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Transition regimes and security sector reforms in Sierra Leone and Liberia

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Abstract: Why are some countries more successful at carrying out post-conflict reconstruction programmes than others? Why has Sierra Leone been more successful in the reform of its armed forces than Liberia has after the end of the Mano River Basin wars? This paper argues that the diverging outcomes are explained by the extent to which post-conflict regimes reflected the distribution of power on the ground in the two countries. Sierra Leone's transition regime reflected the distribution of power between forces on the ground and led to a consultative process that resulted in a moderate reform programme. But the earlier input of key local actors made implementation less difficult. In Liberia the transition regime was built on a repudiation of local power realities. This led to a non-consultative process that resulted in a very radical reform programme. But this lack of consultation has severely compromised the implementation of the reforms.

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1 Introduction

Why are some countries more successful at carrying out donor-funded post-conflict reconstruction programmes than others? Why has Sierra Leone been more successful in the reform of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) than Liberia in the reform of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL)? Sierra Leone and Liberia have similar histories and suffered wars that were intimately linked. As wars ended in both countries, the US State Department and Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) and Ministry of Defense (MOD) invested significant effort and resources in reforming the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and the then Armed Forces of the Republic of Sierra Leone (AFRSL) respectively (Gbla 2006). Both armies had played very negative roles in the wars in their countries.

The reform of the AFRSL, which in 2002 was named the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) went on relatively smoothly with the reformed force taking over the ultimate task of securing the country against external aggression in 2004 (Ebo 2006: 482; Grys 2010: 41). The reform of the AFL has had a more checkered history. By 2013 the AFL had still not taken over ultimate authority for the security of the state, which remained the responsibility of a UN peacekeeping force—United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Why has foreign-backed security sector reforms (SSRs) resulted in such different results in these two very similar countries?

I argue in this paper that the diverging fates of efforts at reforming the RSLAF and the AFL can be put down to the extent to which post-conflict ruling regimes—what I call 'transition regimes' in this paper—under which security sector reforms were conducted reflected the distribution of power on the ground in the two countries. Sierra Leone's transition regime better reflected the distribution of power between forces on the ground than that in Liberia. This forced leaders in Sierra Leone to undertake a wide-ranging consultation process that led to a less ambitious and radical reform programme. But it also means that the implementation of this reform process had the support of key players who had earlier on contributed to defining it. DFID and the MOD were implementing a programme that the powerful in Sierra Leone had been consulted on and could live with.

In Liberia, which was governed by a transition regime that did not reflect the distribution of power among local players in the country, an ambitious security sector reform programme was designed without consulting some of the most powerful societal actors (Loden 2007: 300). This lack of consultation has severely compromised the implementation of the reforms especially in those critical areas where they involve relations between the new army and other social actors.

2 Methodology, study design and case selection

This paper is based on the qualitative analysis of secondary data from agency reports, newspaper stories and scholarly articles. It employs a cross-national comparative method to explain the diverging outcomes of efforts at reforming the military in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The choice of the two countries is motivated by the puzzling nature of the difference in outcomes given the many relevant similarities in the two cases. Both countries have a settler history. Liberia and Sierra Leone were established as settlements for freed slaves and have since maintained close ties with the US and Britain respectively, who led their reform programmes (Sesay et al. 2009: 19; Loden 2007: 298). There were, thus, historically close ties between reformer and reformed eliminating an area of potential variation that might have explained the divergent outcomes.

The two are also small neighbouring countries that suffered from similar economic and political mismanagement before the wars in the 1990s (Sesay et al. 2009: 20-34). This means there was little difference in the pre-war institutional base on which they might have built after the wars. Further, in both countries the armed forces ended up playing highly negative roles that drastically sullied their image and compromised their organizational structure and professional character (Abraham 2004a; ICG 2009: 14). This means that there was not that drastic a difference in the level of effort needed to mend the two forces.

The readiness of both the US and Britain to fund respective programmes in Liberia and Sierra Leone also largely removes the availability of funds as a serious explanation for variations in the outcomes of the reform programmes. The US had pledged US$35 million for the reform of the Liberian armed forces (Ebo 2005: 17). Gbla cites the expenditure of GBP21 million by the UK DFID and Ministry of Defense on the armed forces in Sierra Leone between 2000 and 2002 (Ebo 2006: 84). Why have the results of reform efforts diverged in significant ways despite these similarities?

The rest of this paper is divided into five sections. The first section that immediately follows provides a brief background political evolution in the two countries that led to the need for security sector reform. The third section details the explanation for variation in how efforts at reforming the AFL and RSLAF have turned out. The two reform processes are explored in the fourth section. The conclusion briefly reflects on lessons of this work for international peacemaking and post-conflict reconstruction.

3   The road to SSR in Liberia and Sierra Leone

The histories of the armies in Sierra Leone and Liberia reflected the limited respect for human rights and the rule of law and the general trend towards the evolution of institutions of uncertain capacity in the two countries. Founded as a settlement for freed slaves from the Americas in 1822, the political economy of Liberia was dominated for two centuries by an Americo-Liberian elite under the banner of the corrupt and nepotistic True Whig Party (TWP), which ruled the country from 1878 to 1980 (Sesay et al. 2009: 19-25). The overthrow of President William Tolbert by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe in 1980 seemed to represent the rebellion of non-Americo-Liberians against TWP dominance. But Doe quickly embraced corrupt and nepotistic rule, further personalized the security forces and employed murderous violence against (perceived) opponents (Nelson-Williams 2010: 124; Sesay et al. 2009: 24-26).

When the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor invaded Liberia in December 1989 they routed the AFL and Taylor was eventually elected President in 1997 (Sesay et al. 2009: 38-39). But resistance to NPFL-rule by various factions led to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the departure of Taylor for exile in Nigeria and the installation of an interim government led by Gyedu Bryant in 2003 (Aboagye and Rupiya 2005: 263-64; Sesay et al. 2009: 35-45).

By the time of his flight Taylor had sown insecurity in neighbouring Sierra Leone as well by aiding the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh to invade that country in 1991. Sierra Leone developed out of a colony for freed slaves set up by British abolitionists in 1787 but was soon colonized by Britain, which only granted the country independence in 1961 (Sesay et al. 2009: 19). The All People's Congress (APC) party led by Siaka Stevens was to quickly become the pre-eminent political force presiding over by a corrupt and nepotistic one-

party system that was overthrown by the military in 1992 (Abdullah 2004: 43-48; Sesay et al. 2009: 26-32; Kpundeh 2004: 90-95; Fayemi 2004: 181-82; Gbla 2006: 79; Ebo 2006: 483).

When the RUF invaded Sierra Leone, the army, which had been governed by a corrupt and nepotistic logic by the APC was overwhelmed and an effort to recruit new men led to the incorporation of unprofessional elements, some of who overthrew the government in 1992 (Gbla 2006: 80). During the war many soldiers resorted to looting and banditry and the army formally allied itself with the RUF in 1997 when elements of the army led by Johnny Paul Koroma took power (Abraham 2004a: 106-120). The constant combating of rebels and elements of the RSLAF by civil defense militias, ECOMOG, British forces and mercenary companies finally led to the restoration of peace in 2000 (Abraham 2004b: 206-214).

By the end of the wars in the early 2000s both countries needed to reform armed forces that had been badly decayed by wars and extremely problematic pre-war politics.

4   Diverging reform outcomes

This paper focuses on the reform of armies in Sierra Leone (RSLAF) and Liberia (AFL) that are part of wider security sector reforms that have been central to post-conflict reconstruction in many African countries. Security sector reform can be defined as programmes meant to improve the structure, operational capacity and professionalism of security agencies while better subordinating them to and increasing their ability to work with democratically elected civilian authorities. SSR, thus, includes reform of the police, prisons authority, intelligence agencies and judicial structures (Aboagye and Rupiya 2005: 252; Hanggi 2004: 3). It is important to note that this prevailing conception of SSR betrays an ongoing attachment of security discourses to the idea of 'security' as 'state security' that has been much denounced by advocates of the idea of human security. This is because reform of health and agricultural sectors that impact human security are still not viewed as elements of SSR and are instead lumped under 'socio-economic' reforms.[1]

In asserting the relative success of the reform programme in Sierra Leone relative to Liberia I look at five concrete indicators: (1) the ability to set up a fully operational armed force; (2) the takeover of ultimate authority of this force by nationals; (3) the deployment of this force across the national territory; (4) the assumption of ultimate responsibility for security in the country by the state; and (5) the departure of the international peacekeeping force. On all of these counts the programme to reform the RSLAF achieved far greater success than that targeting the AFL.

4.1   Setting up fully operation forces

The reform of the RSLAF led to the creation of a fully operational force by 2004 that boasted co-ordination both at the unit and battalion levels (Gbla 2006: 85). In Liberia while just over 2,000 soldiers had been trained at the unit level by 2012, there were still gaping holes in the officer corps that made functioning beyond the unit level difficult (ICG 2009: 13).

4.2   Reverting to national leadership

Given the decrepit nature of both forces after the wars and the involvement of many of their senior officers in the wars, it was unsurprising that help was sought from abroad to provide leadership. In both countries, Nigerian officers who had served in regional intervention forces

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[1] For example see Sesay et al. (2009: 7).

were nominated to lead. General Maxwell Khobe was invited by President Kabbah to lead the RSLAF (Gbla 2006: 83) and Nigerian generals, the latest of which was nominated in 2007 have led the AFL. However, in Sierra Leone leadership quickly reverted to Sierra Leonean officers while the pattern of Nigerian leadership of the AFL continues in 2013.[2] This reflects the thinness in the numbers and quality of senior officers in the force and the related lack of trust among members of the Johnson-Sirleaf administration and their international backers in the political orientations of possible Liberian candidates for these senior officer positions.

4.3   Deployment across the national territory

The newly reformed RSLAF was able to deploy across the national territory alongside the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in 2004 (Ebo 2006: 482). This was further evidence of the operational nature of the new force. The AFL was still not deployed across the territory of Liberia by early 2013. Because of its lack of the required collaboration between units, this limited deployment is not at all surprising.

4.4   Assumption of ultimate responsibility for national defense

Pursuant to the deployment of the RSLAF across the national territory ultimate responsibility for security in Sierra Leone was subsequently handed over from UNAMSIL to the government in 2004 (Ebo 2006: 482). UNMIL was by 2012 still in charge of the ultimate security of Liberia and the Liberian government was not considered in any way ready to take over this responsibility.[3]

4.5   Departure of peacekeepers

The end of the UN peacekeeping mission and departure of its remaining members in late 2005 followed the turnover of responsibility for ultimate security in Sierra Leone (Ebo 2006: 482). The UN still had a sizable force in Liberia by early 2013.

The reform programme in Sierra Leone has had its critics including Gbla (2006) who decries the domineering roles played by the British DFID, Ministry of Defense and the International Military Advice and Training Teams (IMATT), which carried the actual implementation of the reforms. However, it is still seen as a largely successful one that could provide lessons for others (Ebo 2006: 482). Criticism of the problems with the AFL and its reform has been widespread. In February 2012, the Force Commander of UNMIL, Maj. Gen. Muhammad Khalid accused the government of Liberia of 'fail[ing] to build the capacity and capability of the men and women of the AFL'. He indicated the need to reverse this since the UN force could not guarantee the security of the country forever.[4]

5   Explaining varying SSR outcomes: a transition regime approach

Mann (1984) distinguishes between two types of state power—autonomous and infrastructural. While the state's autonomous power refers to its ability to undertake actions in various areas of its realm without consultations with society, infrastructural power refers to the ability of the state

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[2] The Inquirer, 'Nigerian General Appointed Liberian Army Chief. Politics – Nairaland', 11 June 2007. http://www.nairaland.com/59279/nigerian-general-appointed-liberian-army (Accessed 17 November 2013.

[3] See UNMIL, 'UN Envoy says UNMIL isn't leaving Liberia just yet', http://unmil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?ctl=Details&tabid=3979&mid=6797&ItemID=614162.

[4] See 'AFL Capacity Building Slow – UNMIL Force Commander', 12 February 2012. http://www.tnrliberia.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=824:afl-capacity-building-slow-unmil-force-commander&catid=43:inside-liberia-&Itemid=132 (Accessed 17 November 2013).

to manage affairs through routine and sustained bureaucratic interventions in diverse sectors throughout its territory. Reform of the armed forces in democratic settings has to be seen as an exercise in infrastructural power. This is because it goes beyond the mere recruitment, training and equipment of a small group of people. Of major importance is that key to security sector reform is the re-engineering of relations between the military and civilian authorities across the national territory. The armed forces have to be subordinated to elected civilian authority (Aboagye and Rupiya 2005: 252). While it involves inculcating this in the minds of officers and soldiers, it also involves ensuring that civilian authorities across the national territory know how to relate to the military with whom they have to work and co-exist. The reform of the military then has to be understood in a wider sense as reform of governance across the national territory. Involving skills training, restructuring, re-equipment, renationalization of leadership, deployment across a territory, inculcation of improved modes of civil-military collaboration across the national territory, it requires the state to reach into society and spread its authority in a very precise form across the national territory.

Because SSR is often undertaken in post-conflict situations the nature of the regime that coincided with the end of fighting is critical. There are two broad types of these regimes. There are those that reflect the relative distribution of power between local forces in the country and those that do not reflect the distribution of power between forces on the ground. Post-conflict regimes reflect the balance of forces on the ground when they facilitate access to power by important power brokers in the country. This could come about through the outright victory of a group and domination of a country by that group, as was the case with the Rwandan Patriotic Front in the early 1990s. It could also come about through internationally or locally brokered inclusive negotiations or through democratic electoral systems *that do not deliberately seek to limit access to power by some parties in the country.* The emphasis here is meant to underscore the point that 'democratic regimes' vary both in the nature of their practice (voting, campaigning, etc.) as well as in the prior institutional arrangements (who can contest positions, voter eligibility rules, etc.) that regulate their practice and that these variations can have significant impact on processes of post-conflict reconstruction.

When the post-conflict regime does not reflect the balance of power on the ground the system of government severely limits access to power by some powerful players during the violent conflict. This is almost always the result of the imposition of solutions by external forces. They intervene and sideline some powerful parties to impose an actor that would otherwise not have been able to impose itself to the exclusion of others. Examples include the post-conflict regime in Afghanistan that is built on the exclusion of the Taliban and that in Iraq that was built on the exclusion of the Baath Party.

Reflecting the distribution of power on the ground has two causally relevant consequences. Because they are rooted in local power realities, these regimes have a deeper reach into society and have more of an ability to carry out reforms that require infrastructural power across the national territory. But their basis in local realities also means that they have to engage in local negotiations even if within a very limited group in order to pass reforms. This often moderates the nature of the reforms they can pass. More importantly, such regimes pass reforms that are more in line with what the most powerful local actors desire and are better able to implement these reforms because powerful local actors present limited roadblocks to their implementation.

The non-reflection of the balance of power on the ground in post-conflict regimes has different relevant effects. Existing above the realm of powerful local forces, these governing systems have the ability to design reform programmes without consulting these actors. This means that such regimes often pass far more radical reforms, including those that are vehemently opposed by

powerful local actors. However, their non-reflection of local power dynamics means that they often can implement only those reforms that do not require negotiations and interventions in society on a wide scale. Areas where reforms require the transformation of social relations at the grassroots level prove extremely difficult for such regimes. This is because local strongmen will present greater roadblocks to the implementation of reforms passed without their consultation and, often, over their protest.

This theory draws insights from a sizable body of work in the politics of economic reform programmes that has noted variation in the difficulty of implementing different types of reforms. Naím (1995) for instance points out that macro economic reforms that require little involvement of and negotiations with wider society and much of the state apparatus are less difficult to undertake. In the 1980s and 1990s the IMF and World Bank sometimes deployed special 'technocratic change teams' to help countries undertake these first stage macroeconomic reforms that included currency devaluation and privatization of state-owned enterprises. So-called second stage institutional reforms such as property rights and rule of law reforms were much more difficult to undertake because they required the involvement of significant sectors of the state and society (World Bank 2002). They, like successful reform of militaries, in effect required the exercise of infrastructural power by the state in calling on it to effect widespread structural and attitudinal changes not only in the military but also in society across the national territory.

This work also borrows insights from literature in International Relations that examines the issue of compliance by parties to their international obligations. One insight of this literature is that states are more likely to comply with obligations that they previously could have a significant role in determining. In these situations implementation requires states to live with rules they had contributed to setting in the first place even if changing interests and perceptions of self can render this complicated. This endogeneity of rules makes compliance more likely (Chayes and Chayes 1993). This is unlike situations where states had little say in setting up the rules they are supposed to comply with. Local power brokers can, in states where regimes reflect power relations on the ground, have a significant say in the eventual security sector reform programme implemented. This makes them less willing to obstruct implementation of the programme even if they also moderate the design of the programme. Reforms with very lofty goals can be set where local forces do not have to be consulted, but in the long run getting actors to go along with a programme that they did not contribute to shaping and, which may even harm their core interests can be difficult, setting back reform implementation.

This study then reinforces the insistence on local 'ownership' in development and reform programmes (Ismail 2008; Ebo 2008: 153-54).[5] In addition to its contributions to ensuring proper prioritization and sustainability, such broad-based ownership through consultations is critical even for the initial implementation of programmes. It also suggests the potential quandaries and dilemmas that can arise in this search for ownership. An implication of my work is that for deep reforms that require significant social transformation, opening the process and political system to all is paramount. The problem is that in Liberia, Sierra Leone and many other similar post-conflict areas this 'all' also includes various unsavory characters and organizations like Charles Taylor and the NPFL whose exclusion does not only seem tempting and befitting but even necessary to prevent further abuses, end impunity and ensure justice for victims. But this insistence may have negative impacts on long-term reconstruction prospects. In a sense this recalls the ongoing debate over international criminal justice that pits so-called protectors of justice at the cost of peace to those that insist on peace even at the cost of justice.

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5 See the edited volume by Donias (2008) for more on the importance of ownership.

This study contributes to the literature on post-conflict reform by providing one response for why certain regimes tend to be more consultative in decision-making than others, which goes beyond the will and predilections of key decision makers. I argue that the nature of some transition regimes (their non-reflection of local power dynamics) makes the path of non-consultation and exclusion much more alluring. Like the 'technocratic change teams' in the political economy of economic reforms literature (Williams 2002: 395), the ability of these regimes to make decisions without consulting significant local actors tends to lead them to, *mistakenly*, see wisdom in exclusion and non-consultation. The problem is that such exclusionary decision-making tends to undermine the implementation of certain reforms in the long run. Those regimes that reflect local power dynamics cannot engage in decision making without consulting significant local political actors. Because of this, the path of non-consultation and exclusion does not represent a tempting possibility for them. This might slow them down in decision making but ultimately aids them in policy implementation.

6   The 'model' reform programme in Sierra Leone

The conflict in Sierra Leone ended with a stalemate among the key parties to the conflict. The *Kamajor* civil defense force, the RUF and elements of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces that later came to be known as the West Side Boys fought to a standstill against the background of incessant intervention by Nigeria, the ECOWAS peacekeeping force, ECOMOG, and at a much later stage British troops that were determined to keep the RUF and renegade elements of the military from capturing and consolidating power (Abraham 2004b: 199-218).

International involvement in Sierra Leone had always been strongly tinged by an inclusive orientation that sought to get parties to agree on a peace that provided space for all factions including those like the RUF that had committed some of the worst abuses in recent African wars (Abraham 2004b). This might have been influenced by the realization that when it came to the warring sides moral dichotomies were hard to justify. While the RUF committed monstrous atrocities it was clear from an early stage that elements of the army who were supposed to combat the RUF not only committed similar violations, but also actively collaborated with the rebels. This was formalized openly when the soldiers who had overthrown the government in 1997 invited the RUF to join them in power and form a People's Army (Abraham 2004a). Even the *Kamajor* civil defense militia, which backed the government in the face of malfeasance by the national army, was accused of violating rights.[6]

Realizing it could not depend on its national army the democratically elected government of Tejan Kabbah also bent over backwards to accommodate the RUF in what commentators came to regard as an effort to secure peace at any cost (Abraham 2004b). The Abidjan accord of 1996 granted a blanket amnesty to the RUF for all abuses, and offered it the possibility of transforming itself into a political party and having some of its members integrated into the national army (Abraham 2004b: 206). Despite obstructionism and a reversion to war by the RUF, the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement saw Kabbah extending the same terms to the RUF. But the Lomé accord went even further in offering the RUF four cabinet positions and naming the RUF leader, Foday Sankoh as the Chairperson of the Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources (Kandeh 2004: 167; Abraham 2004b: 212).

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6 See Human Rights Watch, 'New evidence of atrocities in Sierra Leone and Guinea'. 1 December 2000. http://www.hrw.org/news/2000/11/30/new-evidence-atrocities-sierra-leone-and-guinea (Accessed 19 December 2013).

Even the effort to punish those responsible for abuses during the war was a generally inclusive one. When a special hybrid court was eventually set up to try those most responsible for rights abuses in the country key leaders in the RUF and renegade elements of the military were targeted. But also targeted was the Deputy Minister of Defense in President Kabbah's democratically elected government, Chief Hinga Norman who had headed the *Kamajors*. This was a civil defense force that was loyal to President Kabbah that had protected many communities against the rapacity and atrocities of the RUF and contributed effectively to international efforts to militarily contain the RUF and renegade soldiers (Sesay et al. 2009: 63). Widespread consternation at and condemnation of the arrest of Hinga Norman reflected denunciation of blanket amnesties extended to the RUF in both the Abidjan and Lomé agreements and power-sharing arrangements offered to the RUF in the latter. The subsequent abysmal performance of the RUF in the 2002 elections partly justified criticism that Tejan Kabbah had granted governing power to a group that could claim limited popularity in the country.

Sierra Leone's SSR programme reflected this openness of the transition regime to key powerbrokers in the country. State leaders and the international community realized early on that the thorough reform of the security sector was necessary for guaranteeing the long-term democratic stability of the country. The British Ministry of Defense (MOD) and DFID early on took the lead in carrying out the reform of the security sector of which the reform of the RSLAF was only one element (Gbla 2006). The SLP, judiciary, prisons and what was later to become an Office of National Security were all part of the programme.

An extensive process of consultation across the country preceded the reform of the country's armed forces. A very inclusive Working Group was established that included 'included ministries, civil society, anticorruption commission, security institutions, technical advisers, the academia, and professional associations' (Ebo 2006: 488). The SSR Secretariat organized consultative workshops in the country's northern, eastern and southern provinces bringing together a total of 142 participants. These included 'religious groups, the press, serving and retired security personnel, ex-combatants and traditional chiefs' (Ebo 2006: 488-89).

Unsurprisingly the process resulted in a rather moderate reform programme. Even though the complete disbandment of the military might not have been such an outrageous proposition given its fractured state and abusive role in the war, the process led to the moderate call for the building of a new force with the former army as its core. The goals included creating an army through the retrenchment and retirement of some personal and intake of others, increasing the professionalism, skills and living conditions of its members, and ensuring its proper subjugation to democratically elected civilian authorities (Gbla 2006: 82-84; Ebo 2006: 486-87).

The operational work of reform was to be carried out by DFID through IMATT. The first training mission can properly be said to be the SILSEP programme in 1999, which was followed by the deployment of IMATT in 2000 to pacify elements of the military that posed a threat to the capital. IMATT has handled the reform programme including paring down the existing army, recruiting new members and training them in combat skills and mission readiness. It also equipped the RSLAF with better weapons, upgraded living conditions through the building of new barracks and reorganized the defence ministry as one jointly run by civilians and soldiers. During this process British military members of IMATT held key positions in the military (Gbla 2006: 82-84; Ebo 2006: 486-87).

By 2004 much of what was conceived of as part of the reform of the newly created RSLMF had been accomplished. The UN force undertook a drastic drawdown in late 2005. Ultimate

responsibility for the security of the country was handed to the government by the UN force in 2004. In 2006 UNAMSIL was ended and a small UN office created in its stead (Ebo 2006: 482).

The reform of the RSLMF has not been without criticism. First, there is the rather dominant role played by IMATT and its principals the British DFID and the Ministry of Defense in the implementation of the programme. This is in addition to the fact that DFID paid for the reform programme (Gbla 2006). So the widespread consultations did get Sierra Leoneans of various stripes to decide on what they wanted their military to look like but the actual work of bringing this about was one carried out by British hands. Given the fact that the process of implementation is itself important even after goals have been set, this indeed constitutes a handicap. In a sense this continued Sierra Leone's neo-colonial subordination to Britain. Further, the newly reformed military has continued to exist in a wider political economic milieu that is generally not always conducive to the existence of a professional, nonpartisan and capable force that is properly subordinated to elected civilian authorities. The poor economic state of the country means that like other public sectors workers, soldiers continue to receive poor wages, inadequate equipment and insufficient supplies sapping morale and capacity (Ebo 2006: 490-97) and encouraging force members to engage in both legal and illegal fund-generating activities. In early November 2013 it was widely reported that an officer of the RSLAF had been arrested as part of a group that was transporting marijuana in Liberia.[7] Further, the wider problems of multiparty democracy in the country always risk undermining positive developments in the creation of a non-partisan military.

Despite these challenges, the reform of the RSLMF is seen as a model to be followed, a compliment that the reform of the AFL in neighbouring Liberia has not received.

7   The checkered reform process in Liberia

The question of security sector reform in Liberia first came up at the end of what Liberians often call the 'first war'. In 1997 elections following a return to tentative peace led to the election of Charles Taylor, the leader of the NPFL as president of Liberia. While the elections were widely regarded as plagued by irregularities many, including members of the international community saw the victory of Taylor as the only means of preventing him from putting his formidable NPFL back on the war path. A key component of the effort to ensure sustained peace and stability was the reform of the security sector by ECOMOG. Unsurprisingly, Taylor prevented ECOMOG from carrying out the reforms (Aboagye and Rupiya 2005: 263; Sesay et al. 2009: 40). In what could be termed his own reforms, he transformed the NPFL into the national army bypassing the question of creating a truly national force (Sesay et al. 2009: 38). Abusive irregular forces fiercely loyal to him such as the Anti-Terrorism Unit dominated the security landscape as Taylor continued to pillage the country's resources (Malan 2008: 9). He never made the transition from warlord into statesman and president (Sesay 2009: 39-44).

It was his lack of reform and continued support for RUF's abusive activities in Sierra Leone that transformed him by the late 1990s, in the minds of many, into the main stumbling block to peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone. His presence and political influence in Liberia came to be seen as a guarantee of persisting insecurity in the two countries and his physical removal and curtailment of his political influence as necessary for ending the violence in them (Sesay et al. 2009: 44).

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[7] See The Guardian, 'Liberian presidential motorcade chief arrested in drug smuggling case', 11 November 2013. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/11/liberian-presidential-motorcade-chief-arrested-drug-smuggling (Accessed 17 November 2013).

The international community had come to adopt a stance towards Charles Taylor that was in contrast to their exaggerated effort to include Foday Sankoh in the peaceful governance of Sierra Leone despite his continuing recalcitrance noted above. The imposition of international sanctions on Taylor and some of his henchmen for their support of the RUF in Sierra Leone by UN Security Council Resolution 1343 in 2001 marked the beginning of the end of Taylor's regime (Sesay 2009: 42). When Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), flush with support from Guinea's Lansana Conte (ICG 2003), laid siege to Monrovia demanding the vacation of power by Taylor, international mediation led to the signing of the CPA by the Government of Liberia (NPFL) and other actors in Accra, Ghana in 2003.

The CPA of 2003 firmly undercut the NPFL's influence in Liberia. It led to the end of NPFL rule and introduction of an interim government led by Gyedu Bryant who was not allied to any of the warring parties. The sharing of power led to the granting of multiple portfolios and leadership of state agencies to various armed groups as well as civil society, which previously had no role in government (Fayemi 2004: 186-87). The accord took power from the NPFL and distributed it to others in the country.

The international community went beyond the overthrow of Taylor to seeking his physical removal from the country. The Special Court for Sierra Leone issued an indictment against Taylor for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by his agents in Sierra Leone while negotiations were going on in Accra in June 2003. Taylor finally agreed to exile in Nigeria in exchange for a commitment from the government there not to hand him over to the Special Court for Sierra Leone (Sesay 2009: 44-45). Even his physical removal from the country did not prevent the head of the UN mission in the country from repeatedly accusing him of seeking to rule Liberia from his base in Nigeria (O'Connell 2004: 233).

Peacemaking and post-conflict reconstruction in Liberia had come to be defined in large parts to mean the washing away of NPFL and Taylor influence in the country even though the NPFL had for long periods been the most powerful force in the country. It had been kept out of power before 1997 largely on account of ECOMOG and much of the headway made by groups like ULIMO and LURD could be put down to the support they received from the government of Lansana Conte Guinea. Indeed even the security of the interim government and the elected government of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf that replaced it in 2005 were guaranteed not by any local power base, but by the UN peacekeeping mission in the country. Both Gyedu Bryant and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf were 'outsiders' in the war context who had to be protected by the UN force against the NPFL and other former warring factions. Thus, the peculiar thing about Liberia is not that 'there was no clear winner of the war' as claimed by the ICG (2009: 22). It is the fact that the eventual 'winning' regime has no firm local roots but is instead backed by an impressive international force.

Against this background, it is unsurprising that the reform of the AFL was designed to insulate both the process and end product from the influence of the NPFL and other warring factions. The greatest threat to the reform of the armed forces in Liberia was always seen as the potential infiltration and utilization of the new force by former warring factions against the newly constituted democratic order.

On account of this, unlike in Sierra Leone, there was almost no consultation of social actors in the design and implementation of the SSR programme in Liberia (ICG 2009: 9). Civil society was not consulted (Loden 2007: 300-301). As Ebo (2008: 161) notes, the national legislature was severely marginalized in the process as well to protect the programme from many of its leading members who were seen as having 'questionable records' in connection with the war. This has

prevented the legislature from holding the executive branch accountable on the issue of security sector reform (Ebo 2008: 161). Even the Liberian Ministry of Defense, which was supposedly going to finally take over the AFL complained about its exclusion from the process (Loden 2007: 300).[8] The reform of the AFL became the pet project of the US State Department, which understood its mandate stated in the CPA as an exclusive one that it exercised without consulting even its international partners in Liberia leading to complaints (Loden 2007: 300).

There are some important concrete areas in which this non-consultative method is evident. The State Department on its own decided to completely demobilize the existing AFL and create an entirely new force into which formers members of the AFL were not necessarily going to be integrated (Loden 2007: 300). Instead each potential recruit was to undergo an extremely rigorous screening process. It decided on the size and structure of the new force without consulting or taking into account the recommendations of the government of Liberia's Defense Advisory Committee and the thoughts of other forces in society (Ebo 2005: 17-18). Further, it unilaterally decided to engage US private security contractors DynCorp and PAE to carry out the reforms without consulting even the Liberian Ministry of Defense (Loden 2007: 300; Malan 2008: 28-29). The Liberian Ministry of Defense was to complain that it could not access the contract through which DynCorp was reforming the army or directly access staff of DynCorp without first going through officials at the US Embassy, limiting its ability to evaluate and monitor work done by the company (Ebo 2008: 159-160).[9]

The complete demobilization of the AFL and imposition of a stringent vetting regime for new recruits was meant to further minimize the influence of 'suspicious' local actors in the new force by limiting the presence of former fighters and people loyal to former warring factions in the new force (Ebo 2008: 156; Malan 2008: 30-33).[10]

The complete exclusion of local power brokers like the NPFL and former AFL elements in the design of the programme, which enabled the US State Department to put in place this radical reform effort has severely undermined the implementation of the programme in two ways. First, it has compromised the creation of a complete hierarchical structure with sufficient numbers at all levels to constitute a well-coordinated fighting force. Excluding local powerbrokers including former AFL officers has severely shrunk the pool of eligible senior officers and led the reform process into many difficulties and dilemmas. It is not surprising then that the AFL has continued to be led by foreign officers (Ebo 2008: 156-57). While the force could boast 2,000 well trained recruits at the lower levels it had a severe deficiency in the officer ranks at all levels (Malan 2008: 37-38; ICG 2009: 13).

The second and most damaging impact of a transition regime that does not reflect local power realities and its consequent non-consultation of local power brokers in the security sector reform programme has been on civil-military relations. The process is built on a laboratory approach to security sector reform that is best compared to earlier approaches to what came to be called first-stage macro-economic reforms. These reforms, which included the devaluation of currencies, laying off of workers and privatization of parastatals, were seen as not requiring the participation of significant sectors of the state machinery or social actors. They were thought to be achievable

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8 See Wall Street Journal, 'In Liberia, an Army Unsullied by Past (August 2007)'. http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118703899075796334.html.

9 Wall Street Journal, 'In Liberia, an Army Unsullied by Past', 14 August 2007. http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118703899075796334.html (Accessed 17 November 2013).

10 Bekoe and Parajon, 'Security sector reform in Liberia: domestic considerations and the way forward'. 1 April 2007. http://www.usip.org/publications/security-sector-reform-in-liberia-domestic-considerations-and-the-way-forward (Accessed 17 November 2013).

through the work of small insulated, and sometimes even foreign, teams of technocrats deployed or supported by international financial agencies.

The problem is that security sector reforms in countries like Liberia with long histories of authoritarianism, non-professional militaries and military involvement in politics is more comparable to what are called 'second-stage economic reforms' like rule of law and property rights reform. They require deep fundamental social transformation that cannot be achieved without the transformation of how a wide swathe of civil and military authorities perceive and work with each other. Security sector reform in countries like Liberia requires going beyond building a capable and well-equipped fighting force to creating a political system characterized by the subordination of professional and capable forces to elected civilian authorities and the smooth collaboration of civilian authorities and forces across a national territory. It requires social transformation that cannot be achieved without negotiations with and the involvement of significant segments of the state machinery and civilian authorities at the national and local level.

Any security sector reform process that does not lead to the development of a military that is duly subordinated to elected civilian authorities and that can collaborate with these authorities in a professional manner across the national territory in which it is deployed cannot be recorded as a success in a democratic country (Fayemi 2004: 184; Ebo 2005: 3). This is particularly true in African countries that have suffered from a history of military coups and friction between civilian and military authorities. The elimination of components of the basic training dedicated to civics and civil-military relations in democratic systems has only further worsened this problem (Ebo 2008: 157)

The US State Department, UNMIL and Liberian authorities are realizing that peace built on the exclusion of powerful forces like the NPFL and other local factions, no matter how negative their earlier activities had been, will be hard to sustain. Indeed democratic politics had already forced Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to cut deals and form alliances with many individuals with 'insalubrious' backgrounds including Lewis Brown who was once Taylor's Minister of Foreign Affairs.[11] Now they are learning that true security sector reform similarly cannot be achieved if the new forces do not get out of the training laboratories and become part of a new Liberian society, which cannot but include diverse actors from the civil war. The government and its partners will have to eventually overcome fear of the hijacking of the new army by former warlords and deploy this army across the national territory and teach civilian authorities (drawn from different backgrounds) to collaborate with each other.

8   A difference in style?

The emphasis on transitional regimes in this paper discounts an alternative argument that would focus on differences between the approaches embraced by the US State Department and UK DFID and Department of Defense to the process of reform. An overly aggressive and domineering US attitude compared to a more cautious British approach might be responsible for the difference. This is not a particularly satisfactory explanation because the reconstruction process in Liberia as a whole, including segments not spear-headed by the US State Department, have been marked by the same non-consultative bent. In overseeing much of that process, the head of the UN mission in Liberia, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General Jacques Klein, displayed the same non-consultative bent that one sees in the US State Department's approach. His tendency to run roughshod over local constituencies, including the highest national authorities in policy-making and implementation earned him the titles of 'viceroy' and

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11 See 'Liberia: government intervenes to have travel ban lifted', http://allafrica.com/stories/201207092070.html.

'Governor General' among concerned local officials and members of the international community. He poured scorn on local (as well as international) insistence on the recreation of an army by calling for the abolition of the AFL because 'armies sit around playing cards and plotting coups'[12] (Ebo 2005: 16 and 27-28).

The reform of the Liberia Nation Police reinforces my argument in its being marked by the same non-consultative approach that marked AFL reform despite the fact that it was carried out by the Civil Police section of UNMIL. UNMIL's decision to build the new police around the core of the old one and the US State Department decision to start a completely new AFL were reached through the same non-consultative methodology. Tellingly, analysts have tended to speak of security sector reform as a whole instead of distinguishing between AFL and LNP reform when decrying the extremely non-consultative approach to reconstruction in the country. Loden points out that 'the reform and restructuring of […] security institutions have been led by internationals with little reference to national preferences or consultation' (2007: 300). The ICG similarly calls for the domestic ownership of security sector reforms (2009: 11) and Ebo recommends an increase in 'local ownership' of, greater civil society involvement in and more 'parliamentary oversight' over security sector reforms (2005: ii-iii).

9   Conclusion

One lesson that can be drawn from the argument made here is that Charles Taylor continues to haunt Liberia by having an excessive impact on how the transition from war to peace and post-conflict reconstruction has been framed. Focusing on cleansing Liberian society of Taylor and the NPFL might have been the key to bringing about an end to fighting but it has stunted the much longer and difficult process of post-conflict reconstruction. It has led to the exclusion of parties that for better or worse have constituted a significant power base in Liberia whose input and collaboration will have significantly boosted the long term search for peace and reconstruction in the country.

Beyond the need to be inclusive that this paper points to is the importance of basing peacemaking on local power realities. It is always best when external interventions such as UN missions are deployed in ways that take cognizance of local power realities and try to reorient local actors to peace. The temptation to deploy international forces to redraw local cartographies of power by sidelining the powerful and building up new power centers is a dangerous one. It tends to require long-term and high level international commitment that many donor countries are unwilling to undertake. It also tends to create reforms that are impressive on paper but that can only thrive in the lab, or barracks, as is the case with the squeaky clean new AFL in Liberia.

The argument focusing of how post-war governing systems map unto local power realities is one that goes against potential competing arguments focusing on the pre-war state of the two countries and their armed forces, the length of the wars and their impact on the different armed forces, the difficulty of the task of reform and the existence of significant and sustained financial backing for the reforms. As I point out in the section on case selection and study design above, because these countries and their wars were so similar and interlinked in many ways, we are able to hold constant many alternative variables.

The level of involvement of international actors in the security sector reform programmes in the two countries is one such potential explanatory factor that we can hold constant. This should reinforce the fact that the argument here is not about whether or not there is international

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[12] Quoted in Ebo (2005: 16).

involvement post-conflict reconstruction in a country. It is not a call for exclusive local involvement in and leadership of such reforms. Given the weakened nature of states emerging out of conflicts it is inevitable that their escape from violence and instability has to be aided by outside actors of various types. The argument here is partly about the *nature* of this external involvement. Involvement that seeks to bring about post-conflict regimes that do not reflect local power realities tend to undermine the long-term prospects of reconstruction in these countries.

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