

## **The Issue of Paramilitary Legacies in Communities**

A paramilitary is defined as a military that is not part of a member state's official or legitimate armed forces. While in theory and many cases, paramilitary organisations are simply armed forces independent of state rule who may act as mercenaries or as supplementary organisations such as reserves, they are often organisations that engage in illicit activity. The more socially accepted term paramilitary can allow criminal organisations to cloak their extortion drug dealing, threats, trade in counterfeit goods, money laundering, illegal money lending, sexual exploitation, murder, and other illegal activities.

Some member states such as Oman or Mozambique have outlawed paramilitary organisations, however in the example of Mozambique, this legislation has not yet successfully removed the paramilitary group 'Nampharamas'. Most nations that have experienced or are experiencing the presence of paramilitary groups undergo periods of flux of low activity, sometimes for decades. It is in these communities and regions which the communities continue to suffer from previously active paramilitaries.

Following the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the prominence of the paramilitary group IRA has been problematic in maintaining stability in communities. Despite, official peace and reduced activity, their legacy remains deeply embedded and undermines future reconciliation. The continued presence of Peace Walls in Belfast, large walls constructed between communities to prevent paramilitary violence and terrorism, act as a daily reminder of the risk of sectarian violence and promote a segregated society; which hinders total community unity and encourages social divisions. The legacy of the IRA is strong and still taints Northern Ireland.

Though 30 years on, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina has had long-lasting effects. The period of insecurity before the Dayton Peace Accords of 1995, fostered an environment in which paramilitaries and social divisions were encouraged to flourish. While the Green Berets, a Bosnian paramilitary group, are no longer active, their legacy lives on. This is worsened by the lack of compensation for the war and so according to a UN Special Rapporteur "work [must be] done at local levels to transcend antagonistic politics"; this approach suggests that the societal partitions cannot be mended through mass legislation but rather a more refined solution.

Colombia was victim to huge amounts of displacement due to the extended prevalence of guerillas, paramilitaries and army-led violence. This resulted in many fleeing their rural homes to seek refuge in 'safer' city municipalities, and abandoning their land. This land was often then used in paramilitary 'training' or sold off by paramilitaries to other displaced people, at risk of poverty. The expansive sale of land has meant that following the peace talks of 2016, a land

law was introduced the Land Restitution Unit was introduced to try and return all families to their original homes. Families applied to the government using the new legislation however after being left on waiting lists for years the law finally expired in 2021 and a majority were left with lost hope and still no land. This paramilitary legacy is one of the most evident as it creates a transgenerational and complex issue.

Paramilitary legacies exist globally and with the mix of cultures and histories involved ranging from Balkan violence to the Troubles and so tackling the legacies of paramilitaries their role in slowing socio-economic development is a vital and pressing component allowing member states to heal from their previous strife. It is necessary to appreciate the need for a multi-faceted approach.

### **Things to consider:**

- Can the societal attitudes be challenged?
- Can physical reminders of paramilitary violence be removed?
- Can education improve social divides?
- Can compensation be issued?
- Could paramilitaries face official rulings of guilt? Or should they be pardoned?

### **Useful links:**

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/43124/documents/214542/default/#:~:text=Paramilitarism%20is%20an%20enduring%20and,control%3B%20or%20the%20perpetuation%20of>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_countries\\_that\\_prohibit\\_paramilitary\\_organizations\\_outside\\_government\\_armed\\_forces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_that_prohibit_paramilitary_organizations_outside_government_armed_forces)

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paramilitary>

<https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/land-was-war-booty-colombia-confronts-legacy-mass-displacement>

