Berghof Foundation

Managing Political Transformation and Security Transition Processes

A Strategic Framework

About this paper

This strategic framework was developed based on the 10th Annual Meeting on Negotiations entitled 'Security Transition and Political Transformation' held in San Sebastian, Spain, in October 2018. It provides an overview of the most frequent challenges resistance and liberation movements (RLMs) face with regard to transition processes and ways to address such challenges. While in no way exhaustive, we hope that our readers find this overview useful both for reflection and for enhancing their own negotiation strategies.

Security Transition and Political Transformation: When, why and how?

The dynamic transitions of RLMs between armed struggle and non-violent political action are driven primarily by their decisions to shift and reconsider their overarching goals, ideology, strategies, tactics and the realities on the ground. There are many different pathways for political transition and security transformation, and each option has to be specifically tailored to each case and circumstance. Managing the transformation processes presents a number of challenges that require serious introspection and cohesion within the movement. To provide insights on the transformation and transition processes, this strategic framework seeks to answer the following questions:

- What is political transformation and security transition?
- What are the main challenges faced by RLMs for security transition and political transformation?
- How can RLMs best manage such transition processes?

About our strategic frameworks

As one major output of our Annual Meetings on Negotiations, our strategic frameworks are practical tools providing a structured and comprehensive overview of different themes relating to political negotiations. These papers are based on the input and discussion among all participants in the meetings and are enriched through additional desk research and literature reviews. Recognising that each conflict scenario and negotiation situation is unique, the aim of these frameworks is not to provide a blueprint solution but to present ideas and lessons learned from different international contexts that may be helpful for developing authentic case-by-case approaches to the challenges of negotiation.

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1. Security Transition and Political Transformation: Key dimensions

Security transition and political transformation are not linear processes in which an RLM moves "from...to..." but describe the complex interplay between violent and non-violent strategies. At times, both violent and non-violent strategies are used in pursuit of political goals. 'Transformation' and 'transition' (terms we use interchangeably here) describe the process that leads to a prioritisation of the non-violent strategies until they become the exclusive method of political engagement.

Political transformation	Political transformation describes a process that enables an RLM to engage effectively and sustainably in the political arena – a process that research has indicated to be one of the essential factors for sustainable peacebuilding. The possibility for RLMs to express themselves and have an impact on political governance in a post-war setting reduces the likelihood that their members will return to violence. The prerequisite for a successful transformation is the opening up of political space for RLMs to enter the electoral arena – for example through electoral reforms or power-sharing provisions as part of a peace process and its subsequent implementation. But political transformation is more diverse than the conversion from "bullets to ballots": it also includes various forms of political and social engagement through social movements or ex-combatant associations, etc. Political transformation can be a component of negotiated agreements, but can also take place as a unilateral strategy before, during or after peace processes. It requires efforts to build up civilian capacities and structures. A transition into a political party or social movement can ensure the RLM's continuing existence after a peace agreement and is a requisite for long-term acquisition and consolidation of political power.
Security transition	Security transition is a correlate to political transformation: by "taking arms out of the equation" in RLMs' strategies, it enables them to move forward politically. Security transitions encompass reciprocal measures by RLMs (conventionally called DDR) and by the state (SSR). Together, SSR and DDR can function as mutually supportive processes of state-building, whereby the state consolidates its legitimate power by (re-)establishing a monopoly over the use of force and restructuring its security sector, while RLMs reduce their military power but acquire democratic political leverage. [For a more detailed analysis of DDR and SSR from the perspective of RLMs, see our previous Strategic Framework: Security Arrangements Before, During and After Negotiations, 2013].
	≡ DDR: The decommissioning of weapons, the demobilisation or dismantling of combatant structures, and the socio-economic rehabilitation and reintegration of fighters is a complex and sensitive process for RLMs because it targets their main source of power and leverage at peace negotiations. Security transitions also include additional confidence-building measures such as ceasefire agreements and release of political prisoners. The choice of terminology can be a contentious matter, as RLMs at times reject, for example, the label 'reintegration', arguing that their fighters never 'left' the social sphere; alternative terms and approaches have thus been introduced in various peace accords to address the parties' sensitivities and the specific context. The concept of DDR follows a humanitarian logic, is usually designed as a short-term process, and is often well funded when implemented in the context of an international (e.g. UN) mission.
	≡ SSR: Security sector reform could be described as "DDR for states". SSR is a highly political process as it affects core competencies of the state. It encompasses the restructuring of the security apparatus, e.g. by downsizing, democratising and depoliticising the military, police and intelligence services, incorporating RLM ex-combatants, and providing responsive security governance under civilian oversight. SSR typically follows a development logic and is understood as a long-term, sovereign process led by national authorities; it therefore receives little international funding or support, often limited to technical (e.g. 'train and equip') assistance.

2. Challenges for political and security transformation

☰ **Discrepancies between state and RLM priorities**

One challenge relating to the transformation of RLMs in a peace process is the mismatch between their own logic, understanding and priorities, and those of (incumbent) state actors.

State	Mismatch	RLM
» Negative peace (absence of violence) through ceasefires and DDR is sufficient as a direct peace dividend because it directly increases stabilisation and citizens' security	**Peace dividends**	» Positive peace (by addressing direct and structural violence) needs to be attainable through peace negotiations, so the root causes of the conflict need to be addressed to show a peace dividend to its constituency
» Prefer the peace negotiations to result in incremental change within the existing constitution and state structure	**Depth of change as result of negotiations**	» Prefer peace negotiations to result in a trans-formation of the existing constitutional framework and state structure
» Need to be re-elected; » Elections can bring leadership change entailing a loss of knowledge of the peace process, lack of willingness to negotiate, or lack of commitment to implement agreed reforms	**Internal political priorities**	» Need to build socio-political capacities to 'survive the peace' and exert power beyond demobilisation and decommissioning » Need to show political success to maintain coherence and internal legitimacy
➡ **DDR first, negotiate structural change later**	**Timing**	➡ **Negotiate structural change first, DDR comes later**

☰ **Embedded asymmetry**

The timing of security transition is often understood as a sequenced process whereby DDR usually comes before SSR. This embedded asymmetry promotes the perception of a biased, state-centred and unbalanced peace process, determining 'winners and losers' (Van Dyck 2016). The imbalance pertains to two central challenges:

» **Loss of power source:** The RLM faces the risk of becoming de-capacitated by the DDR process before achieving its goals if the political transition is delayed or blocked (e.g. elite resistance, electoral setbacks) and the RLM finds itself with neither military capacity (hard power) nor political power (soft power).

» **SSR might never be completed:** Implementation of the state's security reform can be a slow process if there is a lack of political will, or if the RLM cannot muster enough political leverage or international support to enforce compliance by the government. Incomplete SSR can betray the promise of the peace agreement as the state does not increase its legitimacy to represent and protect all civilians equally.

☰ **Changing the perception of security transition as a technical endeavour**

International agencies tend to perceive security transitions as purely technical processes; in reality, however, they have highly political ramifications for the peace negotiation as a whole, but especially for the RLM, as it needs to manage its own reconversion while maintaining coherence and internal legitimacy. There is a lack of recognition and knowledge of RLMs' perspectives and perceptions of these dilemmas during transition.

☰ **Steering the process**

For processes of political and security transition, RLM leadership is essential to maintain internal coherence. Organisational structures, hierarchies and decision-making mechanisms need to be adapted to the new realities of the political terrain (e.g. as a political party) while maintaining an efficient leadership. Knowledge, planning and preparation for the challenges ahead, and strategies to steer transformation processes, are essential.

☰ **Keeping the momentum and spoiler management**

Keeping the momentum during transition and managing (potential) internal or external spoilers can be challenging when the pace of change slows down and the process becomes stuck, or when diverse constituencies must be integrated and their different needs addressed – from former fighters and underground militants to civilian allies (e.g. social activists), emerging politicians, new supporters and broader audiences.

☰ **Legal impediments**

At times, efforts to set up civilian structures are disrupted by legal impediments (bans, proscription) and criminalisation efforts by the government. This can challenge the political transformation process, as RLMs need sufficient space and time to develop civilian structures and interact with society. Safety provisions and institutional guarantees for political participation should be covered in the peace negotiations; however, ensuring the government's adherence to its promises can be difficult.

☰ **Adopting and cultivating a new political culture**

Another challenge specific to RLMs is the need to build and maintain a new internal culture that reflects the needs of a democratic political party. The new rules and norms of decision-making must promote open discussions and participatory processes as necessary steps for internal consensus-building and for political efficacy in the governance system. This can require new forms of communication, changes in leadership styles, leadership renewal, and new approaches to assert power and compliance throughout the hierarchy.

3. Implications for the negotiation agenda: Options for designing a more balanced security and political transition process

A holistic approach to RLMs' transformation during peace processes is based on the premise that political and security transitions are, intrinsically, mutually dependent and hence need to be designed and implemented in a parallel and reciprocal fashion.

≡ **Combining security and political transformation: transforming the sources of power and legitimacy**

From the perspective of an RLM, a combined political and security transformation entails a process of building up, developing or consolidating the political capacities of the organisation, as a party or social movement at the same time as dismantling its security apparatus. This combined process aims to shift the locus or centre of gravity of power from military force (weapons) to political engagement. This transition of power enables RLMs to take advantage of the peace process to convert one form of power for another while continuing to pursue their historical goals non-violently in the democratic political sphere ('same path, new shoes'). This approach helps RLMs avoid the risk of finding themselves in a 'no power zone' of having lost their military leverage while lacking the necessary space and scope to develop political capital.
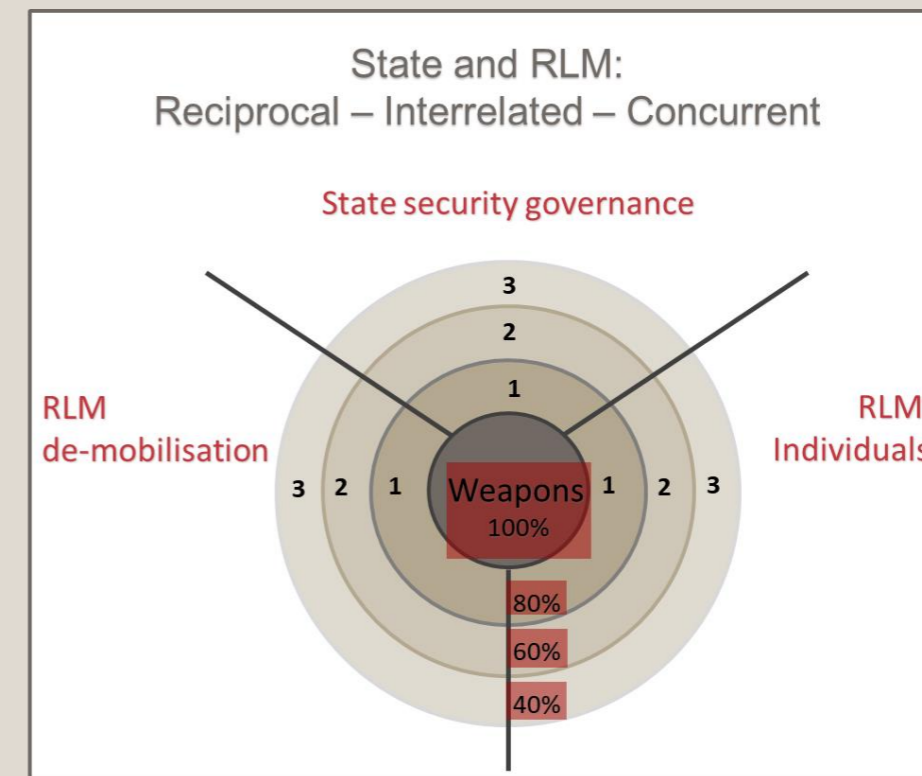

RLM focus: power transition
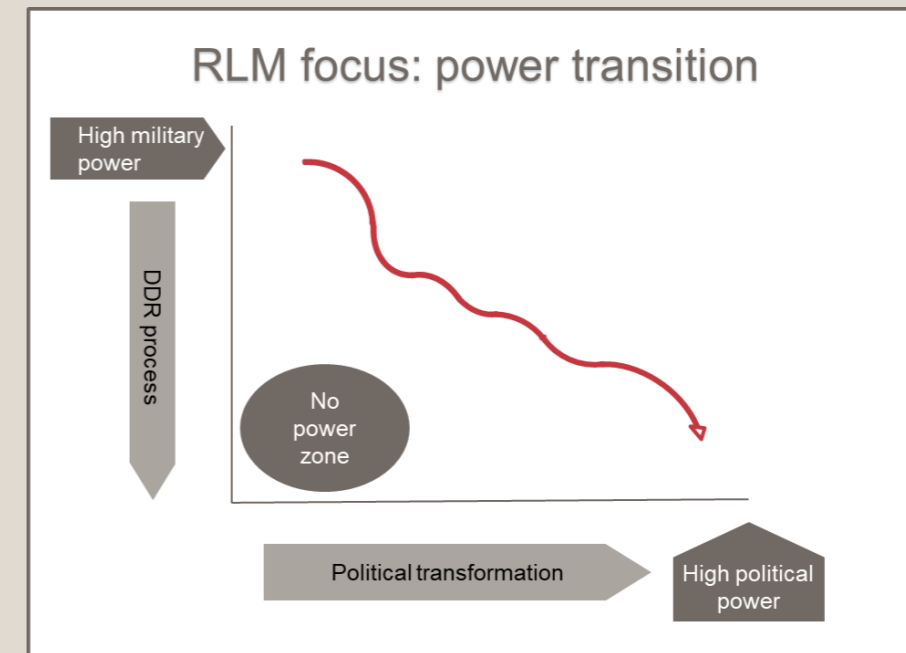
With regard to the state, a holistic approach combining DDR and SSR can also be visualised as a tit-for-tat process: peace agreements enable post-war governments, including their security apparatus, to become perceived as legitimate and democratic by the population (through SSR and structural reforms), while asserting their monopoly over the coercive use of force and hence presenting themselves as the sole security provider for all citizens (through DDR).
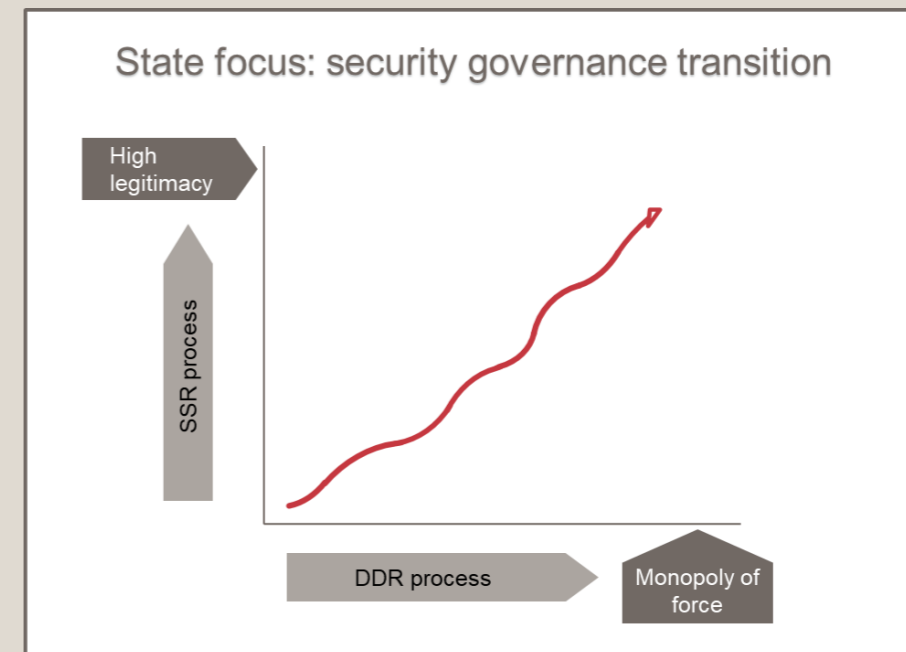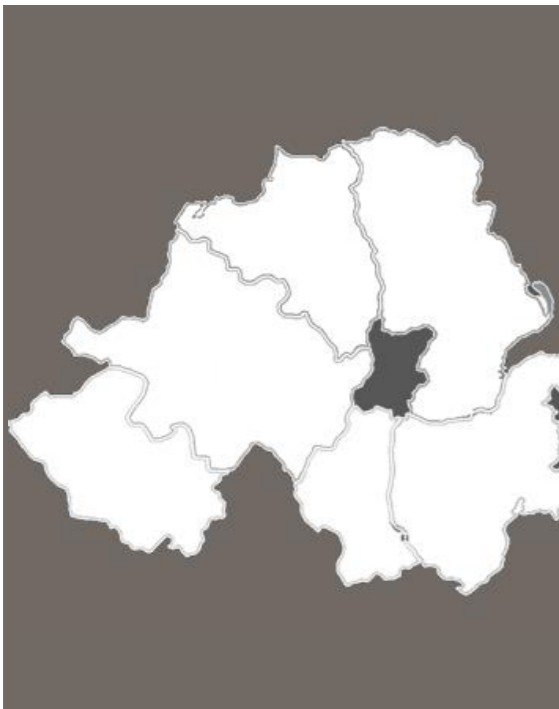

State focus: security governance transition

When linking political and security transitions, benchmarks can help build credible commitment by both sides and balance the timing and sequencing of DDR, SSR and political reconversion. A diagram designed by Mark Knight (2018) visualises the parallel implementation of four inter-related and concurrent components of security and political transition: weapons (decommissioning), individuals (reincorporation of fighters into society), organisation (RLM demobilisation and party formation) and state security (SSR). This model underlines a transactional approach to post-war transition whereby RLMs progressively relinquish their military capacity in parallel to acquiring political capacity and receiving assurances that the state is adopting and implementing a new, legitimate and inclusive national security strategy.

State and RLM:
Reciprocal – Interrelated – Concurrent

State security governance

3
2
1

RLM de-mobilisation   RLM Individuals

3 2 1   **Weapons 100%**   1 2 3

80%
60%
40%

Example: Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) realised that it was caught in a military stalemate and there would be no possible military solution to the political conflict. The IRA conducted intensive negotiations with its own base during the peace process, and negotiated with the British Government through the nationalist political party Sinn Féin. Within the framework of the peace process and its formalisation in the 1997 Good Friday Agreement, the IRA accepted a power-sharing model and Sinn Féin as the exclusive body representing the nationalist cause. The IRA itself was directly engaged only in the decommissioning process. The trust-building quid pro quo process was supported by an Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD), which functioned as the recipient of the IRA's weapons. Two (formerly) high-ranking church officials were invited to accompany and witness the process of destruction of IRA weapons. The security transition was implemented reciprocally and in parallel to other commitments defined in the Good Friday Agreement, such as police reform, while Sinn Féin consolidated its political capacity by taking part in local and national elections and Northern Irish power-sharing institutions.

A unilateral strategy might be applied when deemed beneficial in the absence of negotiated settlements: unilateral moves can strengthen the position of RLMs and bring them closer to their political goals, as they can thus build trust and increase support among their own people and within the international community and promote greater understanding for their cause. Unilateral action can be useful when governments are not ready or willing to engage in peace negotiations, but unilateral steps can also be undertaken as part of a peace process. Ceasefires are often declared unilaterally to encourage progress and build trust in RLMs' capacity to commit their members to non-violent behaviour, but as outlined in the example of the Basque Country below, even a more comprehensive DDR process can be handled unilaterally.

In most cases, the international community has a crucial role to play in supporting, legitimising, securing and monitoring disarmament processes. But decommissioning (by putting arms out of operational use) is most effective when it results from a voluntary process, with the armed organisation and the community being in the driving seat (in terms of implementation and oversight, respectively). When RLMs engage in a process of self-led decommissioning, transparency and public communication about the shift of strategy can help to demonstrate their genuine decision to pursue non-violent politics, sending a powerful and dignifying message that puts RLM in a strong position and avoids the impression of surrendering.

Example: Basque Country

Starting in 2011, the Basque independence movement progressively came to the realisation that in the absence of any political will for a negotiated settlement on the part of the Spanish government, it needed to create an alternative pathway to peace. The Basque public was strongly opposed to violence, and so the leaders of the Basque armed group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) realised that armed struggle was not sustainable and that a transition to a non-violent strategy would better serve their agenda in their pursuit of an independent Basque state. Accordingly, ETA first announced a unilateral and permanent ceasefire in 2011, followed by a declaration of cessation of armed activity. An unofficial International Contact Group (ICG) of respected international figures promoted the establishment of an International Verification Commission (IVC) to monitor the ceasefire and later also the decommissioning and disarmament of ETA. Against resistance from the Spanish government, the IVC proceeded and eventually completed the inventory and sealing of ETA's arsenals. The Spanish government blocked any further disarmament of the sealed weapons, insisting on an official 'surrender' by ETA. Yet ETA managed to maintain coherence and in 2014 announced the dismantling of its logistics and operational structures.

Meanwhile, civil society organised around a common platform, the Social Forum, which promoted ETA's disarmament along with the resolution of all 'consequences of the conflict' (e.g. transitional justice and human rights), and included a wide range of Basque social actors in the discussion of options to continue the stalled process of disarmament. By 2016, that network formalised into the Permanent Social Forum, and a group of individuals – the Artisans of Peace – set out to break the Spanish government's blockade. The proposed solution was to transfer the responsibility for the destruction of the ETA's weapons to Basque civil society in collaboration with the IVC. ETA agreed on condition that the process could not be perceived as a surrender. The Permanent Social Forum and the Artisans of Peace managed to create a wide support base for ETA's disarmament among local civil society and local and regional institutions in the (French and Spanish) Basque Country, such as regional governments and city mayors. This legitimised the proceedings and in April 2017, on a public 'Day of Disarmament', the Artisans of Peace handed over information on the inventory and locations of weapons caches, which it had received from ETA, to the representatives of the IVC and two international witnesses. The IVC then transmitted the information to the French authorities, who collected and destroyed the caches (located on French territory). ETA's disarmament had become a dialogue process between ETA and civil society, which avoided the impression that France had negotiated with ETA or that ETA had surrendered to Spain, as no Spanish police authority was involved. Through the active participation of Basque civil society representatives, ETA allowed the very society in whose name it had (allegedly) taken up arms to become the main agents of the decommissioning process (Basque Permanent Peace Forum 2017).

4. Factors conducive to effective political transformation

There are many known factors that support a successful transformation of RLMs, including the leadership's level of internal legitimacy and the structural coherence of a group, both of which reduce the danger of splintering during the difficult transition 'from bullets to ballots'. Other supporting factors can be promoted actively by RLMs through early strategising on upcoming challenges and building capacity and knowledge to mitigate their impact. Through proactive anticipation of transition pathways, multiple strategies are thought through and can be applied and/or combined according to the evolving process. A 'principled pragmatic' approach can ensure that RLMs remain true to their core principles while adapting tactical choices, by constantly asking themselves what course of action best serves the overarching goals at each step of the transition, given the overall political environment.

Internal factors	Peace process factors	International factors
» Political agenda and prior political experience » Internal cohesion and discipline » Social legitimacy among the wider society/constituency	» Levelling the (technical/political) playing field at the negotiating table » Peace agreement provisions: guarantees of participation and institutional reforms » Innovative scenarios to bypass institutional blockages	» Diplomatic support » Technical support (capacity-building) » Guarantees and monitoring of security/political transition

☰ Maintaining internal cohesion throughout the transition

Internal cohesion is challenging to manage and preserve throughout the transition process but is highly relevant for success. To forge a consensual commitment to a peaceful transition, the RLM leadership needs to formulate a clear strategy on how to move forward – not a strategy based on a tactical compromise between polarised positions by 'pragmatists' and 'hardliners', but a distinct pathway which everyone can commit to. Communication and explanation of the new strategy among members are then essential. Internal consultations help to initiate and promote discussion and can alleviate fears or insecurities by opening the space to address them throughout the internal hierarchy, and with the broader support base. The new strategy can function as a vision that the leadership can promote internally to mobilise support for change and counterbalance conservative tendencies that resist change. Leaders play a central role in promoting compliance with the new strategy: they need to be capable, bold and committed, and have sufficient authority to align all members behind their positions. The continuity of leadership throughout the political and security transition helps the accumulation of knowledge and experience; this was the case in the Northern Irish peace process, where the historical leaders of Sinn Fein remained involved in the negotiation, implementation and consolidation stages of the new political strategy. Efforts to maintain cohesion can also help cultivate a new political culture, such as a practicing democratisation by opening up decision-making and establishing participatory norms and practices.

The Basque independence movement, Abertzale Left, encountered several key moments of internal debate and consensus-building on its political transformation and security transition. After the collapse of the 2006-2007 peace negotiations, the movement was disoriented and divided. Internal cohesion was threatened by diverging interpretations of why the negotiations had failed and which strategy it should pursue: for some, the continuation of non-violent strategies was considered the only way forward, while others argued in favour of maintaining the full spectrum of armed and unarmed capacities to maximise leverage. A third group promoted armed escalation in order to strengthen the negotiating position in future. The division spanned the entire Abertzale Left, from the armed group ETA to the banned political party Batasuna, and civil society organisations such as trade unions.

In that situation, the leadership around Arnaldo Otegi, the imprisoned leader of Batasuna, developed a new strategy to build a larger social alliance and engagement with international actors by promoting political engagement and military demobilisation. Upon his release from prison in 2016, Arnaldo Ortegi continued the path of internal consultations with more than 300 Batasuna cadres and 1,000 grassroots social movement members. The final step of extensive internal consultation to confirm and consolidate the peaceful political strategy was centred on the decision to dismantle the armed organisation ETA. Internal debates took more than a year, due to the efforts made to consult exiled and imprisoned ETA members, as well as active members and those 'on the run'. The intention was that every member had to be part of the decision to dissolve the organisation in order to maximise the commitment to the solution. By the end of the process, a total of 3,000 members had participated and 1,000 cadres had voted in favour of formal demobilisation. As a result, ETA announced its complete dismantling in May 2018, combined with a statement of apology to all the civilian victims of past violence (Aiartza Azurtza 2019).

≡   **Third-party roles**

Various third parties can be involved in supporting transformation processes: international agencies, civil society actors and local community leaders such as religious or traditional figures. Their role can range from providing political and diplomatic support, to technical assistance and capacity-building, and/or serving as guarantors or monitors.

Technical assistance and capacity-building can mitigate security challenges, such as trained experts managing weapons collection as part of disarmament programmes, as occurred in Aceh through an EU-led Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM). Apart from large-scale international monitoring missions, various other models have also been applied, from independent commissions made up of foreign experts and eminent persons (see Box 1 on the Northern Irish peace process), to mixed bodies comprising representatives of international organisations, the main conflict parties and civil society. Civil society organisations (including the media) have a crucial advocacy role to play in delegitimising the use of force/arms, e.g. by mobilising campaigns demonstrating public support for a full and timely decommissioning process. Direct engagement in verification and monitoring can also come from religious or civil society figures using their moral authority and/or representative power to lend credibility to the process and assert community ownership over the transition. Their involvement during the decommissioning process can avoid creating the impression that the RLM is "surrendering" its weapons to the (former) enemy (see Box 2 on the Basque example).

The 2012-2016 Havana peace process between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) embodies most factors highlighted in Table 1.

First, internal cohesion and discipline were maintained thanks to the participation of commanders and combatants from the seven blocks of the national FARC-EP structure, and several summits to debate and agree on the new political strategy. For example, a Central High Command Plenary held in 2015 2015 focused on internal arrangements for an eventual political transition, and opened an internal debate about gender and feminism, leading to the first female commander being elected to the Central High Command. Discussions across all fronts and cells culminated in the Xth Conference of FARC-EP in September 2016, when members voted on the Final Agreement. The political transition was formalised at the first Congress of the new party in August 2017, where it adopted a series of measures for political action without weapons, voted on the new name (Common Alternative Revolutionary Force – FARC), a party logo and statutes, and elected a new political direction. This was the first time that clandestine militants had participated in a national-level discussion on the strategic direction of their movement.

Secondly, the peace accord provided a conducive institutional framework to support and safeguard the political participation of FARC members. The Final Agreement stipulates rights and guarantees for the engagement of the political opposition, including a comprehensive security system to protect politicians and electoral reform provisions. It also includes dedicated measures to support FARC's political transformation by guaranteeing funding and media coverage for its election campaigns and new political entities (political party and think tank), and securing its political representation during two Congress periods (from 2018 to 2026) through five guaranteed seats in the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives.

Finally, FARC received significant international support for its political transformation and security transition. The United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia monitored the progress of both parties with respect to the commitments they had made in the peace accord, including the 2018 election when FARC participated for the first time. In particular, the UN mission oversaw the decommissioning process and its various steps (registration, identification, verification of possession, collection, storage, removal and final disposal), and supported the cantonment and demobilisation of FARC-EP troops in 23 'transitory normalisation zones'.

However, after fifty years of underground militancy and armed struggle, the movement lacked prior political experience, which partly explained some of the challenges it faced in building a credible political party and transforming its public image, which would have also necessitated a well-planned and professional media strategy. The new party also faced a challenge to integrate not only ex-combatants but also clandestine militants from social movements, and broaden its appeal to new members. In the 2018 general election, its candidates received less than 1% of the votes across the country. The design of the peace process also had some inherent weaknesses, such as the failure to integrate a quid pro quo approach: the bilateral ceasefire and laying down of weapons were disconnected from a binding timeline for the government's fulfilment of its commitments. In fact, the government failed to comply with the agreed measures on political reintegration, as it delayed funding for the FARC party and did not implement the promised preventive protection measures. The most tragic outcomes of the demobilisation process were the selected killings of ex-combatants and leaders of social movements in rural Colombia, while most areas liberated by FARC were taken over by paramilitary and narco-trafficking groups.

5.   Key Takeaways

1. Security transition and political transformation are interdependent and mutually reinforcing processes, and must be planned and implemented concurrently.

2. There is an inherent mismatch between the interests and needs of the government versus those of the RLM.

3. The transformation of RLMs during peace processes entails the conversion of security/military capacity (hard power) into non-violent political engagement (soft power) in pursuit of their historical objectives.

4. When peace processes are stalled and state actors refuse to engage in negotiations, RLMs can take unilateral steps to shift their strategy of struggle, move forward and transform themselves politically, in dialogue with their members, social base and broader society.

5. Maintaining internal cohesion and discipline during political and security transitions requires committed, bold and capable leaders who are willing to engage in inclusive internal consultations to align all members behind their strategic shifts towards non-violent politics.

6. Local civil society can play an active role in the promotion, formulation, support and monitoring of arms decommissioning processes, alongside, or instead of, international (e.g. UN) missions.

6.   Relevant literature and further reading

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