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Different Paths of Reconstruction: Military Reform in Post-war Sierra Leone and Liberia

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Keywords: military reform, security sector reform, SSR, civil war, post-war, Liberia, Sierra Leone

Security Sector Reform (SSR) has developed into a key component of international peacebuilding agendas. However, there is a lack of sufficient knowledge of the advantages and drawbacks of different reform processes. This study offers a comparative analysis of two post-war states with diverse approaches to the reconstruction of the national armed forces after a civil war: Sierra Leone after the 1999 Lomé peace accord, where the competing warring parties were integrated into a single force; and Liberia following the 2003 Accra peace agreement, where the old army was disbanded and a new force was recruited and built from scratch. The findings show that each approach was associated with distinct benefits and risks during the implementation process. However, the outcomes are also similar in many important respects, and raise questions about the long-term sustainability of these reforms.

During the last two decades, comprehensive security sector reform (SSR) has developed into a key component of international peacebuilding agendas. In war-affected countries, where human rights violations and poor governance of the state's security forces have been the norm rather than the exception, such reforms can play a key role in the process towards peace and democracy. This study focuses on one particular reform: the reconstruction of the national armed forces. While there is growing research on SSR generally, as well as on military reform specifically, relatively little is known about the advantages and drawbacks of

different approaches to military reform, and whether certain policies and practices have been more beneficial than others in terms of restructuring the armed forces after a civil war.

We address this research gap by comparing the process of rebuilding the armed forces in two post-war states in West Africa: Sierra Leone following the signing of the 1999 Lomé peace accord, and Liberia following the 2003 Accra peace agreement. These are particularly suitable for comparison as they display a range of similarities in the causes and dynamics of their respective civil wars and the key warring parties. However, there are striking differences in regard to the approaches of reconstructing the armed forces during the peace processes. In Sierra Leone, the competing warring parties – the national army, rebel troops and the civil militia – were integrated into a single force, whereas in Liberia the existing army was disbanded and a new force was built from scratch.

In order to assess the outcomes of these reform efforts, we compare the two cases in three broad dimensions: the operational capacity of the new force, its governance and the sustainability of the reforms. The analysis is based on original field research and interviews conducted with some of the key actors and institutions, as well as on secondary sources. The findings show that both approaches display distinct benefits and risks during the implementation process. A more pragmatic approach in Sierra Leone ensured a speedy and cost-effective process, which addressed the short-term security needs of the country, but overlooked human rights violations committed by ex-combatants during the war and a long-term need for downsizing. In contrast, the more ambitious approach in Liberia was a costly and time-consuming strategy associated with high security risks, which was unlikely to have worked in the absence of a large international peacekeeping force. However, the outcomes are similar in many respects as both countries struggle with long-term challenges in transforming a political culture in which civilian and democratic control over the armed forces is a novelty, and where the financial sustainability of the SSR process is dependent on the continued presence of international funding.

This article is structured into five parts. First, it presents a brief overview of previous research on this topic to establish some benchmark criteria for successful military reform. Second, it discusses the peace negotiations and the stipulations of the peace agreements concerning the reconstruction of the armed forces in the two cases. Then it addresses the implementation of these reform processes, from the recruitment process to the training provided. In the fourth part, the outcomes of these ongoing reform processes are compared. Conclusions are then presented with critical implications for policy making.

Previous Research on Post-War Reconstruction of the Armed Forces

Reconstruction of armed forces is often regarded as one component of a larger effort towards reforming the entire security sector after a civil war. Much of the literature on SSR has traditionally been dominated by studies with an explicit policy-making perspective, but academics have also given the topic increased attention. In this literature, SSR is usually identified as a wide-ranging and somewhat ambiguous concept. As a minimum common denominator scholars emphasize that such reforms aim to provide security for the broader public, while paying attention to democratic and civil control of the security forces.¹ For instance, according to Heiner Hänggi, SSR is 'essentially aimed at the efficient and effective provision of state and human security within a framework of democratic governance'.²

Within this field some studies specifically address the reconstruction of the armed forces after a civil war. However, the conclusions diverge on which approach to military reform is preferable. One such approach – military integration of armed forces, sometimes referred to as military pacts – is by many scholars considered an effective tool for enhancing the durability of peace. Such military pacts, whereby former warring actors are guaranteed positions in the new army, are said to address commitment problems and security dilemmas among the former belligerents.³ Other scholars are more sceptical of the benefits of promoting military integration as a strategy for lasting peace.⁴ William Stanley and Charles Call, for example, propose that post-civil war countries are more likely to benefit from downsizing the army, restricting its role to external defence missions, and focusing on police reform.⁵ In the literature, then, the jury is still out on the effectiveness of these approaches. Furthermore, most of these studies focus primarily on whether the reforms influence the likelihood of durable peace, and not on the performance of the newly reformed forces.⁶

Building on studies on SSR and military reform we identify three clusters of factors that can be used as benchmark criteria for determining the relative success of the reconstruction processes in the two cases. First, indicators related to the *operational capacity* of the new force are assessed: whether the new or restructured force is well trained, effective, and whether it has adopted a high degree of professionalism in its operations. In addition, the composition of the force and its representativeness in relation to the broader population is considered as this may be particularly relevant where the clientelistic bias of the armed forces – for example on the basis of region or ethnicity – often

constitutes a key cause of conflict. A thorough and inclusive recruitment process has been suggested as one measure to avoid this.⁷

Second, *governance* of the new force is a critical factor, as a key purpose of post-war military reform is to ensure that national armed forces are brought under civilian and democratic control. In post-war societies that experience a transformation to both peace and democracy, this signifies whether a genuine break with the past has occurred. Improved relations between the soldiers and the civilian population is another critical governance-related indicator in post-war societies where widespread human rights abuses by security sector institutions were frequent prior to or during the armed conflict.⁸

The third cluster of factors relates to the *sustainability* of the new force. This aspect constitutes an integral part of the success of security sector reforms. While post-war governments often rely on external funds and expertise to implement the reconstruction process, these reforms eventually need to be financially self-sustaining. A closely related issue concerns the degree to which local ownership over the reform process has been achieved, since this is commonly deemed important for the legitimacy and hence long-term sustainability of reforms.⁹

The Point of Departure: The Peace Settlements

Although the reform processes in Sierra Leone and Liberia subsequently took different paths, the reasons are not primarily to be found in the peace negotiations or in the provisions of the peace accords, which were remarkably similar in content. In Sierra Leone, the government and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) signed a peace agreement on 7 July 1999 in Lomé, Togo, after eight years of civil war.¹⁰ The talks were presided over by the UN, some foreign diplomats and a handful of Sierra Leonean civil society representatives.¹¹ The rebels held the upper hand militarily, and President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah was under strong international pressure to negotiate a settlement in spite of resistance within his cabinet. In addition, it was clear that the Nigerian ECOMOG forces – which in practice had replaced the role of the national army in defending the government against both renegade army soldiers and the rebels – were preparing to leave, increasing the urgency of finding a political solution to the conflict.¹² In Liberia, the government and the two rebel groups – the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) – signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on 18 August 2003 in Accra, Ghana, following the near military defeat of

the government after three years of civil war. The marginalization of the government forces in 2003, and the growing international political and economic pressure on the Charles Taylor regime, provided an opportunity for initiating a peace process, which not only resulted in the removal of Taylor from power, but also far-reaching reform of the demoralized and heavily politicized armed forces of the state.¹³

In both cases, the peace agreements explicitly addressed the need for a reconstruction of the armed forces. Article XVII in the Lomé peace agreement laid down conditions for restructuring the Sierra Leone Armed Forces (SLA). It stipulated that it should be restructured, and that ex-combatants from the RUF, the Civil Defence Forces (CDF), and the national army who wished to join the new force could do so provided that they met 'established criteria'. The aim was to create a 'truly national' armed force that reflected the 'geo-political structure of Sierra Leone'.¹⁴ Hence, unlike many other peace agreements – such as in Mozambique in 1994 or Burundi in 2003 – the Lomé accords did not provide for a conventional military merger, since it did not specify quotas for each group, but only provided the possibility for ex-combatants from all camps to seek entry into the new armed forces.

In the Liberian CPA, Article VII focused on the reform and restructuring of the army and was more detailed than the Lomé accord.¹⁵ The AFL was to have a new command structure, whereas the irregular forces, referring to 'all forces that are not established in accordance with the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Liberia' were to be disbanded.¹⁶ It was further stated that the new armed forces '*may* be drawn from the ranks of the present GOL forces, the LURD and the MODEL, as well as from civilians with appropriate background and experience'.¹⁷ Critically, the composition of the new armed forces was to reflect 'the national character of Liberia'. The wording of the CPA was thus similar to that of the Lomé accords. Importantly, nowhere in the agreement was it stated that the old AFL was to be completely disbanded.¹⁸ Ex-combatants from all three warring parties, as well as civilians, could (re-)apply provided they met criteria for eligibility.

However, the accords differed on SSR in two important respects. First, the CPA spelt out the vetting procedures and criteria for eligibility in more detail. All candidates were to be 'screened with respect to educational, professional, medical and fitness qualifications as well as prior history with regard to human rights abuses'.¹⁹ Second, while the Lomé Accord gave the Sierra Leonean government the main responsibility for leading the process of training and restructuring the new army, the CPA gave the United States the 'lead role' in creating the new army.

Armed Forces: The Reconstruction Process

Although the Lomé peace accord and the CPA displayed many similarities in providing for military reforms, events dictated that the two countries would take different paths. In Sierra Leone a comprehensive SSR process was initiated under British guidance. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) was to be reorganized on the UK model of joint civil–military management. An International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT), consisting of international military and civilian personnel were to advise on and assist with implementation. In addition, plans for the establishment of a Military Reintegration Programme (MRP) were outlined for integrating ex-combatants into the existing army.²⁰

The dramatic events of May 2000, when the RUF ambushed and abducted 500 newly arrived UN troops, temporarily disrupted these plans. President Kabbah decided to reintegrate a large number of ex-AFRC junta soldiers into the already partly disarmed and demobilized army, which was in acute need of reinforcement to counter the rebels. Together with the CDF, the UN forces and UK troops, they renewed the struggle against the RUF.²¹ It was subsequently decided that the reinforced SLA would not re-enter the disarmament and demobilization process due to the fragile security situation. Instead, UK-led training teams assisted and trained the army in six-week intensive training courses while IMATT was being deployed.²²

By the spring of 2001 the RUF had essentially been defeated and faced little choice but to accept a ceasefire. The disarmament and demobilization process was reinstated and in January 2002 – two and a half years after the Lomé agreement – the war was officially declared over. The new MoD was inaugurated and Kabbah announced that the army would be merged with the tiny Sierra Leone Air Force and Navy, to form the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). Shortly thereafter, the planned MRP was reinstated.

In Liberia, the political context was radically different. A transitional administration was in place comprising the warring factions and representatives from both the established political parties and civil society. There were low levels of trust between donors and the government. Accordingly, the process of reconstruction was slow to get off the ground.²³ In addition, the Special Representative of the Secretary–General (SRSG), Jacques Klein, allegedly did not prioritize reconstruction of the armed forces. The delayed reform process led to a wave of protest by AFL soldiers, with the largest military barrack being looted in June 2005 following a riot in Monrovia over non-payment of salaries and benefits.²⁴

While it had initially been expected that US marines would take responsibility for restructuring the AFL, the Washington government decided put the job out to tender; which was awarded in early 2005 to the private company DynCorp International.²⁵ Another US security company, Pacific Architects and Engineers Inc. (PAE), won separate contracts for camp construction and maintenance, and later for mentoring the new AFL officers and leaders.²⁶ In January 2006, following the inauguration of the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf administration, the US government contracted the Rand Corporation to report on the strategic objectives of the reform process. This was delivered to the Liberian government in May 2006. The Governance Reform Commission (GRC, later the GC), which had been established in the CPA, was subsequently mandated to provide recommendations for the drafting of a new national security policy for Liberia, eventually made public in 2008.²⁷

Due to the drawn out political process, important decisions regarding the reconstruction of the armed forces were primarily based on basic financial and technical considerations. For example, the US State Department, in cooperation with DynCorp, decided that the new AFL would be limited to 2,000 soldiers.²⁸ And while the transitional government had initially suggested that at least part of the old army should be retained, all those that had served with the old AFL were discharged, causing widespread resentment and protest.²⁹

The recruitment processes for the new armies also diverged substantially. In Sierra Leone, all former ex-combatants who participated in the renewed disarmament and demobilization process were briefed on the existence of the MRP and given the option to seek entry into the armed forces. However, only a small minority of all ex-combatants, about 2,500, of which about two-thirds came from the RUF and the rest from the CDF, decided to do so. At this time, the size of the existing army – consisting of former SLA soldiers, some of whom had only been recruited after Kabbah's return to power in 1998, and former AFRC junta soldiers – was about 12,000. Following the implementation of the MRP, the RSLAF thus expanded to about 14,500.³⁰

Potential recruits were brought into holding camps for screening processes, medical examinations and physical, educational and military tests. Local paramount chiefs from the recruits' home areas were consulted.³¹ But the screening appeared to pay little attention to human rights abuses committed during the war,³² and UK soldiers involved in the process acknowledged that the screening was limited to previous discharges from the army and criminal records.³³ The reason was pragmatic; it was considered preferable to keep these ex-combatants in the army where they could be monitored and controlled than have them

causing trouble on the streets.³⁴ It was only this small group of recruits – from the RUF and the CDF – who entered the RSLAF after 2002 that were subject to vetting; none of the soldiers in the existing army were. In a next step, the candidates had to attend a formal selection tribunal, normally chaired by a UNAMSIL colonel and including RUF and CDF officers employed by the National Commission for Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR). IMATT officers provided the secretariat and sometimes chaired the sessions.³⁵

This contrasted sharply with developments in Liberia, where DynCorp began by dismantling the old structures and discharging all former AFL soldiers and MoD personnel. Recruiting for the new army did not begin until January 2006.³⁶ At that time, more than 100,000 ex-combatants had been disarmed and demobilized from the ranks of the AFL, LURD, MODEL, and ex-GOL, including paramilitary forces.³⁷

Compared to Sierra Leone, the screening procedure for the new AFL was relatively rigorous and the bar for recruitment set high.³⁸ Recruits had to be at least 18 years old, had to pass a written high school proficiency test (or hold a high school diploma), and pass medical and physical tests.³⁹ The rejection rate was very high.⁴⁰ Most recruits came from the Monrovia area, but recruitment teams visited the recruits' home villages, neighbourhoods and schools in Liberia's 15 counties, conducting interviews with family members, teachers, employers and friends.⁴¹ Pictures of the candidates were posted, encouraging members of the public to report discrediting information. A Joint Personnel Board (JPB) chaired by the Liberian Defence Minister, the US Chief of the Office of Defence Cooperation, and a Liberian civil society representative, took the final recruitment decision.⁴²

In the training phase, the two countries also displayed considerable differences in budgeting, scope and level of commitment. In Sierra Leone, the successful MRP recruits underwent a nine-week programme of basic infantry training before joining existing units. Former ex-combatant groups were deliberately broken up into different units to avoid factionalism. After six months their temporary rank was substantiated, subject to performance and recommendation.⁴³

In Liberia, all recruits entered an eight-week induction programme, followed by advanced infantry training. Those with leadership potential were subsequently selected for entry into a four-week Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) course. A few selected trainees continued on to an officer's candidate school. After graduation, soldiers entered collective training provided by the PAE contractors, focusing on the development of specialized

military skills and functioning military units. However, in 2008, Liberia still lacked a functioning officer corps: there were only 98 officers rather than the target of 138.⁴⁴ Officers from ECOWAS member states were brought in to serve in the AFL, including a Nigerian Major-General as Command-Officer-in-Charge. The Liberian government was also forced to recall five former senior AFL officers who had previously been discharged.⁴⁵

Assessing the Military Reconstruction Processes

Although it is yet too early to decisively determine the outcome of these reconstruction processes, as they are both still ongoing, this section ventures an initial assessment of the current status of the armed forces (as of October 2012) in relation to the benchmarks mentioned above.

Operational Capacity

The operational capacity of the armed forces in Sierra Leone is widely considered to have improved since its inception in 2002. Most observers contend that the RSLAF has a basic capacity to defend the country against the most likely security threats.⁴⁶ The army is much better trained and equipped, although there are outstanding issues in regard to a lack of heavy military equipment, communications, transport and accommodation.⁴⁷ The RSLAF still lacks the general military capacity to counter a large-scale military intervention by another country due to its lack of modern weapons and an effective air force.⁴⁸ The most prevalent security threats against the state, however, remain internal, and most analysts agree that the security institutions are in a much better position to counter low-level incursions and unrest before it is allowed to escalate.⁴⁹ Due to the military integration process, the core of the RSLAF still consists primarily of former ex-combatants and ex-army soldiers. However, because of the nature of the civil war, this does not necessarily mean that certain geographical regions or ethnic groups are overrepresented. A new, open and competitive recruitment procedure was introduced after the war, and a policy devised to ensure recruiting from all four major provinces.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, analysts acknowledge the need to keep the composition of the armed forces under close scrutiny in light of the increasing political polarization between the two dominant political parties characterised by regional and ethnic dimensions.⁵¹

It is more difficult to assess the operational capacity of the AFL. The UN peacekeeping mission continues to have the primary responsibility for the security of Liberia. In January 2010, following the departure of the US contractors, full responsibility for the training, maintenance and sustenance of the AFL was transferred to the Liberian government.⁵² At this time the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) continued the US support with nearly 50 US military personnel providing mentoring and advice.⁵³ In early 2011, Johnson Sirleaf declared that the AFL was 'moving towards becoming fully operational', with the intention that the armed forces should be mission capable by 2014.⁵⁴ The army would also be increased by 300 soldiers and the infrastructure of the AFL expanded.⁵⁵

According to advisers on site the training has progressed well since the outset and was continuing to make slow yet gradual progress in 2011.⁵⁶ However, it has also been suggested that the training does not correspond to anticipated security needs.⁵⁷ In addition, the AFL faces considerable challenges related to the lack of a professional officer and NCO corps. One result of the decision to build a new army has been a radical improvement in the AFL's composition compared to the old force. Following the recruitment, both the army and MoD were considered broadly representative in terms of geography and ethnicity.⁵⁸ However, due to financial constraints it is unclear whether the Liberian government will be able to uphold this ambitious practice in the future.⁵⁹

Governance

As of 2011 the RSLAF was not yet fully under civilian and democratic control. Although significant progress had been made in official decision-making structures and procedures, the institutional reforms are yet to become politically entrenched and self-reinforcing. Certain areas of responsibility, such as budget and procurement, are more decisively in the hands of civilian personnel, whereas policy remains partly under military control. This is probably due both to resentment on the part of the military and a lack of capacity and willingness on part of the civil servants.⁶⁰ The problem of institutional memory has also been identified as an obstacle, as many MoD officials who were trained and advised in the early reform years subsequently left their posts.⁶¹ There is also a lack of effective and functioning democratic oversight mechanisms.⁶² Although both the parliament and some of its committees are formally responsible for this, their powers are restricted by lack of both capacity and willingness to fulfil these duties.⁶³ While the relationship between the political elite and the army has improved, and the level of politicization of the RSLAF is generally

considered to be low, there is still a sense of suspicion remaining at the level of the executive regarding the loyalty of the armed forces,⁶⁴ which although difficult to prove, may not be completely unfounded.⁶⁵

In the early years of the RSLAF, many believed that the army was still violent and enjoyed impunity.⁶⁶ As part of the reconstruction process, however, there have been deliberate efforts to improve public perception of the armed forces.⁶⁷ Surveys show that after ten years the RSLAF is no longer considered a security threat and soldiers enjoy more trust among the population.⁶⁸ While there were instances of clashes between the civilian population and soldiers during the formative years, few incidents have occurred since.⁶⁹ The legal framework for effectively addressing such issues has also improved, although the general weakness of the Sierra Leone judiciary remains a key obstacle to improving the rule of law.⁷⁰ One critical part of the military reform process has been the identification of new roles and tasks for the army in peacetime. In 2004, a Military Aid to Civil Power role was introduced which made it possible for the army to support the Sierra Leonean Police (SLP) when deemed necessary and appropriate due to security concerns.⁷¹ Generally, most observers testify to the professional behaviour of the army when assigned to such tasks.⁷²

In Liberia, it has been suggested that the new MoD is the 'best-trained and most functional ministry in the Liberian executive branch',⁷³ but concerns have also been raised regarding its capacity to deal with budgeting, procurement and management systems.⁷⁴ Compared to the AFL, the civilian personnel at the MoD have not received the same amount of training and advice, and there is still a communications and cooperation gap between the AFL and the MoD.⁷⁵ The CPA has also been criticized for failing to account for the establishment of effective civilian and democratic oversight mechanisms.⁷⁶ The growing professionalism of the MoD is not unambiguously positive in this respect. One key problem, as in Sierra Leone, relates to the general weakness of both the civil society and the legislative branch. Despite reforms to improve the workings of these institutions, parliamentary engagement and insight into security sector issues remains low.⁷⁷

Because the AFL has yet to become fully operational, a fair assessment of the relationship between military and the population is not possible, but there is anecdotal evidence from training exercises in the communities that the new generation of soldiers displays a professional attitude towards the population.⁷⁸ As in Sierra Leone surveys indicate that the perception of the AFL in the population has improved considerably in the

post-war period, and few people consider the armed forces a threat to their personal security.⁷⁹

Sustainability

In Sierra Leone, the size of the armed forces is an issue of concern in terms of sustainability.⁸⁰ Most international observers, including IMATT representatives, argue that the current size – approximately 8,500 personnel – is too large for the country.⁸¹ In terms of what the government can afford to sustain without external funding, the size is likely to be limited to 2–3,000. For operational requirements, however, it has been suggested that the right size might be up to 5,000 troops, considering the volatile security situation in the greater Mano River region, and the potential for participation in international peacekeeping operations.⁸² Any concrete proposal regarding further downsizing is, however, likely to be met by great resistance. Most of those who would be asked to leave would face bleak employment prospects, and the last round of downsizing in particular was met with loud protests.⁸³

International personnel have occupied high-level executive and advisory posts in the RSLAF and the MoD for the last ten years. Some Sierra Leonean officers complain that they have been sidelined or insufficiently consulted during the process, while IMATT has claimed that this was necessary due to the lack of capacity and willingness of RSLAF officers.⁸⁴ However, steps have been taken to gradually remove international personnel from command and executive posts to advisory and support roles. The remaining executive powers were handed over in 2007.⁸⁵ But there were 45 international IMATT personnel still in advisory positions in 2010.⁸⁶ Interestingly, there seems to be only limited concerns outside the RSLAF and among the population regarding the extensive involvement of international actors in general, and the UK's in particular, in the SSR process.⁸⁷

In Liberia, sustaining the size of the new force is not the main source of concern, although most observers tend to agree that the government cannot afford a much larger force than its current 2,000 members. Financial constraints have affected the size of the force, the training and the long-term sustainability of the reform process, including the new recruitment procedures. Both initial entry training and collective training have suffered from lack of adequate funding.⁸⁸ In a post-war country struggling with the lack of resources for vital development, the comparatively high costs associated with maintaining a

professionally trained army thus poses a significant challenge to its standards and sustainability.⁸⁹

In contrast to Sierra Leone, the perceived lack of local ownership of the SSR process has caused great resentment among many local actors in Liberia, where the legislature and civil society actors have voiced strong concerns about their limited roles.⁹⁰ Controversial decisions concerning military reforms are frequently evidenced as external dominance, notably the disbandment of the former AFL, the limited strength of the new army, and the outsourcing of the reform process to private security companies.⁹¹ The last issue in particular was criticised due to the perceived lack of accountability and transparency that followed. Both DynCorp and PAE were contracted to the US Government and had no legal obligation to provide information to, or coordinate with, the Liberian government.⁹² While this may be the case, DynCorp is said to have met the Liberian government and civil society groups during the recruitment process.⁹³ Some argue that the US government shared the information from contractors with the MoD on a regular basis.⁹⁴

Conclusions

By investigating the experiences of post-war Sierra Leone and Liberia, preliminarily conclusions are possible about the advantages and drawbacks of the two approaches to military reform. Although each approach has had its distinct benefits and risks during the implementation process, the outcomes are similar in many respects, entailing implications for the long-term sustainability of the reforms.

One benefit of the approach in Sierra Leone, particularly in the early years, was that it enabled local and international peace custodians to keep a large number of ex-combatants off the streets, limiting the risk that they would undermine the peace process or constitute an easy recruitment target for potential 'spoilers'. The speed of the process also mitigated the security vacuum; the new army was operational within a couple of years. The Liberian approach of disbanding all existing armed forces, including the old AFL, while at the same time practically preventing them from seeking entry into the new army, was a much more risky strategy, especially as it was interpreted by many as violating the letter of the peace agreement. Without the presence of an extensive international peacekeeping operation to protect the fragile peace process, it is doubtful if this strategy would have worked.

Another advantage of the Sierra Leonean approach was that the recruitment and training process of the integrated army was less demanding on resources because recruits

joined existing units. However, integration also had the drawback of producing a large number of troops. Although the RSLAF was subsequently reduced and new peacetime roles developed, the force is still too large. One benefit of the Liberian 'clean slate' approach was that it limited the size of the new AFL from the outset, thereby avoiding the politically sensitive task of downsizing, and alleviating some of the concerns about financial sustainability.

The decision in Liberia to start from scratch in terms of recruitment is also likely to have contributed to the quality of the force composition and improved relations between the army and the population. While the composition of the RSLAF in Sierra Leone no longer appears to be plagued by ethnic or regional biases, it still largely comprises ex-combatants who could be regarded as a latent security threat. However, there are few indications that this has had any straightforward negative implications for relations between the RSLAF and the population. Considering the time and resources spent on demobilizing the old AFL, and the vetting and screening process, this is a noteworthy finding. However, it is possible that the comparative benefits of the Liberian approach will only become evident in the future, given that the UN still has the main responsibility for security in Liberia. In Sierra Leone the capacity of the RSLAF is generally considered to have improved considerably, but as the core of the force consists of ex-combatants and it needs downsizing, there may be negative implications for its continued renewal and hence its long-term capacity.

In spite of pursuing different paths of reconstruction, Sierra Leone and Liberia share critical shortcomings regarding the establishment of genuine civilian and democratic control over the armed forces, and the prospects for financial sustainability of these reform processes. The findings suggest that opting for one of the two reform approaches will only partly affect the outcome. 'Weak' and war-torn states with a legacy of authoritarian rule are likely to face similar challenges in making SSR take root in the political culture, whichever approach is adopted. Such societies are often struggling with a range of other political and socioeconomic challenges, and there are certainly opportunity costs in maintaining a large military when funds could be spent improving the living conditions for the population at large.⁹⁵ No matter how successful military reform is, it is ultimately dependent on progress in other areas of society, such as the judiciary and the strengthening of both the parliament and the civil society.

Both cases demonstrate the important role that international donors can play in these post-war military reform processes. The UK in Sierra Leone and United States in Liberia have been instrumental in funding and implementing the military reconstruction processes.

But such extensive international involvement raises critical concerns about local ownership. Interestingly, this issue has raised more controversy in Liberia than in Sierra Leone, in spite of almost equally extensive international involvement. This suggests that it may not be the degree of involvement itself that is the key issue at stake, but rather the relationship between the donors and the local actors and the attitudes and behaviour of the key participants in the process.

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NOTES

¹ For analyses of SSR, see *inter alia*, Albrecht Schnabel and Hans Born, 'Security Sector Reform Narrowing the Gap between Theory and Practice', The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), 2011; Heiner Hänggi, 'Conceptualising Security Sector Reform and Reconstruction', in Alan Bryden and Hänggi (eds), *Reform and Reconstruction of the Security Sector*, Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004, pp.3–18; Michael Brzoska, 'Introduction: Criteria for Evaluating Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Security Sector Reform in Peace Support Operations', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.13, No.1, 2006, pp.1–13; Alpaslan Ozerdem, 'Insurgency, Militias and DDR as Part of Security Sector Reconstruction in Iraq: How not to do it', *Disasters*, Vol. 34 (supp.1), 2010, S40-S59.

² Hänggi (see n.1 above), p.1.

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