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Making Liberia Safe

Transformation of the National Security Sector

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Liberian police stand guard at an evening concert celebrating the inauguration of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Monrovia, January 16, 2006. Johnson-Sirleaf took office as Africa's first elected woman president, pledging to break with the country's history of corruption and violence that spread war to neighbouring states.

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Summary

The security institutions, forces, and practices of the regime of Charles Taylor, Liberia's former president, met *none* of the essential criteria for a sound security sector: coherence, legitimacy, effectiveness, and affordability. They were meant to serve the regime, not the nation, and were controlled and used—rather, misused—by one man, mainly against Liberia's people and neighbors.

Yet even under new, able, and decent leadership, the old structures and ways are unworkable, wasteful, and confused, and they enjoy neither the trust nor the cooperation of the Liberian people at this critical juncture. It follows that Liberia must make a clean break, adopting a new security architecture, forces, management structure, and law.

The government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has made security sector transformation a high priority, and the United Nations, the United States, and others are helping Liberia build new forces. What has been done and planned so far to transform the Liberian security apparatus is valid and important; this study raises no fundamental questions about the soundness of what is already under way.

At the same time, Liberia and its partners need an overall security architecture, accompanied by a strategy to create it. Without an architecture and strategy, setting priorities will become increasingly difficult; gaps, redundancies, confusion, and political squabbling over forces are likely. In offering an architecture and strategy, this study identifies additional measures, including additional capabilities, that would make Liberia's security sector more coherent, legitimate, effective, and affordable.

The starting point for this inquiry is an analysis of Liberia's security environment, which is complex, fluid, and fraught with risk. Liberia faces a present danger of growing lawlessness and poor public safety, owing primarily to its large pool of jobless and unschooled youth, whose only experience is fighting. If public safety and the rule of law are not established and maintained, odds are all too good that more severe domestic threats will arise. In particular, political opportunists, warlords, or criminal figures may lure and organize ex-fighters into armed groups beyond the reach of, and ultimately endangering, the state. Because this could happen quickly, capabilities that strengthen dissuasion and preempt internal threats are at a premium.

The risk of sudden threats from abroad cannot be excluded. Even if outright state aggression against Liberia is improbable in present conditions, the potential exists for incursions by insurgents operating from adjacent states and for use of Liberian territory by insurgents to attack those states.

In this environment, Liberia needs an *integrated security concept* to guide the formation and use of new forces and of new institutions to manage those forces. That concept should entail

- concentrating on known challenges of law enforcement and public safety
- dissuading, deterring, and—if need be—defeating any organized internal threats that may arise
- preparing to defend against external aggression by states or, more likely, by nonstate actors.

From this concept, we derive *core security functions*:

- regular policing
- protecting and developing transportation links, infrastructure, and natural resources
- protecting key officials
- preventing and responding to civil unrest
- preventing and defeating organized armed opposition, up to and including full-blown insurgency

- providing border and coastal security
- responding to outright aggression
- developing appropriate and mutually beneficial relationships with neighbors and other interested parties
- collecting intelligence to support these functions.

Liberian security forces, supported by intelligence capabilities, must be able to fulfill these core functions in a cost-effective manner. The Liberian National Police (LNP) and Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) are Liberia's basic building blocks for performing these functions.

The primary missions of the LNP are (a) to prevent and fight crime and (b) to maintain public safety. These missions call for a light, but sizable, community-friendly police force that can earn the confidence and cooperation of the Liberian people. Anticipating occasional civil disorder, the LNP should also have a branch capable of riot control (e. g., the police support unit).

The primary missions of the AFL are (a) to safeguard the country against possible external threats and (b) to support internal security forces in defeating any insurgency or other internal threat for which Liberia's internal security forces prove inadequate on their own. At present, nonstate external and internal threats are more likely than threats from neighboring states. The size of the AFL is less important than that it be superior in quality and capability to foreseeable threats.

In view of Liberia's particular security demands, this basic force structure can be enhanced by including in the LNP a small mobile "swing" police unit capable of (a) helping regular police meet heightened internal dangers, (b) challenging armed groups that form in defiance of the state's authority, and (c) operating with the AFL, if need be, to meet major internal or external threats. This quick-response police unit (QRPU) should be oriented toward law enforcement but also trained and equipped for light combat operations. QRPU personnel would be drawn mainly from the rest of the LNP; rotation of personnel through the LNP, including tours in the QRPU, would facilitate interoperability.

This overall architecture should provide flexibility, speed, and geographic reach. The QRPU would permit the regular LNP to be

lightly armed and community-oriented, and it would reduce the state's reliance on AFL intervention to quell domestic threats.

Liberia's core security functions also indicate a need for a modest Coast Guard, in addition to the Customs and Immigration services and the Special Security Service (SSS) to protect national leaders.

In analyzing specific *force-structure options* (detailed in Chapter Four of this volume), we found the following (see Table S.1):

- Existing plans of the United Nations (UN), the United States, and Liberia to build a small LNP and small AFL (Option 1), while sound, may not be adequate to meet Liberia's needs—especially for maintaining basic public safety, preventing armed internal opposition, and providing coastal security.
- Doubling the planned size of the LNP and the AFL and adding a Coast Guard (Option 2), which would result in approximately \$18 million more in annual operating costs, could fall short of providing adequate security against armed internal opposition without excessive reliance on domestic intervention by the AFL.
- Incorporating a QRPU in the LNP (Option 3) would better meet Liberia's security challenges, especially armed internal opposition, at a \$5 million increase in annual operating costs above the current plan.
- Although the capital cost of Option 3 would be about \$24 million more than that of Option 1—because of the addition of a QRPU and Coast Guard—it would cost \$43 million less to build than Option 2. This seems like a wise investment for Liberia and its supporters, yielding effective security on an economical operating basis.

Table S.1
Costs for Three Force-Structure
Options (\$millions)

Option	Operating Cost	Capital Cost
1	17.8	94.9
2	35.4	162.1
3	22.5	118.9

The force structure of Option 3 covers the full spectrum of internal and external dangers, including those from armed gangs and insurgency. At the same time, the ability of Liberian security forces to meet these dangers can be affected by poor road access, aggravated by the difficulty in moving during the rainy season. This problem can be reduced by good surveillance, rotary-air mobility (provided by a foreign partner), preemptive action, and isolation of armed groups in inaccessible areas, as well as by the ability to act in force when roads become passable. Improving Liberia's roads is important for its security.

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is critical to Liberia's security and will remain so for some years to come. It will take about five years before the main Liberian forces have been fully built, equipped, trained, and deployed.¹ During that period it should be possible to scale back significantly the numbers of UNMIL peacekeepers and correspondingly reduce UNMIL costs, provided certain critical UNMIL capabilities are preserved—especially police advisors, UNMIL's own quick-response force, and rotary-wing air transport and surveillance. During this transition, command and control arrangements between UNMIL and Liberian security forces must be delineated and coordinated with great care.

Although it is unclear whether the UN will be prepared to maintain any presence beyond the time Liberian forces reach full strength, a tailored residual presence, on the order of no more than 3,000 personnel, could be needed for at least one or two years thereafter, given stable conditions, to ensure that conflict and chaos do not return. Beyond that time and for some time to come, a small but critical need will remain for international (not necessarily UN) capabilities, including advisors, rotary-wing air transport and surveillance, to complement Liberian forces. The cost of such a post-UNMIL international capability has been estimated in the body of this monograph; it is not included in the Liberian force-structure options.

Because Liberia's security environment is dynamic and unpredictable, force plans and the force structure itself must be adaptable.

¹ This assumes a benign environment and significant continued and new assistance. The time frame is therefore somewhat notional.

This goes not only for the mix of capabilities of Liberian security forces—e.g., the size of the regular police, the relative importance of the QRPU, the size and firepower of the army—but also for the rate at which UNMIL can be drawn down. This demands tight planning links between the Liberian government, the U.S. government, and the UN. Liberia must develop its own ability to plan its needs for forces and other security capabilities based upon informed, objective, and realistic analysis. It must neither underestimate the security difficulties it faces nor overestimate its ability to maintain capabilities. Creating a civilian and military capability to assess, plan, and align its resources with its needs should become part of the assistance Liberia receives from its international partners in the coming years.

As important as Liberia's forces are its security institutions—the management structures, responsibilities, authorities, processes, and rules—that will assure coherent, legitimate, effective, and affordable direction to, control of, and support for security forces. These institutions are needed not only for Liberia's long-term security but also to guide security sector transformation starting now. The following merit immediate consideration:

- A Liberian National Security Council (NSC) for policymaking, resource allocation, and crisis management should be created and used regularly. The NSC would be chaired by the President and would include as its core the Ministers of Justice, Defense, Finance, and Foreign Affairs (with others included ad hoc). It would receive objective analysis and advice from the head of national intelligence, the most senior officers of the LNP and AFL, and the Liberian National Security Advisor (LNSA).
- This cabinet-level NSC should in turn serve as a template for, and should insist upon, interministerial information-sharing and coordination at lower levels—a bureaucratic challenge for any government, but essential for Liberia. Multilevel interministerial cooperation will take time to effect; all the more reason to encourage it now.
- The LNSA should have several responsibilities: orchestrating the NSC system at and below the cabinet level; ensuring that the Pres-

ident and NSC receive objective analysis, options, and all points of view; fostering direct ties among key ministries and agencies; monitoring the progress of security sector transformation; and monitoring the quality of operational cooperation among the various security services. The LNSA should not be involved in regular ministry affairs or come between ministers and the President.

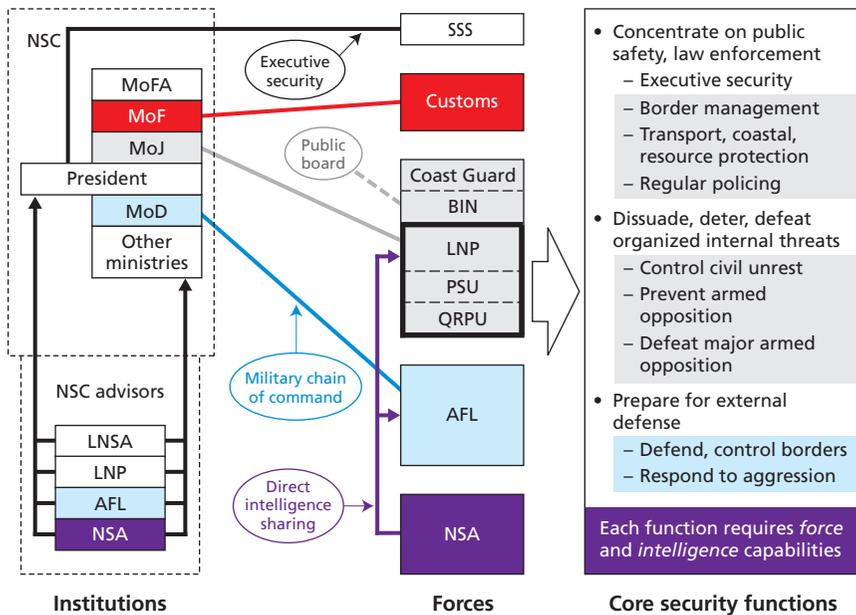
- The chain of command over the AFL—the country’s strongest force—should be clarified: from the President, as commander-in-chief, through the Minister of Defense to the senior military commander, with the understanding that decisions to use military force should be reached by the deliberation of the NSC as a whole. Any military domestic intervention, moreover, would require consultation with the legislature.
- Several ancillary police should be consolidated into the LNP, with the exception of certain specialized services—Special Security Service for executive protection, Immigration and Naturalization, Customs, and the Coast Guard.
- Other ancillary police agencies should be eliminated and their personnel vetted for possible service in the LNP.
- The LNP should be aligned under the Justice Ministry while maintaining operational control within the LNP, with an independent board to maintain professional standards and public trust of the police.

Intelligence capabilities are an essential complement of the various armed services and must be held to the same standards of effectiveness, affordability, legitimacy, and coherence. Responsibility and capability to collect intelligence should be concentrated in a National Security Agency (NSA) that (a) reports to the President; (b) provides analysis to the entire NSC; (c) furnishes information directly and continuously to the LNP and AFL; and (d) is authorized to arrest and briefly detain only persons who pose national security threats. Thus, the intelligence service is a *support* organization for the rest of the security sector. Recognizing that the police will be able to collect much of the information needed to investigate and fight crime, the NSA should focus on high-threat concerns and can be of modest size.

Taking this analysis of force structure and institutions into account, it is possible to assemble a complete architecture, as shown below. This architecture would have the following characteristics (see Figure S.1):

- The NSC, chaired by the President as commander-in-chief, has final authority over all security forces.
- Security forces report through ministries rather than directly to the President.
- Security forces are distributed between the Justice and Defense ministries.
- Lines of authority are clear.
- Control over the military passes from the President through the Minister of Defense.

Figure S.1
Integrated Architecture and Core Functions



- The number of distinct security forces and services is manageably small, while still allowing for specialization.
- No security force lacks an important core security function.
- No core security function lacks a force that is principally responsible for it, and there is no confusion or duplication in the alignment of forces with functions.
- The QRPU can support other police units or support the AFL.
- The intelligence service (NSA) reports to the President, serves the NSC as a whole, and provides direct support to the LNP and AFL.

This architecture should be presented and codified in a way that secures broad political support, earns public understanding and trust, and signals the government's clarity of purpose and resolve, including toward potential adversaries. A new omnibus national security law, though a political challenge to enact, is a better way to meet these needs than revising each law now on the books or instituting a new system by presidential decree.

In the course of preparing this integrated approach, we identified several issues in need of immediate attention:

- Security personnel should stay out of politics, except for having the right to vote.
- To avoid discontinuity and political manipulation, senior sub-cabinet security officials (except for the LNSA) and uniformed officers should be nominated by the President and confirmed by the legislature for fixed terms, not changed with a government transition.
- As the new LNP is being built, its patrols need to be accompanied and mentored by armed international civilian police (CIVPOL) advisors.
- Liberian justice, courts, and corrections systems must be built quickly or law enforcement will be neither effective nor legitimate; this effort is now woefully under-resourced.

- Personnel of the former police force and other security forces who are not to be trained and integrated into the new force should be retired immediately, lest they infect new police with bad habits.
- Current systems for paying security personnel must be upgraded and made immune to corruption.

Liberia must not and need not be left to face its dangers alone. Even as Liberian forces gradually take over from UNMIL, and as new security institutions are built, those with a stake in Liberia's security—the UN, the AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United States, other countries, and international organizations—should continue to help. Liberia should forge cooperative ties with its neighbors in the Mano River Basin, including coordination against common nonstate threats. The UN Security Council should make clear through continuing resolutions that its concern for Liberia will not fade with the gradual reduction of UNMIL. The United States must be steadfast in its support for Liberia, making it a model of how a failed state can be made secure and viable. As others offer to help Liberian security sector development, their efforts should conform to Liberia's chosen principles, architecture, and standards.

Implementation should focus on the following:

- Immediate and consistent use of the NSC to guide security sector policy, planning, resource-allocation, and transformation
- Development and coordination of detailed integrated (UNMIL-Liberian) force plans with the United States and the UN
- Public education, political consensus-building, and preparation of a national security law
- Stepped-up and regular joint LNP-CIVPOL patrolling to solidify the rule of law, provide evidence of deterrence, and show that the state is making progress
- Plans to assure uninterrupted continuation of UNMIL's own quick-response force
- A design and plans for a small LNP QRPU and small Coast Guard

- Consolidation, reduction, and appropriate recruiting, vetting, and training of the currently independent ancillary police forces, customs, and intelligence personnel
- Attention to building court and corrections-system capacity
- Training (e.g., at the U.S. Africa Center for Strategic Studies and other institutions) of senior officials and officers in the precepts and practicalities of Liberia's security sector.

To conclude, the presence of UNMIL, the commitment of the United States, and a somewhat less hostile external security environment—albeit one that may change rapidly—provide Liberia with valuable time to create security institutions and forces that are effective against dangers, are legitimate in the eyes of Liberia's people and neighbors, fit together and work coherently, and are worth the cost. This study is meant to help Liberia and its supporters use that time well.