).

“ An infrastructure for peace is one of the main ways to ensure that peace does not turn into a new battleground, but rather the ground for dialogue for the non-violent management and transformation of conflicts. ”

What characteristics could an infrastructure for peace have in Colombia? How can we combine what is agreed upon in an eventual peace agreement with the wealth of initiatives and institutional and community experiences Colombia already has? We will present some ideas in the following section.

– A peace infrastructure on the national level takes the form of a system of governance for peace. In some countries, such as Nepal, this has been through a Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation, which has provided strategic direction to the process. This Ministry also has a secretariat in charge of coordinating and assisting the entire institutional framework of support for the implementation of the peace agreements. For the development of this system of government for peace, there could be, in addition, a series of supporting institutions to enrich the peace infrastructure: research institutes, a roster of experts for strengthening institutions, in particular, city halls and local entities, or to facilitate conflict mediation, centres for historical memory and reconciliation, and peace houses, among other possibilities.

– A peace infrastructure on the regional level takes the form of a point of contact between the national and the local: An arena for action where national policies and programmes can be put into the context of the local level, including an eventual peace agreement. It must also coordinate between the local and national levels so that local proposals are taken into account in the dynamics of peacebuilding defined at the national level.[7] The regional level is strategic because it is the ideal space to coordinate key actors or to replicate peace initiatives that have been successful on a larger scale.

In Colombia, proposals such as the Programmes for Development and Peace have been playing this role for many years.

– A peace infrastructure on the local level takes the form of formal spaces for citizen participation (Local Peace Committees or the like) through which open dialogue can be fostered to nurture and enrich the implementation of the peace agreement. The local is fundamental as it is where people have most suffered violence, and where the success or defeat of peace will be defined. On this level, peace means improving the living conditions of those who are the most vulnerable – including the victims – in particular, their real access to health, education, land, participation, culture, public safety, etc.

– Internationally, a peace infrastructure takes the form of strategies to support peacebuilding in Colombia that promote initiatives articulated with and complementary to national and local dynamics. Instruments such as basket funds, international cooperation strategies to support peace and joint programs can be fundamental to achieve strategic, sustained and comprehensive international backing that does not turn into thousands of small isolated and de-contextualized projects.

A peace infrastructure, in short, is one of the main ways to ensure that peace does not turn into a new battleground, but rather grounds for dialogue over the non-violent management and transformation of conflicts, which is, without a doubt, what will bring about a process of transition from armed conflict to peace. The objective of a peace infrastructure is to accompany this building process. It is a key factor in generating a sustainable peace. It is not an end in itself. It is an institutional commitment to facilitate a process of change from war to peace. Its ultimate goal must be to build and consolidate a legitimate state – in the eyes of the population of Bogota or in the eyes of the population that lives in the most remote hamlet of Iscuandé, Nariño- A state which is not a part of the conflict, but instead, the main mechanism for the non-violent regulation and transformation of conflicts, and the guarantor of human rights.

1. Article 217 of the Constitution of Colombia of 1991.

2. Data from *"The World Factbook"* of the US *Central Intelligence Agency.*

3. Some important documents on the subject:
– Odendaal, Andries (2013) *A Crucial Link: Local Peace Committees and National Peacebuilding.* Washington: USIP
– *Special Issue: Infrastructures for Peace.* Vol. 7. Issue 3. 2012. Journal of Peacebuilding & Development.
– Barbara Unger et al. (eds.) (2012) *Peace Infrastructures – Assessing Concept and Practice.* Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series No. 10. Berlin: Berghof Foundation.

4. Ryan, Jordan (2012) *Infrastructures for Peace as a Path to Resilient Societies. An Institucional Perspective.* En Journal of Peacebuilding & Development. Vol. 7. No 3. p.15.

5. Clark, Helen. 2012, '*Putting Resilience at the Heart of the Development Agenda*', speech given at the University of Cambridge, 16 April 2012.

6. The main documents up until now on the process of dialogue between the Government and the FARC EP can be found in the this link. These represent partial agreements subject to the principle that nothing is agreed upon until everything is agreed upon.

7. Paladini Adell, Borja (2012) *From Peacebuilding and Human Development Coalitions to Peace Infrastructure in Colombia.* In Barbara Unger et al. (eds.). Op.Cit Peace Infrastructures – Assessing Concept and Practice. Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series No. 10. Berlin: Berghof Foundation.

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