

Why security forces do not deliver security: evidence from Liberia and the Central African Republic

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Why Security Forces Do Not Deliver Security: Evidence from Liberia and the Central African Republic

Andreas Mehler¹

Abstract

Little attention has been paid to the factual contribution of the state's security forces to the physical security of African citizens. Reports about security forces adding to a widespread insecurity are frequent: the protectors become violators, and their appearance causes fear, not security. In many African crisis countries the realization of better security forces appears to be an elusive goal, either because violent conflicts are not definitively settled and therefore do not allow for decent reform or because a lack of capacity as a result of material constraints is not easy to remedy. Above all, the political will of governments to reform their security forces, including their composition and structure, is often limited. This contribution compares the security provision by official forces in Liberia and the Central African Republic, two extreme cases of strong and weak international involvement, respectively, in post-conflict security-sector reform. Blueprint models for such reforms that do not take into account local expectations and experiences are bound to fail.

Keywords

security, armed forces, security-sector reform, Liberia, Central African Republic

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Introduction

The impact of African security forces on the security of the population is rarely at the center of empirical analysis.¹ This may be linked to some blurring recently of what is meant by security. *Human security* explicitly focuses on the needs of the individual, including protection from hunger, disease, and disasters, but at the same time it waters down the importance of minimal security requirements for the protection of individuals from physical violence. Many terms, such as *food security*, *job security*, *social security*, and so on, rightly point to existential fears. In this article, the term *security*—without adjectives—is used instead. However, security refers not only to the internal security of a state but also to the security of its population from physical violence, perpetrated by both state and nonstate actors. In the postindependence era and particularly in so-called socialist African regimes, the military was sometimes used to provide public services outside the security sector. But what about the fulfillment of the core security mandate of those forces? Critical studies about the actual performance of African armies and police forces in providing security to the citizens are still rare.² This may be partly explained by the discreet nature of the subject, which is surrounded by an aura of secrecy, particularly when it comes to nondemocratic regimes. Thus, the topic is not easily researched. It becomes easier when states have experienced a breakdown of authority and when a substantial international engagement in the security sector has occurred. For the purpose of this article, two country cases of external intervention, located at the two poles of a spectrum of intensity, have been selected: Liberia (very strong engagement) and the Central African Republic (CAR; rather weak engagement). This variation in the intensity of engagement is one of the essential differences between the two countries, which are both (1) very poor (ranked 176 and 178 out of 179 in the Human Development Index, 2006 values) and (2) small in terms of population size (3.3 and 4.2 million people in 2006) and which both (3) have a particularly violent contemporary history.³ Both are also diamond-producing countries that demonstrate major similarities with regard to associated risk factors (high resource dependence, low resource abundance, “lootable” resources located in the periphery, but no discriminated-against minority living in these regions).⁴ It could be expected that in this context the intensity of outside engagement has some bearing on the quality of services provided by state security organs because the following assumptions can be made: (1) the intensity of civil war influences the stability of formal security forces, and outside engagement (peacemaking, peacekeeping) should lower this intensity; (2) the frequent reshaping of security forces in line with the directives of new heads of state creates a loyal core, but a frustrated mass, of security forces, and external engagement in security-sector reform should be conducive to a professional army beyond the immediate reach of changing presidents.⁵

This article explores whether capacity, structure or composition, ongoing violent conflict, or political will are essential in explaining the weak performance of state

security forces in providing security. The following familiar assumptions are scrutinized: First, in theory, governments in resource-rich countries can use resource revenues to finance a large security apparatus, which should be able to effectively suppress rebellion—or to provide security (as a public good) for the majority of the population. The assumption is therefore that the relative size of a security apparatus varies positively with the level of security. Second, one main assumption on the part of international promoters and sponsors of security-sector reform is that the existing security forces are not adequately structured (or financed and controlled) to provide for that same good. The excessive relative size of presidential guards or other special forces is symptomatic of this unbalanced structure. Also, the dominance of a few ethnic groups within security forces may reduce acceptance of these forces within the population. Third, security forces continuing to fight civil wars are under extreme pressure and may not be in a position to provide security to ordinary people under these conditions. Fourth, the relative lack of responsiveness of the ruling elites toward the ruled—particularly in resource-rich rentier states—expresses itself in the disregard for the basic security interests of ordinary people.

For this purpose, brief historical accounts of phases of insecurity are recalled, with an emphasis on the security forces' involvement (with more emphasis on the CAR as the security forces played a comparatively bigger role here than in Liberia), and the potential change imposed by outsiders in the course of “security-sector reform” is assessed (with more emphasis on Liberia as the reform process there advanced rather quickly). The political will to have functioning and republican security forces on the part of a country's leadership may or may not be subject to outside influence. As far as they have been available, popular perceptions of the security forces are presented and contrasted with the technocratic top-down perspectives dominant in security-sector reform.

Background and Current Research

It has not been uncommon in African countries for severe security problems to have started right within the security forces, leading to an escalation of violence or an inability to deal with it appropriately. A well-known case is Sierra Leone, with its “sobels” (soldiers by day, rebels by night), but many flagrant recent cases (in Guinea-Bissau 2008–9, Guinea 2009) confirm this impression. It is obvious that security forces are frequently part of the problem and less often part of the solution to Africa's security concerns.

The study of security forces in Africa is traditionally the field of “securocrats”: specialists on questions of armament, the composition, professionalism, and training of the armed forces, and so on.⁶ During the cold war the military balance between competing subregional powers was of obvious interest (e.g., Ethiopia vs. Somalia). With the now dominant paradigm of state failure and the growing importance of postconflict reconstruction, this interest has merged more and more with the developmental approach to security-sector reform.⁷

A second strain in the literature on African security forces is rather historically informed and draws genealogies of armies from their colonial foundation to the postindependence era.⁸ A third, and important, part of the literature on security forces focuses on military regimes and coups or, more generally, the intrusion of the military into African politics. Some argued that the security sector was oversized, particularly the military, which only rarely defended the borders against aggressive neighbors. The reduction of military spending was the order of the day in the 1980s, and the number of interstate wars in Africa has remained limited. Transformations of the military apparatus into ethnic factions, a warlord's support base, and mercenary organizations have been seen as a deviation from the republican ethos or professionalism. Those studies are often very normatively informed.⁹ In a study on military coups, McGowan found that the quality of leadership and public opposition to military rule are important in explaining the rather good performance of four West African states with regard to conflict and coups in contrast to the rest.¹⁰ The interest in public opinion has to be stressed as it rarely comes to the fore. Even after a successful reform of the security sector—and this was arguably the case in Sierra Leone after 1999—"mistrust of the security forces on the part of the population" can remain the key problem.¹¹ This view from below is too rarely explored. Particularly rare are any opinion polling data.¹² The dominant explanation for the weak performance of security forces is weak states.¹³ This argument could be circular, as security is without any doubt one of *the* core functions of a state across time and space. Based on this brief overview, it is clear that the study of African security forces is still seldom interested in the security output of security organs.

In the following paragraphs, which focus on the two case studies selected (CAR, Liberia), the main sources of information used are media reports, selected nongovernmental organization (NGO) reports, UN Security Council resolutions, and reports by the UN secretary-general on UN missions in both countries. This information is used because the security sector in general, and demobilization and disarmament in particular, plays an important role in the mandates assigned by the Security Council. The historical information given here draws on a limited number of articles and Internet sources. These reports regularly inform external perceptions of the performance of state security forces. Wherever possible, local reactions and voices are added to this picture. The approach is therefore mostly qualitative. At least for Liberia, some original data from fieldwork are used; the author also visited the CAR three times between 1993 and 1999 in the context of a different research project.

The main events of violence since the 1960s (independence of CAR) in both countries are summarized in Table 1.

Military Rule and Civilian Insecurity in the CAR

One has to acknowledge that the former colonial power France retained considerable influence long after formal independence; most successful coups are therefore considered to have been tacitly endorsed by Paris before they actually happened.

Table 1. Main Episodes of Violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Liberia, 1960–2009

CAR	Liberia
1965 Coup d'état by Jean-Bédél Bokassa	1979 Brutally repressed rice riots
1979 Operation Barracuda, French commando action to replace Bokassa with his predecessor David Dacko	1980 Bloody coup d'état by Samuel Doe, Thomas Quiwonkpah, and others, killing President William Tolbert; public execution of thirteen further high-ranking government officials
1981 Coup d'état by André Kolingba	1985 Failed coup attempt by Quiwonkpah, massive repression of ethnic Gio and Mano
1982 Failed coup attempt by Ange-Félix Patassé and François Bozizé	1989–96 First civil war, main instigator: Charles Taylor; Doe killed by the Prince Johnson faction
1996–97 Series of three army mutinies against President Patassé (elected in 1993)	1997 Series of political assassinations after the election of Charles Taylor
2001 Failed coup attempt by Kolingba	1999–2003 Second civil war, LURD and MODEL close to military victory when cease-fire signed
2001–2 Bozizé revolt	
2003 Conquest of Bangui by Bozizé (toppling Patassé)	
2005–9 Series of rebellions in the northern part of the country	

LURD = Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy; MODEL = Movement for Democracy in Liberia.

However, it would be an exaggeration to believe that France masterminded these acts in detail. The administration of the CAR has historically been highly militarized, with three members of the military hierarchy—in fact, actual or former chiefs of staff—having taken power by force and served as presidents for thirty-three out of fifty years of independence: Jean-Bédél Bokassa (on December 31, 1965), André Kolingba (September 1, 1981), and François Bozizé (March 15, 2003). The first two successful coups did not result in immediate bloodshed, although Bokassa's rule included numerous political assassinations.¹⁴

Capacity, Structure, and Composition of the Official Security Forces

According to Berman,¹⁵ at the end of “emperor” Bokassa's reign (1979) a maximum of 7,500 troops served in the Forces Armées Centrafricaines (FACA); the number was about half that size in the mid-1990s, shortly after civilian president Ange-Félix Patassé (1993–2003) had taken over, which meant that military ruler Kolingba had actually reduced the size of the army. However, Kolingba had turned the armed forces into a dominant Yakoma force (his own minority ethnic group). In 2003 the total number of FACA personnel was 4,442; in 2006 the UN estimated the

total strength at 4,000 but with only 1,250 elements considered to be operational.¹⁶ This means that the army was always small compared to the population of approximately four million inhabitants. The FACA forces were always very weak in armaments and received a particularly low degree of attention under President Patassé.

The Gendarmerie was made up of more or less an additional 1,300 men (with a maximum of 1,600 attained in 2002). Under Patassé, the Presidential Guard officially counted 642 members but was in reality made up of 900 members.¹⁷ Finally, the police force totals approximately 1,600 members, mostly poorly (or not at all) armed, with the exception of a special unit to combat gang crime.

Ongoing Conflict

Insecurity has, in fact, been caused not just by the top hierarchy of the army. In 1996–97 three army mutinies undermined the country's stability (200–500 dead). While the particular situation in the security sector formed the background to these mutinies, they also need to be understood within the context of the larger political environment of Patassé's presidency. The first mutiny, in April 1996, was indirectly tied to Patassé's displacement of the former beneficiaries of Kolingba's regime. Only one month later the second mutiny erupted, this time involving five hundred soldiers who claimed that the promises made had not been fulfilled and that certain strategic decisions were unacceptable. Violence erupted once again in mid-November 1996; eight hundred rebels were involved, but this time they also had explicit political aims, demanding the resignation of the president. Only with the help of international peacekeepers was it possible to end the crisis.

Extrajudicial executions were a daily occurrence after the aforementioned special unit to combat gang crime took over the fight against criminality in 1997.¹⁸ There is no clear indication whether the population appreciated or resented this heavy-handedness. A local massacre in Kolingba's home region of Kembé which mainly targeted an officer loyal to Kolingba, was attributed to the Presidential Guard. Patassé had reason to suspect a good part of FACA of lacking loyalty (and sympathizing with Kolingba), but his opponents also had reason to suspect the president of using his Presidential Guard and informal forces for intimidation and repression.¹⁹

During the next crisis in May 2001 the security forces were again at the center of events. No other major objective of the rebels was achieved. The loyalists regained the upper hand in the following days, supported by at least three hundred troops of the rebel leader Jean-Pierre Bemba from the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo as well as Libyan forces and helicopters. Kolingba, who still had a solid power base in parts of the military apparatus, publicly claimed that he had orchestrated the rebellion.

Crimes against humanity were perpetrated by Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo (MLC) fighters as well as by security forces and pro-Patassé militias, leading to the (late) opening of investigations by the International Criminal Court in 2007.²⁰

Security forces were involved, but who exactly was responsible has yet to be investigated. The persecution of Yakoma families began, houses in specific parts of the capital were destroyed, and eighty thousand inhabitants fled to the countryside. The retaliatory acts of the combined security forces, MLC (Bemba's militia) and Libyan troops, suggested that a rather simplified interpretation of the rebellion was at work, with Kolingba, his political party Rassemblement Démocratique Centrafricain, and the Yakoma in general being demonized as the source of the conflict. However, a judicial investigation of the rebellion revealed that the matter was more complex. Approximately one hundred arrests were ordered in the course of the investigations (June–September 2001), contributing to an atmosphere of suspicion and fear—not least within the security forces. Originally, up to 1,250 FACA soldiers had reportedly fled over the Oubangui river to neighboring DR Congo.

However, a more serious military challenge emerged, with the dismissal of the chief of staff Gen. François Bozizé on October 26, 2001, and the subsequent accusation that he was involved in a new coup plan. Bozizé refused to accept an arrest warrant; defected with, initially, about one hundred troops; engaged in street battles in the northern neighborhoods of Bangui (which traditionally supported Patassé); and moved to the north of the country. After taking weapons from several Gendarmerie barracks and fighting a number of skirmishes, possibly involving additional Libyan troops and aircraft as well as recently recruited young members of progovernment militias (“Karako” and others), Bozizé went into exile in Chad, drawing with him up to three hundred FACA members. Only in early 2002 did the government under Prime Minister Ziguélé take full notice of the plight of the army, with all its material shortcomings and the rampaging corruption within the leadership circles,²¹ but it was too late to react. In the end, Patassé lost the power game to Bozizé.

Soon after Bozizé's military takeover, new zones of insecurity developed in the countryside. Some trouble was attributed to *Zaraguinas* (highway robbers), but former “liberators,” that is, the irregular troops who had helped Bozizé to seize power, became a real source of concern in the capital Bangui. In a letter to the World Bank in November 2003, Bozizé himself gave his total number of men as 1,640, of whom 540 had already been integrated into the FACA and a further 150 identified to follow suit—leaving another 850 without such a prospect.²² Numerous acts of violence were perpetrated by these forces in the following months. After difficult negotiations, approximately 200 ex-liberators agreed to be accompanied to the border with Chad; others agreed to integrate into civilian life after being paid an undisclosed sum of additional allowances.

The security forces of the CAR were responsible for a number of serious human rights violations during the gradual escalation process of the northern rebellions from 2005 onward. The disproportionate use of violence again became very common. On January 29, 2006, the town of Paoua in the prefecture of Ouham-Pende (hometown of former president Patassé) was attacked by rebels. The acts of retaliation by the Republican Guard (the new Presidential Guard), acting under the command of one of Bozizé's nephews, were even worse. Approximately half of

the local population reportedly fled the town. The government was accused of being responsible for the massacre (81–104 dead according to various unconfirmed reports).

The security forces also suffered casualties during the new rebellion(s). Two FACA members were killed close to the provincial capital Birao in May 2006 (Vakaga prefecture). While demonstrations against widespread violence—particularly by the state security organs—took place in Bangui in April and May, new rebel attacks were launched in Vakaga in June. About twelve FACA soldiers and two Chadian peacekeepers were killed.²³ After these attacks, Bozizé reacted by replacing the entire FACA leadership. He heavily criticized the army again on August 11 after eighty soldiers deserted their positions in the northeast of the country, the third time such an act had occurred. The soldiers were immediately arrested.

The worst was yet to come. On October 30–31, 2006, rebels attacked Birao, killing ten FACA soldiers and taking the town. A week later the city was reconquered with massive French assistance. The extreme vulnerability of the regime—and of its security forces—was exposed by these events. In March 2007, FACA engaged in a brutal orgy of destruction, destroying up to 70 percent of the houses in Birao.

On the second front line in the north things were not any better. Attacks on Paoua in January 2007 and on Ngaoundaye in mid-April and mid-May were followed by severe state repression, particularly by the Presidential Guard. New NGO reports in 2007 emphatically criticized the government. A Human Rights Watch report was rejected publicly by the government as grotesque and drawing an unrealistic picture.²⁴ While the report noted severe human rights violations by the rebels, its critique of the FACA and the Presidential Guard was even harsher and well documented. An Amnesty International report specifically highlighted the plight of the civilian population in the north, blaming the Presidential Guard for brutality and drawing attention to the inability of the government to protect ethnic Mbororo children from abduction by armed bandits. In 2008 a “global peace agreement” was reached with most active rebel movements and an “inclusive political dialogue” was held, but in February 2009 new rebel attacks were being recorded.

Security-Sector Reform and the Absence of Political Will in CAR

Security-sector reform had its ups and downs during the crisis years in the CAR, but it always remained very state focused (despite acute state weakness).²⁵ As early as 1998 the UN Security Council called on the government to adopt, as soon as possible, a plan for the effective restructuring of the armed forces based on proposals submitted by a competent commission.²⁶ Later, it welcomed the establishment of a joint committee of the government and the Mission des Nations Unies en République Centrafricaine (MINURCA) to address the restructuring of the FACA.²⁷ The respective UN Security Council resolution called for “well-balanced geographical and multi-ethnic recruitment, the improvement of working conditions, including

payment of salary and salary arrears, the provision of adequate infrastructure, equipment and support materials, and the redeployment of some of the restructured units outside Bangui.”²⁸ Part of the problem was addressed bluntly, but the focus was exclusively on the state as the only possible provider of security (notwithstanding the small size of the security forces). The UN mission MINURCA (1998–2000) had *inter alia* mandates to assist in the capacity-building efforts of the national police and to provide advice on the restructuring of the national police and special police forces.²⁹ Before the end of its mandate, the UN Security Council “strongly encouraged” the government to coordinate with MINURCA in the progressive transfer of its functions in the security field to the local security and police forces.³⁰ This series of events demonstrates that throughout MINURCA’s existence only government and UN bodies were involved in the reform process; that is,

- Civil society and parliament were kept out of the program, and
- Security providers other than the state’s security forces were not targeted.

After Bozizé’s conquest of Bangui in 2003, two dreaded units, Patassé’s Presidential Guard and the intelligence agency, were dissolved. The local UN peace building office organized the burning of weapons in July 2003. Approximately 400 soldiers, mostly Yakoma, who had fled to the DR Congo after the failed coup attempt of 2001, came back, and 80 percent of them were reintegrated into the FACA. The government had started a \$13 million Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program with the United Nations Development Programme and World Bank support to integrate up to 7,565 former combatants. The insecurity question was on the agenda of the National Dialogue conference, held in October 2003. Participants noted the following reasons for the failure of national defense forces to assume their mission to provide security: the anarchical recruitment, the absence of basic training, bad equipment and low motivation among the rank and file, the absence of barracks, the closing of training centers, the politicization of the defense and security forces, and the use of nonconventional forces. This was the basis on which, one month later, the government wanted to start a reform process by writing a “letter of general policy in global defense matters” to the World Bank. It committed itself to good governance; good management of public finances; the reinforcement of the justice system; the restructuring of the defense and security forces; and efforts to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate ex-combatants. During the following four years, however, a coherent reform strategy was not defined, raising doubts about the political will to make progress.

Security-sector reform programs had limited effects; for example, the number of personnel trained was not particularly impressive. Between May and December 2007 this training involved a total of one hundred personnel.³¹ This slow pace was probably the reason for the establishment of a task force that submitted a paper to the donor roundtable held in Brussels on October 26, 2007.³² This paper was a rare example of openness as it noted a “dysfunctionality of the entire security and justice sector.” It asserted that the series of crises had provoked “a deconstruction of the

security system without precedent.” The concentration of troops in Bangui without any means of transportation was one aspect highlighted. The heteroclitic composition of the security forces would lead to the absence of cohesion and discipline. The destruction of infrastructure (barracks, police stations, etc.), the lack of equipment (arms and ammunitions, vehicles, logistical means), the lack of adapted personnel (dead, aging personnel; desertions; absence of training; corruption), and the dysfunctional command chain were all mentioned—the mass of mishaps was truly impressive. The morale of the troops was described as being particularly low, with the notorious salary arrears highlighted. The security forces’ “uncivilian behavior” was cited as a reason for a “confidence break with the population which can no longer identify with them.” As the only other security provider, private security companies were cited in this context. But some pages later reference was made to “non-official security forces (private security companies, guerrillas and private militias, rebels)” as a “constitutive part of the security sector.” However, concerning planned activities, all those nonstate actors were left out.

What the civilian population thinks of its security forces is rarely directly reported. When several incidents involving the FACA in 2001 and 2002 led to bloodshed, the inhabitants of Bossangoa revolted, marched to the garrison, and demanded the dismantling of the military basis. The troops fired live bullets and killed another person.³³ And during his tour of the country’s garrisons in early 2002, Prime Minister Ziguélé heard more complaints.³⁴ It was an utter understatement when the UN stated in one of its reports that “Central African Republic authorities are having difficulty maintaining law and order in several parts of the country.”³⁵ In fact, during the recent crisis in the north the security forces acted against the civilian population and behaved like an occupying force, suspecting civilians of indiscriminate support of the rebels and committing numerous atrocities.

To resume the argument of the preceding paragraphs, the example of the CAR shows how low capacity, the existence of parallel structures in state security services, and the heteroclitic composition of the armed forces have been problematic factors in the performance of the security sector. However, the latter could also be contributing factors in the rebellions, leading to a deadly spiral of violence and counterviolence. The political will of the different regimes to promote a republican army has certainly always been less palpable than the will to have a solid, loyal component within the security forces. Weak outside engagement did not lead to any substantial amelioration.

Oligarchic Rule and Warlord Politics in Liberia: The Declining Provision of Security

Capacity, Structure, and Composition of the Security Forces

The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) were created in 1962 under President William Tubman and received substantial U.S. support during the 1960s.³⁶ The army grew to

a six-thousand-strong body with a National Guard and a Coast Guard as separate bodies. William Tolbert became president after Tubman's death in 1971. Not only did he lack the support of the general populace, but also he generated dissatisfaction among the AFL. He alienated the army by removing officers on charges of disloyalty.³⁷ The popular bloody coup against Tolbert by then master sergeant Samuel K. Doe came from the lower ranks, made up mainly of personnel from the hinterland. During the 1980s Doe recruited soldiers from his own Krahn ethnic group into the armed forces. In November 1985, former army commanding Gen. Thomas Quiwonkpa tried to topple Doe's regime and failed dramatically. The rebels were repelled, and Quiwonkpa was executed. Doe carried out reprisals against ethnic Mano and Gio suspected of supporting the rebellion. Doe himself was murdered during the "first" civil war on the orders of rebel leader Prince Johnson in 1990. After notorious warlord Charles Taylor succeeded in winning first the civil war and then elections in the 1990s, he marginalized the AFL because of its suspected Krahn identity. For instance, Taylor's son Chucky headed the dreaded new Anti-Terrorism Unit. In contrast to the CAR's military, the Liberian armed forces lost the "state" label quickly during the civil war and either were regarded as another military faction in a brutal civil war or were confined to the barracks.³⁸ Hence, it does not make sense to go into the details of how the army harmed the population's security interests as was done for the CAR example.

All other state security organs were quickly personalized under warlord rule. In the countryside, security forces did not receive adequate pay and therefore lived from extortion: "The Special Security Service (SSS) and the Special Operations Division (SOD), both mobilized to combat Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebels, consisted of former NPFL [National Patriotic Front of Liberia] rebels who were paid a one-time fee of \$150 and then expected to loot and pillage to support themselves. In short, a key feature of security institutions in Liberia has been the gross abuse of human rights (often with impunity) by security personnel through torture, arbitrary arrests and killings, and the use of official powers for private gains."³⁹ It was obvious that the whole sector was in need of radical reform when peace was achieved in mid-2003. Liberia became a sort of UN protectorate, with many fields normally within a state's jurisdiction under tight international control.

Peace and Ongoing Insecurity

In contrast to CAR, Liberia did not relapse into war after the 2003 peace agreement. This is a considerable achievement. However, it should not be confounded with a situation of general security. Ordinary people today continue to face very real threats, including armed robbery. The disarmament process was not a complete failure, but many so-called former combatants merely handed in some rounds of ammunition instead of a weapon. Small arms are obviously still in circulation and are used. The overall rating of the current security situation is certainly much better than

before the peace agreement. United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) patrols control the main axes of Monrovia and relatively safe areas, for example, the posh quarter of Mamba Point where the embassies are located, but not the remote neighborhoods. Former combatants, now without a job, were easily mobilized by political entrepreneurs before the 2005 elections. Ethnic (and religious) rivalries top off this highly explosive cocktail. One of the major local outbursts of violence in postconflict Monrovia involved a confrontation between ethnic Mandingo and other groups in October 2004 and resulted in the burning of mosques, churches, and gas stations. UNMIL troops could not prevent the escalation of violence and arrived too late on the scene. During the war, the LURD rebels were composed mainly of Mandingo, something that is not forgotten by those who suffered from hunger and starvation during the siege of Monrovia. On the other hand, Mandingos feel that they are continuously threatened and treated as second-class citizens. Thus, at least part of the population continues to feel insecure.

Security-Sector Reform in Liberia: An Uphill Struggle

The UN family of organizations indeed quickly identified security-sector reform as a prime task: “In Liberia, one of the key reasons for the relapse into violence after the end of the first civil war and the 1997 presidential elections was the lack of reform of the armed and security forces.”⁴⁰ Such reform in Liberia was, from its inception, more circumspect than in the CAR. It was claimed that effective weapons management would in the long term also require a comprehensive national policy for the demilitarization of civilians. Nevertheless, the activities of UNMIL in this field remained state focused, with the government selected as the primary partner.⁴¹

Although the mandatory “assistance” made it sound as if the government would remain in the driver’s seat of the reform process, a long list of activities attests to the contrary. Outsiders drove and funded the process to a large extent, first of all UNMIL (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; police reform) and also the U.S. government (army reform). The entire reform process remained state centered, with regard to both policy formulation and program implementation: The defense policy had to be reformulated after decades of turmoil. A Defense Advisory Monitoring Committee comprising the ministries of defense, finance, information, and planning and a representative from the Central Bank of Liberia as well as key international partners, including UNMIL, was established to oversee the demobilization process in 2005.⁴² In the following year a United States–funded security-sector review was conducted by the RAND Corporation, an institute close to the major defense organizations in the United States. This report was seen as the basis for a national dialogue on security-sector reform.⁴³ The commission held several rounds of consultations with security agencies, government bodies, international partners, and civil society. The definition of the respective roles of the AFL, the Liberian National Police (LNP), the Liberian Seaport Police, the Police Quick Reaction Unit, the SSS, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, Customs, and

other key security agencies was apparently a difficult process. Only in late November 2007 was the national security strategy being finalized. The National Security Council was expected to adopt the document by the end of 2007. Structural issues, such as the overlapping mandates of existing security agencies would be addressed by reducing the number of agencies to a more rational and sustainable number.⁴⁴

The LNP only gradually became operational again. While the transitional government made efforts to regularly pay increased salaries to newly trained police officers, it was unable to raise the \$4 million required to cover the decommissioning of personnel from the LNP and the SSS who were ineligible to join the new, restructured services.⁴⁵ UNMIL found it necessary to recommend a revision of the appointment process to ensure transparency in hiring procedures and merit-based promotions.⁴⁶ However, the presence of the LNP in the interior of the country remained very low. This was at least partially the result of the unavailability of suitable housing, vehicles, and communications infrastructure. By September 2006 the LNP had deployed only 454 officers throughout the fifteen counties in Liberia. The UN police worked with the LNP to rationalize the high number of officers assigned to the Monrovia headquarters.⁴⁷ The rehabilitation of police stations in the periphery progressed slowly.⁴⁸ All this showed that the population, particularly outside Monrovia, could not rely on protection from the police even three years after the war had ended.⁴⁹

The United States–led program to restructure the AFL led, in a first phase, to the demobilization of 9,400 irregular personnel who had been recruited into the armed forces after the outbreak of the civil war in 1989, with each conscript receiving \$540 in severance pay. A second phase started in October 2005 and was to lead to the retirement of 4,273 regular members recruited before the conflict, but because of a lack of funds—some provided by South Africa and the United States—this process was slower than expected.⁵⁰ In the end, the aim was to have an army of 2,000 troops. As of November 2007, 645 recruits had completed their basic training. The force was expected to grow to 1,100 soldiers by February 2008 and to 1,600 soldiers by May 2008. Sovereignty was far from being achieved at this point. The government would assume control over the AFL only after the conclusion of the entire training program (expected in November 2009 at the earliest). As of October 2007, less than 5 percent of the force consisted of former AFL soldiers, and no ethnic group accounted for more than 15 percent. The demobilization of previous AFL officers resulted in a situation where no experienced company-grade officers were available to command infantry companies. The U.S. and Liberian governments therefore suggested that Economic Community of West African States member states provide commanders for the first three AFL companies for an interim period. The distrust of the AFL (and the LNP and SSS) was such that Security Council resolutions authorized only trained and vetted members of these corps to operate weapons. In November 2007, AFL weapons remained in the custody of the United States and its contractors.⁵¹ This outside domination of the security sector was not entirely legitimate in the eyes of Liberians.⁵² Despite numerous efforts to reform the sector, the

balance sheet still appeared to be below expectations in 2009, with the UN secretary-general noting “significant capacity deficits.”⁵³

A surprisingly positive picture resulted from a poll on security providers in urban Liberia conducted (by a team under the aegis of this article’s author) in late 2005. Responding to open questions, 18.4 percent cited the police as the most important group for their personal safety. When asked more specifically whether they felt protected or threatened by the police, only 0.7 percent of our respondents saw the police as a big threat to their personal security; 2.2 percent rated them as somewhat of a threat, while 4.6 percent claimed that the LNP did not affect their personal security at all. Accordingly, 32.2 and 60.3 percent saw the police as serving a protective function (*somewhat important for my personal security, very important for my personal security*).⁵⁴ The rating for the army was worse. Responding to similar questions, only 2.0 percent said it was the most important group for their personal safety. When asked whether they felt protected or threatened by the AFL, 4.4 percent of our respondents saw the army as a big threat to their personal security and 5.1 percent as somewhat of a threat. This means that roughly every tenth person had a negative (or very negative) opinion of the army. Rather surprisingly low was the number of respondents, 24.3 percent, who said that the AFL did not affect their personal security at all—given the fact that the army was not operational and only in training at that time. The 41.1 percent who rated the AFL as “somewhat important for my personal security” and the 25.0 percent who said it was “very important for my personal security” are surprising for the same reason: AFL was hardly operational in that period. This can be interpreted only as wishful thinking—what the AFL should be—as they could not be seen as being effective in practice at the time of our inquiry.

The Liberian example shows how the onset of the brutal civil war in 1989 quickly transformed the official army into an armed faction. Parallel structures were also quickly established. Warlord president Taylor excelled at this art; no single body of the security forces was at the service of the population after 1997. The year 2003 was the watershed that ended a period of completely arbitrary rule. Liberia’s generally peaceful situation since the peace agreement of Accra in that year—but likely more the result of the external intervention in and oversight over the security forces—has contributed to the relative satisfaction of the population with the security forces. Considerable attention has been given to the clear distribution of roles within the security apparatus, which should reduce overlaps in mandates. It may be too early to attribute this relative success of the first steps in security-sector reform to the indeed heavy investments as long as peacekeeping troops are still present. Doubts persist as to whether the capacity of state security forces will be sufficient to deal with security challenges in the medium term. The political will of the Tolbert, Doe, and Taylor regimes to promote a republican army was obviously low; the present Johnson–Sirleaf administration can be rated much more highly in this regard, at least for the moment. A synthesis of the main features of security forces in Liberia and Central African Republic shows a number of similar characteristics, but also marked differences (table 2).

Table 2. Official Security Forces in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Liberia and Their Security Performance

	CAR	Liberia
Capacity (International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Military Balance 2008")	3,150	2,400
Security apparatus operates as "state in state" (score and rank; "Failed States Index 2009")	9.6 (rank 8)	6.9 (rank 53)
Security-sector reform—2009 status	Conceptualization phase	Advanced (in progress)
Insecurity induced by security forces	Constantly high since 1996	High before and during first civil war, low since 2003
Security provided by security forces	Constantly low since 1996	Low until 2003, limited but growing since 2005
Main factors influencing performance	Negative: Politicization of armed forces/frequent reorganizations along ethnic lines Top hierarchy involved in politico-military turmoil Rank and file involved in politico-military turmoil Nonpayment of salaries Mutinies and their effects Rebellions and their effects Positive: Limited effects of outside advisors Limited effects of security-sector reform	Negative: Politicization of armed forces/some reorganizations along ethnic lines Rank and file involved in politico-military turmoil Top hierarchy involved in politico-military turmoil Civil wars and their effects Positive: Initial results of security-sector reform Heavy presence of UN peacekeepers

Sources: International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), "The Military Balance 2008" (London: IISS, 2008); Fund for Peace, "Failed States Index 2009," http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=292&Itemid=452 (accessed October, 13 2009); and compilation by the author of qualitative data.

Conclusions

It is obvious that the state security forces in both Liberia and the CAR have had a very low capacity, both before and after major episodes of civil war and rebellion. Structure and composition have been important topics of the externally sponsored security-sector reform. In Liberia, the phase of violent turmoil has come to an end,

probably more the result of the physical presence of a strong UN mission than changes in the military and political setup. Today's government is credited with having a rather strong political will to transform the security forces into well-functioning institutions, something that is much less apparent in the CAR. Civil society is weak in both countries. In Liberia, however, it is at least associated with security-sector reform; in the CAR this connection is very superficial.

African security forces are more complex entities than many believe, and perspectives from below, from above, and from outside may not produce an identical picture. In countries with a long-time record of peace it is not uncommon to find a "republican" army, that is, an army oriented toward the common good, and also police forces committed to people's security. This is usually not the case in countries that have gone through protracted phases of violent conflict. A severe crisis of confidence of the state's security forces in many African states can be assumed and is certainly demonstrated in both case studies. The effect of outside engagement is probably limited. In the case of Liberia, it can be claimed that outside intervention in the form of peacemaking, peacekeeping, and finally peace building was effective only after two decades of turmoil and disintegration in the formal security forces. While it is possible that the international community's engagement in security-sector reform will be conducive to a professional army outside the immediate reach of the president in Liberia, the limited efforts in the CAR have not yet produced apparent peace or republican security forces. Ongoing conflict itself explains more: in prolonged crises without a clear winner, security forces are often characterized by internal cleavages, with entire segments siding with a specific conflict party or individual battalions defecting to "the enemy." Fighting rebellions and suffering casualties puts security forces under stress and may result in an even worse performance record. Because of infighting, the security forces contribute to the difficulty of establishing a monopoly on the use of violence. The political weight, material equipment, and self-esteem or humiliation of an entire corps may play roles in the actual behavior of those forces—and in the production of security for the ordinary people.

The meaning of state security forces for the security of the population is still largely enigmatic, although there are indications that in many countries such forces are perceived rather as sources of insecurity. In both case studies the record of the security forces is problematic. And without fundamental change to the social habits in the CAR and Liberia (plus a change of the political system in the CAR), the possibility of better security forces in the medium term will likely remain an elusive goal. Based on the CAR's experience, it also appears to be difficult to reform a sector as long as violent conflicts are not definitively settled. The intermediate near to protectorate status of Liberia has allowed for a more fundamental restart, although it is far from guaranteed that the advanced security-sector reform can be sustainable, particularly when the self-help mechanisms intended to compensate for the lack of state-sponsored security are simply ignored.

Seen from outside, both the state and its security forces must be strengthened and reformed; however, too frequently this is done according to a blueprint model that

does not take local expectations and experiences into account. Furthermore, the security forces are usually “partners” in such endeavors, although popular trust in them is obviously limited. The language of official donor documents is therefore full of hypocritical statements. While strong international involvement in the security sectors of war-ravaged states offers a good basis for reform and may be regarded as its necessary precondition, it is evidently far from sufficient.

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Notes

1. Among the rare journal articles peripherally touching on this issue are Rialize Ferreira and Dan Henk, “‘Operationalizing’ Human Security in South Africa,” *Armed Forces & Society* 35 (2009): 501–25; and Patrick J. McGowan, “Coups and Conflict in West Africa, 1955–2004: Part I, Theoretical Perspectives,” *Armed Forces & Society* 32 (2005): 5–23, and “Coups and Conflict in West Africa, 1955–2004: Part II, Empirical Findings,” *Armed Forces & Society* 32 (2006): 234–53.
2. See Bruce Baker, *Multi-Choice Policing in Africa* (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007); Karin Dokken, *African Security Politics Redefined* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Alice Hills, *Policing in Africa: Internal Security and the Limits of Liberalization* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000).
3. Both countries therefore qualify as being in a “conflict trap” according to Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 17–36. Population density varies between 32.3 inhabitants per square kilometer (Liberia) and only 6.9 (Central African Republic [CAR]).
4. Matthias Basedau and Tim Wegenast, “Oil and Diamonds as Causes of Civil War in Sub-Saharan Africa: Under what Conditions?” *Colombia Internacional* 70 (2009): 35–59, 49 (table 1).
5. For further aims of security-sector reform from outside see Sven Gunnar Simonsen, “Building ‘National’ Armies—Building Nations? Determinants of Success for Postintervention Integration Efforts,” *Armed Forces & Society* 33 (2007): 571–90.
6. Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1962); William J. Foltz and Henry S. Bienen, eds., *Arms and the African: Military Influences on Africa’s International Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).
7. Nicole Ball, “Democratic Governance in the Security Sector” (paper, United Nations Development Programme Learning from Experience for Afghanistan workshop, 2002);

- Michael Brzoska, "Development Donors and the Concept of Security Sector Reform" (DCAF Occasional Papers 4, Geneva, 2005).
8. Henry Bienen, *Armies and Parties in Africa* (New York: Africana, 1978), Claude E. Welch, *Soldier and State in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Military Intervention and Political Change* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970).
 9. E.g., George Klay Kieh, Jr., "Military Engagement in Politics in Africa," in *The Military and Politics in Africa*, ed. George Klay Kieh, Jr. and Pita Ogaba Agbese (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 37–55.
 10. McGowan, "Coups and Conflict," 248–49.
 11. Osman Gbla, "Security Sector Reform under International Tutelage in Sierra Leone," *International Peacekeeping* 13, 1 (2006): 78–93, 91.
 12. The Afrobarometer project is an exception as it asked questions about trust in the military and the police for eighteen countries, which may be seen as a proxy to the perception of performance. Neither Liberia nor CAR was tested, but it can be shown that there is a high degree of variation among African security forces. In Senegal a mere 4.9 percent of respondents have no trust at all in the military, while in Nigeria this number is 45.1 percent.
 13. McGowan, "Coups and Conflict."
 14. Two alleged coup attempts, in 1969 and 1976, were pretexts for a series of executions.
 15. Eric G. Berman, *La République Centrafricaine : Une Étude de Cas Sur les Armes Légères et les Conflits. Small Arms Survey, Special Report* (Geneva: Institut universitaire de Hautes Études Internationales, 2006), 15.
 16. UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on Chad and the Central African Republic Pursuant to Paragraphs 9 (d) and 13 of Security Council Resolution 1706 (2006)," December 22, 2006 (S/2006/1019), 5.
 17. Sami Faltas, "Mutiny and Disarmament in the Central African Republic," in *Managing the Remnants of War: Micro-disarmament as an Element of Peace-building*, ed. Sami Faltas and Joseph Di Chiaro, III (Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos 2000), 77–96.
 18. See, e.g., "République Centrafricaine: Exécution de six bandits presume," *IRIN-CEA*, August 24, 1999; and UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Central African Republic and on the Activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in That Country," June 29, 2000 (S/2000/639).
 19. A campaign speech of Kolingba's preceding the presidential elections in 1999 and reported by *Sangonet*, September 11, 1999 (www.sangonet.com, accessed January 2, 2000, translation by the author) is telling: "The general-candidate Kolingba has held a 'strongly muscled' speech yesterday. He claims the support of FACA in the case of troubles caused by patassist militias, Karako and Balawa, and the Forsdir deployed all over the territory."
 20. Marlies Glasius, "'We Ourselves, We Are Part of the Functioning.' The ICC, Victims, and Civil Society in the Central African Republic," *African Affairs* 108, 430 (2008): 49–67.
 21. *Centrafrique Presse*, February 19, 2002. Ziguélé visited inter alia the garrison of Bouar and was shocked at the situation he found. He donated one million CFA francs as a personal gift and promised to follow the dossier.

22. Berman (2006, 54).
23. Members of the regional peacekeeping mission Forces Multinationales en Centrafrique.
24. See Human Rights Watch, "Central African Republic: State of Anarchy. Rebellion and Abuses against Civilians" (New York: Human Rights Watch, September 2007). In this context it is interesting to read again what Bozizé himself told soldiers in early 2005: "In fact and unfortunately, I have noticed recently that certain defence and security forces have showed very bad attitudes towards civilians. . . . I am telling you frankly: Those who are guilty of such lamentable attitudes do not deserve to wear the military uniform. Yes, they do not merit to be among defence and security forces. In certain civilizations, knights, meaning the most valorous warriors of that time, were proud to defend widows and orphans. Then, you, Central Africans wearing military uniforms, be proud of rendering service to our people. Yet, it is not by behaving like hooligans as some of you are doing that you will enhance your image in front of the population." *Radio Centrafrique*, Bangui, in French, 18:00 GMT, February 14, 2005, as reported by the BBC Monitoring service.
25. International Crisis Group, "République Centrafricaine. Anatomie d'un Etat fantôme," in *rapport Afrique*, no. 136 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, December 13, 2007).
26. UN Security Council, "Resolution 1182 (1998)," adopted by the Security Council at its 3905th meeting, July 14, 1998 (S/RES/1182), par. 2.
27. UN Security Council, "Resolution 1201 (1998)," adopted by the Security Council at its 3935th meeting, October 15, 1998 (S/RES/1201), par. 4.
28. UN Security Council, "Resolution 1230 (1999)," adopted by the Security Council at its 3984th meeting, February 26, 1999 (S/RES/1230), par. 12.
29. UN Security Council, "Resolution 1159 (1998)," adopted by the Security Council at its 3867th meeting, March 27, 1998 (S/RES/1159), par. 10e.
30. UN Security Council, "Resolution 1271 (1999)," adopted by the Security Council at its 3984th meeting, October 22, 1999 (S/RES/1230), par. 4.
31. UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Central African Republic and the Activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic*, December 5, 2007. More problems are listed in International Crisis Group, "Central African Republic: Keeping the Dialogue Alive," in *Africa Briefing*, no. 69 (Nairobi: International Crisis Group, January 12, 2010), 1112. The limited progress in reforms is also documented in UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Central African Republic and on the Activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in That Country," December 8, 2009 (S/2009/627).
32. Anonymous, "Note thématique: La réforme du secteur de la sécurité, table ronde des partenaires au développement de la RCA," Brussels, October 26, 2007.
33. *Agence France Presse*, February 23, 2002. Also see "Où va l'armée centrafricaine?" *Centrafrique Presse*, February 5, 2002.
34. *Centrafrique Presse*, February 19, 2002: "The Prime Minister noted numerous complaints in Nola, Bang and numerous other cities on the anti-patriotic behaviour of the

- defense forces, on the harassment of the population, and that is a pity” (translation by the author).
35. UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on Chad and the Central African Republic Pursuant to Paragraphs 9 (d) and 13 of Security Council Resolution 1706 (2006),” December 22, 2006 (S/2006/1019), 5.
 36. On the history of the Armed Forces of Liberia’s predecessor organization Frontier Force, see International Crisis Group, “Liberia. Uneven Progress in Security Sector Reform,” in *Africa Report*, no. 148 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, January 13, 2009), 2–3.
 37. David C. Gompert, Olga Oliker, Brooke Stearns Lawson, Keith Crane, and K. Jack Riley, “Making Liberia Safe: Transformation of the National Security Sector,” prepared for the Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, National Defense Research Institute, 2007).
 38. International Crisis Group, “Liberia. Uneven Progress,” 4.
 39. Mark Malan, “Security Sector Reform in Liberia: Mixed Results from Humble Beginnings” (Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), 9, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=855> (accessed August 14, 2008).
 40. UN Security Council, “Progress Report of the Secretary-General on Ways to Combat Subregional and Cross-Border Problems in West Africa,” February 11, 2005 (S/2005/86), par. 33.
 41. For the mandate see UN Security Council, “Resolution 1509 (2003),” adopted by the Security Council at its 4830th meeting on September 19, 2003 (S/RES/1509), par. 3, n-q.
 42. UN Security Council, “Eighth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia,” September 1, 2005 (S/2005/560), par. 39.
 43. UN Security Council, “Eleventh Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia,” June 9, 2006 (S/2006/376), par. 25.
 44. UN Security Council, “Letter Dated 5 December 2007 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee Established Pursuant to Resolution 1521 (2003) Concerning Liberia Addressed to the President of the Security Council” (S/2007/689), par. 134.
 45. UN Security Council, “Eighth Progress Report,” par. 31. 33.
 46. UN Security Council, “Eleventh Progress Report,” par. 22.
 47. UN Security Council, “Twelfth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia,” September 12, 2006 (S/2006/743), par. 25.
 48. UN Security Council, “Tenth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia,” March 14, 2006 (S/2006/159), par. 23.
 49. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) achieved the initial target of providing basic training for 3,500 police officers by mid-2007. See UN Security Council, “Fifteenth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia,” August 8, 2007 (S/2007/479), par. 20.
 50. UN Security Council, “Ninth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia,” December 7, 2005 (S/2005/764), par. 34.
 51. UN Security Council, “Letter Dated 5 December 2007,” par. 135, 136, 143.

52. Malan, "Security Sector Reform," 44.
53. UN Security Council, "Eighteenth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia," February 10, 2009 (S/2009/86), par. 20. Also see International Crisis Group, "Liberia. Uneven Progress."
54. Results of the "Legitimate Oligopolies of Violence" research project. Survey conducted in November 2005 (700 respondents). It is important to note that we did not go into rural areas, where UNMIL peacekeepers were barely present.

Bio

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