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**The Production of Insecurity by
African Security Forces: Insights from
Liberia and the Central African Republic**

Andreas Mehler

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GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies
Leibniz-Institut für Globale und Regionale Studien
Neuer Jungfernstieg 21
20354 Hamburg
Germany
E-mail: info@giga-hamburg.de
Website: www.giga-hamburg.de

The Production of Insecurity by African Security Forces: Insights from Liberia and the Central African Republic

Abstract

Little attention has been paid to the factual effect of the state's security forces on the security of African citizens. Reports about security forces' contribution to 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. The self-help mechanisms used to compensate for the lack of state-sponsored security need more attention. However, it has to be acknowledged that the ideal of a neutral and effective force loyal to the state is shared by a great majority of the population. This contribution compares the experiences of Liberia and the Central African Republic, two extreme cases of strong and weak international involvement, respectively, in post-conflict security-sector reform.

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

Dr. Andreas Mehler

is a political scientist and the director of the GIGA Institute of African Affairs.

Contact: mehler@giga-hamburg.de

Website: <http://staff.giga-hamburg.de/mehler>

Zusammenfassung

Die Produktion von Unsicherheit durch afrikanische Sicherheitskräfte: Einsichten aus Liberia und aus der Zentralafrikanischen Republik

Der tatsächliche Beitrag staatlicher Sicherheitskräfte zur Sicherheit afrikanischer Bürger wird selten erörtert. Es häufen sich die Berichte, wonach Sicherheitskräfte die schon existierende Unsicherheit erhöhen: die Beschützer werden zur Bedrohung und ihr Erscheinen erzeugt Angst, nicht Sicherheit. In vielen afrikanischen Krisenstaaten erscheint es als illusorisch, bessere Sicherheitskräfte zu bekommen, weil entweder die gewaltsamen Konflikte noch nicht endgültig beendet wurden und daher eine grundlegende Reform nicht möglich ist oder der Mangel an Kapazität lässt sich wegen materieller Engpässe nicht beheben. Selbsthilfemaßnahmen zur Kompensation der fehlenden staatlichen Sicherheitsgewährleistung verdienen größerer Aufmerksamkeit. Gleichzeitig muss anerkannt werden, dass eine große Mehrheit der Bevölkerung dem Ideal neutraler, effizienter und dem Staat gegenüber loyaler Sicherheitskräfte anhängt. Der vorliegende Beitrag vergleicht Erfahrungen in Liberia und in der Zentralafrikanischen Republik, zwei Extremfällen von massiver bzw. schwacher internationaler Einwirkung in die postkonfliktive Sicherheitssektorreform.

The Production of Insecurity by African Security Forces: Insights from Liberia and the Central African Republic

Andreas Mehler

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1 Introduction

The impact of African security forces on the security of the population is rarely at the center of empirical analysis.¹ In the post-independence era and particularly in so-called socialist African regimes, the military was sometimes used to provide public services outside the security sector. The use of military engineers and rank and file for building roads or other infrastructure in Tanzania or Guinea may come to mind. But what about the fulfillment of the core security mandate of those forces? Military professionalism and civilian control have been presented as the critical aspects of beneficial civil-military relations by classical author

¹ Among the rare journal articles peripherally touching on this issue are Rialize Ferreira / Dan Henk: "Operationalizing' Human Security in South Africa," in: *Armed Forces & Society*, 35 (2009) 3, 501-525; and Patrick J. McGowan: "Coups and Conflict in West Africa, 1955-2004: Part I, Theoretical Perspectives," in: *Armed Forces & Society*, Oct 2005; vol. 32: pp. 5-23 and "Coups and Conflict in West Africa, 1955-2004: Part II, Empirical Findings," in: *Armed Forces & Society*, Jan 2006; vol. 32: pp. 234-253. For armed forces and elite security see Mehler 2008.

Samuel Huntington (1957, 1995). That both aspects are deficient in many African states is a platitude; nevertheless, critical studies about the actual performance of African armies and police forces in providing security to the citizens are still rare (Baker 2007, Dokken 2008, Hills 2000). 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 (in the new millennium this has happened in Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Sierra Leone).²

For the purposes 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 (rather weak engagement). This variation in the intensity of engagement is one of the essential differences between the two countries, which are both (a) very poor (ranked 176 and 178 out of 179 in the Human Development Index / 2006 values) and (b) small in terms of population size (3.3 and 4.2 million people, 2006) and which both (c) have a particularly violent contemporary history. It could be expected that this 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.

This article will explore whether capacity, structure, composition, ongoing violent conflict, or political will are essential in explaining the weak performance of security forces in providing security. For this purpose, brief historical accounts of phases of insecurity will be given, 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" will be assessed (with more emphasis on Liberia as the reform process there advanced rather quickly). It can be assumed that capacity, structure, and composition are shaped by externally sponsored security-sector reform, while the continuation of violent conflict may depend partly on the strength of the foreign/international military presence. 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.

² I have excluded Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Somalia, and Sudan from that list as they do not entirely fulfill both criteria.

2 Background and Current Research

It has not been uncommon in African conflict countries that severe security problems have started right within the security forces, leading to an escalation of violence or an inability to deal with it appropriately. A rather well-known case is Sierra Leone, with its “sobels” (soldiers by day, rebels by night). Gbla (2006: 79) notes the intensified “politicization and ethnicization of the security forces” under president Siaka Stevens (1968–85) as a major precursor of civil war. Semi-literate people, some with criminal backgrounds, were recruited. Additionally, paramilitary forces were created and used against political opponents. Accordingly, the UN secretary-general stated the following in a 2005 report (on West Africa as a whole):

The Security Council’s call for the implementation of security sector reform as an essential element for regional peace and stability reflects the views of many West Africans themselves. Although the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) has been working towards a smooth transfer of primary responsibility for internal and external security to the armed and security forces of Sierra Leone, for many Sierra Leoneans the biggest security concern remains how those forces will perform once United Nations peacekeeping forces leave the country. [...] In Guinea-Bissau, the armed and security forces currently appear to be among the major factors of instability.³

This prophecy has since materialized in Guinea-Bissau, with two coup attempts in 2008 and the assassination of the chief of staff followed by the president of the republic in March 2009. It appears to be quite obvious that security forces are frequently part of the problem and less often part of the solution to Africa’s security concerns.

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 (Gbla 2006: 91). This view from below is too rarely explored. Particularly rare are any opinion polling data.⁴

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; etc. (Finer 1962, Foltz/Bienen 1985). During the Cold War the military balance between com-

³ UN Security Council, Progress report of the Secretary-General on ways to combat subregional and cross-border problems in West Africa (S/2005/86), 11 February 2005, para. 33.

⁴ The “Afrobarometer” project is an exception as it asked questions about trust in the military and the police for 18 countries which may be seen as a proxy to the perception of performance. Neither Liberia nor CAR were tested, but it can be shown that there is a high degree of variation between 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. Conversely, 84.1 percent of the Senegalese trust the military “a lot” and in Nigeria just 6.5 percent do. Although Senegal has witnessed a localized low-intensity conflict in the Casamance region for a long period of time, it is distinctly more peaceful than Nigeria, with its numerous religion- and territory-related conflicts. The data on trust may be an indicator of the overall protective value of these state organs, but it cannot replace more concrete information on the protective output of the organs.

peting subregional powers was of obvious interest (for example, Ethiopia versus Somalia). With the now dominant paradigm of state failure and the growing importance of post-conflict reconstruction, this interest has merged more and more with the developmental approach to security-sector reform (Brzoska 2003, Ball 2002).

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 post-independence era (Bienen 1978, Welch 1970). 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. In fact, during the 1970s and 1980s a good number of coups and coup attempts were perpetrated and subsequently analyzed (Decalo 1976/1990, Luckham 1994). 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, in fact, remained limited. Some of the same authors who wrote about coups and the growing role of the military in politics in the 1980s later elaborated on the disengagement and subsequent re-engagement of the military in politics (Welch 1983, Luckham 1998, Klay Kieh 2004, McGowan 2003). 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 (e.g. Klay Kieh 2004). In a study on military coups, McGowan (2006: 248f-249) has 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. The interest in public opinion has to be stressed as it rarely comes to the fore.

The dominant explanation for the weak performance of security forces is weak states (inter alia in McGowan 2005). This argument could be circular, as security is without any doubt one of THE core functions of a state across time and space. The big exceptions to the state-centered view have been recent contributions by Bruce Baker (2006, 2007), in which he contends that the "degree of sovereignty" of states can vary in the security field. In a study on the state police in Uganda and Sierra Leone, he finds that "fragmented 'sovereignty' has no guaranteed permanence. It is contested and fragile. Consent is given by the community for the effective protectors in a given area (spatial or moral), but there is no promise that the contract is permanent and irrevocable" (2006: 73). This interest in a view "from below" is still rare, but highly instructive. 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 have been media reports, selected NGO reports, UN Security Council resolutions, and reports by the UN secretary-general on UN missions in both countries. This information has been 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 have been added to this picture. The approach is therefore mostly qualitative. At least for Liberia, some original data from fieldwork has been used; the author also visited the CAR three times between 1993 and 1999 in the context of a different research project.

3 Military Rule and Civilian Insecurity in the Central African Republic (CAR)

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 31 out of 48 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.⁵ According to Berman (2006: 15), at the end of “emperor” Bokassa's reign (1979) the 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. The coup attempt by Kolingba against Patassé in 2001 (see below) motivated the temporary desertion of up to 1,250 men; another 300 defected with then chief of staff and current president François Bozizé at the end of the same year. 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.⁶ This means that the army was always small compared to the population of approximately four million inhabitants. The FACA 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). The best equipment was reserved for the Presidential Guard, the name of which was changed several times (1997: Force spéciale de défense des institutions républicaines/FORSDIR; 2000: Unité de Sécurité Présidentielle/USP⁷). Under Patassé, the Presidential Guard officially counted 642 members but was in reality made up of 900 mem-

⁵ Two alleged coup attempts in 1969 and 1976 were pretexts for a series of executions. The 2001 coup attempt was particularly bloody (see below).

⁶ 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), 22 December 2006 (S/2006/1019), p. 5.

⁷ The FORSDIR was constantly criticized, not least for its role in manning roadblocks (instead of the police or the Gendarmerie) and for constant altercations between its members and Chadian cattle herdsman. See Seventh report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic, 15 July 1999 (S/1999/788). The simple renaming of the group as USP did not change things fundamentally.

bers (Faltas 2000). Despite its formal subordination under the chief of staff, the unit was always a de facto instrument of the head of state. This has not changed under Bozizé, who now commands approximately 750 members of this guard (2008). Finally, the police force totals approximately 1,600 members, mostly badly (or not at all) armed with the exception of a special unit, the Office central de repression du banditisme (OCRB). A number of smaller government agencies—among them the secret service and the forest guards, etc., all in all 250 members—can be added, making the total number of security forces approximately 8,500 maximum.

Insecurity has, in fact, not just been caused 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. To some degree the mutinies were reactions by previously favored groups in the face of an increasingly autocratic, exclusionary, and even life-threatening state leadership. The first mutiny, in April 1996, was indirectly tied to Patassé's displacement of the former beneficiaries of Kolingba's regime. Some 250 soldiers took to the streets and protested in response to wage arrears (of three to four years). They also demanded a change in the army's leadership. After clashes in which several were killed, some of their corporatist demands were met. 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 (the transfer of one regiment dominated by Yakoma, Kolingba's ethnic group, to the countryside) were unacceptable. France, which maintained two military bases in its former colony, intervened militarily, and 43 people were killed. 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. One of Kolingba's sons was involved in this third mutiny, but it remained unclear whether his father backed the uprising. Only with the help of international peacekeepers was it possible to end the crisis.

Extrajudicial executions were a daily occurrence after the OCRB took over the fight against criminality in 1997.⁸ The organization's commander, Louis Mazangue, gained a dubious reputation for shooting suspected criminals when they were caught stealing a second time. There is no clear indication whether the population appreciated or resented the OCRB's heavy-handedness. The repression under the democratically elected President Patassé was not any different from that of his autocratic predecessors. 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

⁸ See for example IRIN-CEA, 24 August 1999, République Centrafricaine: Exécution de six bandits présumés; and 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, 29 June 2000 (S/2000/639).

(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.⁹ During the next crisis in May 2001 the security forces were again at the center of events. Rebels stormed the presidential residence and tried to control the nerve centers of the city, particularly the radio station. Fighting raged in several parts of the city and produced civilian deaths. The army chief of staff and the commander of the Gendarmerie were shot, but 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. Bangui's southwestern districts of Bimbo, Petevo, Fatima, and Bruxelles, where the mutineers were hiding, were the targets of intense shelling. The total number of casualties was officially 57 deaths, but might have exceeded five hundred.

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 (Glasius 2008). For instance, some quarters of Bangui were indiscriminately shelled, and at least six hundred women were raped. A suspect number of officers were also killed, apparently not in combat. 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 (360 alone in the neighborhood of Ouango); and eighty thousand inhabitants fled to the countryside or, predominantly, crossed the Oubangui River to the Congolese town of Zongo.¹⁰ The retaliatory acts of the combined security forces, the 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 (RDC), and the Yakoma in general being demonized as the source of the conflict. However, a judicial investigation into 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. The national radio broadcast a list of approximately two hundred to three hundred names of sol-

⁹ A campaign speech of Kolingba's preceding the presidential elections in 1999 and reported by Sangonet, 11 September 1999 (www.sangonet.com, accessed 2 January 2000) is telling: "Le général candidat Kolingba a tenu hier un discours "très musclé". Il revendique le soutien des FACA en cas de déclenchement de troubles par les milices patassistes, Karako et Balawa, et la Forsdir déployée sur tout le territoire". ("The general-candidate Kolingba gave a 'strongly muscled' speech yesterday. He claims the support of the FACA in the case of troubles caused by Patassist militias, Karako and Balawa, and the Forsdir deployed all over the territory.")

¹⁰ 70,000 had returned by the beginning of September 2001. However, roughly 1,000 armed men remained in the DRC.

diers who did not report back to their barracks, most of them again with Yakoma names. Originally, up to 1,250 FACA soldiers had reportedly fled over the Oubangui river to neighboring DRC.

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 pro-government 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,¹¹ 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 which had helped Bozizé to seize power, became a real source of concern in the capital Bangui. Most of them were of Chadian origin and could not hope to be integrated into the army (Debos 2008). In a letter to the World Bank in November 2003, Bozizé himself had given 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 (Berman 2006: 54). The latter began harassing and extorting money from Bangui residents in 2004. The CAR’s Episcopal Conference condemned numerous acts of violence perpetrated by “armed men in uniforms” as early as January 13, 2004. An exchange of gunfire between ex-liberators and government soldiers occurred on April 17, leaving 10 people dead. Individual houses in two Bangui neighborhoods were looted in the following days. After difficult negotiations and with the help of the Chadian ambassador, approximately two hundred ex-liberators agreed to be accompanied to the border; others agreed to integrate into civilian life after being paid an undisclosed sum of additional allowances. In July 2004 some success in combating bandits at the northern border was reported after the government deployed approximately two hundred French-trained soldiers to the provinces.

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 onwards. The countryside began to suffer more than Bangui, the town previously hardest hit. The disproportionate use of violence again became very common. On January 29, 2006 the town of

¹¹ See Centrafrique Presse, 19 February 2002. Ziguélé visited inter alia the garrison of Bouar and was reportedly shocked at the situation he found. He donated one million CFA francs as a personal gift and promised to follow the dossier.

Paoua in the prefecture of Ouham-Pende (hometown of former president Patassé) was attacked by rebels. The acts of retaliation by the Republican 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 against Gordil and Tiringoulou (Vakaga) in June. About 12 FACA soldiers and two Chadian peacekeepers were killed.¹² After these attacks, Bozizé reacted by replacing the entire FACA leadership, including chief of staff Gen. Antoine Gambi (on July 4, 2006). A week later France decided to provide more logistical, material and tactical help, including one C-130 troop transporter. This did not lead to improved morale inside the army. Bozizé heavily criticized the army again on August 11 after 80 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 10 FACA soldiers and taking the town. Subsequently, other towns fell to the rebels. This meant that a quarter of all provinces were partly in the hands of rebels or threatened to become the theater of violent conflict. A week later Birao was reconquered with massive French assistance, and the other towns followed. The extreme vulnerability of the regime—and of its security forces—was exposed by these events; however, the FACA were capable of doing the dirty work of “cleaning the area.”¹³ In March 2007, after another attack on Birao, again only fought back by French forces and the use of Mirage fighter jets, FACA engaged in a brutal orgy of destruction, destroying up to 70 percent of the houses in Birao.

On the second frontline 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. The Human Rights Watch report “State of Anarchy. Rebellion and

¹² Members of the regional peacekeeping mission Forces Multinationales en Centrafrique (FOMUC).

¹³ Until recently, UN reports were reluctant to accuse the security forces of atrocities. A new tone is perceptible in the 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, 3 July 2007 (S/2007/376), p. 3: “Il convient de noter que les représailles des forces gouvernementales sont souvent sans proportion avec les agissements des rebelles et des autres groupes armés dans les zones où ils opèrent. Prenant pour acquis que la population civile locale soutient les rebelles, les soldats détruisent, saccagent et incendient les maisons et s’en prennent physiquement aux civils innocents.” (“It has to be noted that repression by governmental forces is frequently not proportional to the acts of rebels and other armed groups in their zones of operation. Soldiers destroy, ravage and set alight houses and physically assault innocent civilians assuming that the local civil population supports the rebels.”) See also p. 7.

Abuses against Civilians” was rejected publicly by the government as grotesque and drawing an unrealistic picture.¹⁴ 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 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 already in February 2009 new rebel attacks were being recorded.

4 Security-sector Reform yet No End to Insecurity in the 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, ICG 2007). As early as 1998 the UN Security Council called upon 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ This joint committee prepared draft laws and decrees on the structure of the defense forces and a timetable for the restructuring program. 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

¹⁴ 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. Apart from the fact that these behaviours are not tolerable on the part of those who are charged with the responsibility of safeguarding the institutions of the country, such an attitude is not worthy of genuine professionals. In fact, abusing, even brutalizing without any reason, without valid reason, defenceless and unarmed people including women, constitute serious acts punishable with heavy sanctions. Disciplinary sanctions, and also obviously judiciary sanctions must be taken. Furthermore, 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.” Source: Radio Centrafrique, Bangui, in French 1800 GMT, 14 Feb 05, as reported by the BBC Monitoring service.

¹⁵ UN Security Council, Resolution 1182 (1998), adopted by the Security Council at its 3905th meeting, on 14 July 1998 (S/RES/1182), para. 2.

¹⁶ UN Security Council, Resolution 1201 (1998), adopted by the Security Council at its 3935th meeting, on 15 October 1998 (S/RES/1201), para. 4.

redeployment of some of the restructured units outside Bangui.”¹⁷ 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* the mandate 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.¹⁸ Parallel forces such as Patassé’s militias and local self-help groups were not mentioned. Before the end of MINURCA’s mandate, the UN Security Council “strongly encouraged” the government to coordinate with MINURCA in the progressive transfer of MINURCA’s functions in the security field to the local security and police forces.¹⁹ 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;
- security providers other than the state’s security forces were not targeted.

After Bozizé’s conquest of Bangui in 2003, two dreaded units, the USP and the intelligence agency Service d’Enquête de Recherche et de Documentation (SERD), were dissolved. The local UN peacebuilding office BONUCA organized the burning of weapons in July 2003. Approximately four hundred 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 UNDP 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 defence 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.

¹⁷ UN Security Council, Resolution 1230 (1999), adopted by the Security Council at its 3984th meeting, on 26 February 1999 (S/RES/1230), para. 12.

¹⁸ UN Security Council, Resolution 1159 (1998), adopted by the Security Council at its 3867th meeting, on 27 March 1998 (S/RES/1159), para. 10e.

¹⁹ UN Security Council, Resolution 1271 (1999), adopted by the Security Council at its 3984th meeting, on 22 October 1999 (S/RES/1230), para. 4.

During the following four years, however, a coherent reform strategy was not defined, raising doubts about the political will to make progress.²⁰

The main actors in security-sector reform since 2000 have been UNDP; BONUCA; CEMAC/FOMUC; the World Bank; the EU; France; and, to a more limited extent, other donors including China, Japan, Ireland, and Germany. Despite several activities by BONUCA since its inception, progress has been limited. While BONUCA continuously reported that human rights training sessions for police forces were being held, it also had to note grave human rights violations by the security forces. The number of personnel trained was not particularly impressive. Between May and December 2007 this training involved a total of one hundred personnel (40 officers from the National Gendarmerie, 30 staff members from Immigration Services, and 30 staff members from the Police Traffic Division).²¹ 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, 2007.²² 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 (“ex-loyalistes, miliciens, ex-mutins, ex-libérateurs”) 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. Reportedly, they had grown in number over recent years. 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,” and on a different page the “residuals of political party militias or of identity-based groupings” were also cited. However, concerning planned activities, all those nonstate actors were left out. This means that this recent, analytically convincing paper was again not taking into account any of the self-help mechanisms of the population when it came to policy formulation.

²⁰ Note thématique: La réforme du secteur de la sécurité, table ronde des partenaires au développement de la RCA, Bruxelles 26 Octobre 2007.

²¹ S/2007/697, 5 December 2007.

²² Note thématique: La réforme du secteur de la sécurité, table ronde des partenaires au développement de la RCA, Bruxelles 26 Octobre 2007.

What the CAR 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. The troops fired live bullets and killed another person.²³ And during his tour of the country's garrisons in early 2002, Prime Minister Ziguélé heard more complaints.²⁴

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."²⁵ 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 CAR example 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. The ongoing violent conflicts in the northern part of the country—even after the conclusion of peace agreements—are important background factors in the increasing number of reports of grave human rights violations by security forces. However, the latter could also be contributing factors in the rebellions, leading to a deadly spiral of violence and counter-violence. 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.

5 Oligarchic Rule and Warlord Politics in Liberia: No Improvement in the Provision of Security

The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) were created in 1962 under President William Tubman and received substantial US support during the 1960s.²⁶ The army grew to a 6,000-strong body with a National Guard and a Coast Guard as separate bodies. The officer corps of the AFL consisted almost exclusively of Americo-Liberians, that is, descendants of former slaves "repatriated" as settlers in Liberia, a territory that had formally gained independence in 1847. Members of other ethnic groups served as soldiers and noncommissioned officers. Wil-

²³ Agence France Presse, 23 February 2002. See also Centrafrique Presse, 5 February 2002 ("Où va l'armée centrafricaine?")

²⁴ Centrafrique Presse, 19 February 2002: "Le Premier ministre a enregistré à Nola, à Bang et dans plusieurs autres villes de nombreuses plaintes sur le comportement anti-patriotique des forces de défense, les exactions qu'elles commettent sur la population et c'est dommage" ("The Prime Minister noted numerous complaints in Nola, Bang and numerous other cities on the anti-patriotic behavior of the defense forces, on the harassment of the population, and that is a pity.")

²⁵ 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), 22 December 2006 (S/2006/1019), p. 5.

²⁶ On the history of the AFL's predecessor organization Frontier Force see ICG 2009: 2-3.

liam Tolbert became president after Tubman's death in 1971. Not only did he lack the support of the general populace, but he also generated dissatisfaction among the AFL. He alienated the army by removing officers on charges of disloyalty.²⁷ The popular bloody coup against Tolbert by then master sergeant Samuel K. Doe ("the first of the warlords," Ellis 1999: 31) 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 general 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 first winning the civil war and then elections in the 1990s, he marginalized the AFL because of its suspected Krahn identity. By creating a network of competing security units and militias, he further undermined the unity and professional standards of the army. For instance, Taylor's son Chucky headed the dreaded new Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU). In contrast to the CAR's military, the Liberian armed forces lost the "state" label quickly during the civil war and were either regarded as another military faction in a brutal civil war or were confined to the barracks (ICG 2009: 4). 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. Taylor's cousin Joe Tate was made chief of the police although he was accused of having led gangs of looters and a political death squad during the first civil war (Malan 2008: 9). 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.

(Malan 2008: 9)

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.

²⁷ David C. Gompert, Olga Olikier, Brooke Stearns, Keith Crane, K. Jack Riley: Making Liberia Safe. Transformation of the National Security Sector (RAND National Defense Research Institute, Prepared for the Office of the [US] Secretary of Defense), Santa Monica 2007.

Recent reports by the UN secretary-general, though, have made clear that not all security concerns have been resolved:

The overall security situation in Liberia remained relatively stable, but continued to be characterized by an underlying fragility, partly owing to weak national security institutions. The achievement of a steady state of security in Liberia depends both on the level of security risks and national capacity to handle possible fallouts. There continues to be a sustained prevalence of law and order incidents, including armed robbery, mob violence, rape and attacks on on-duty Liberian National Police officers.²⁸

6 Security-sector Reform in Liberia: An Uphill Struggle

The UN family of organizations indeed quickly identified security-sector reform as a key 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.”²⁹ Such reform in Liberia was, from its inception, more circumspect than in the CAR. A 2003 report stated that “effective weapons management in the long term will also require a comprehensive national policy for the demilitarization of civilians.” Such a policy “should include a clear national legal framework for civilian ownership and possession of permitted weapons and prohibition of proscribed weapons.” The report further stated that “the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the subregion is a matter of serious concern, in particular as it relates to the phenomenon of youth violence.”³⁰ Nevertheless, the activities of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in this field remained state-focused, with the government selected as the primary partner.³¹

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 (DDR process, police reform), and additionally the US government (army reform). The entire reform process remained state-centered, with regard to both policy formulation and program implementation:

²⁸ UN Security Council: Eighteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, 10 February 2009 (S/2009/86), para. 8.

²⁹ UN Security Council: Progress report of the Secretary-General on ways to combat subregional and cross-border problems in West Africa, 11 February 2005 (S/2005/86), para. 33.

³⁰ Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Liberia, 11 September 2003 (S/2003/875), para. 50. This report is also significant as it puts the problem of arms possession in a clear subregional context, drawing attention to cross-border arms flows: “Cutting off supply routes within the West African subregion for the illegal flow of small arms, explosives and ammunition and preventing illegal flows of arms into the subregion would have to be part of the disarmament and demobilization exercise” (para. 50, see also para. 49).

³¹ For the mandate see UN Security Council, Resolution 1509 (2003), adopted by the Security Council at its 4830th meeting on 19 September 2003 (S/RES/1509), para. 3, n-q. For the protective performance of UNMIL see Aboagye/Bah 2004.

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 2005.³² 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 US. This report was seen as the basis for a national dialogue on security-sector reform.³³ The government later tasked the Governance Reform Commission³⁴ with leading the public dialogue on security-sector reform.³⁵ The commission held several rounds of consultations with security agencies, government bodies, international partners and civil society. In the meantime, UNMIL was working with the government to establish a county network for security coordination and reporting.³⁶ The definition of the respective roles of the Armed Forces of Liberia, the Liberian National Police (LNP), the Liberian Seaport Police, the Police Quick Reaction Unit, the Special Security Service, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, Customs and other key security agencies was apparently a difficult process. The UN secretary-general expected “that these security agencies will have clear mandates, which will complement each other. The overall security architecture should ensure that Liberia’s security sector has the capacity to anticipate and deal with security threats before they materialize.”³⁷ Only in late November 2007 was the national security strategy, drafted in part by the Governance Commission and the Ministry of National Defense, being finalized, with technical support from UNMIL. 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

³² UN Security Council: Eighth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, 1 September 2005 (S/2005/560), para. 39.

³³ UN Security Council: Eleventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, 9 June 2006 (S/2006/376), para. 25.

³⁴ Already established by the Peace Agreement of Accra, Art. XVI (a): “The Commission shall be established as an independent Commission with seven (7) permanent members appointed by the Chairman and confirmed by the NTLA, from a list provided by civil society organisations. It shall have a chairperson who must be from the civil society. Its membership shall include women.” The commission first worked under the chairmanship of current president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

³⁵ UN Security Council: Twelfth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, 12 September 2006 (S/2006/743), para. 29. The Governance Reform Commission was chaired by Amos Sawyer. A number of NGOs were associated.

³⁶ UN Security Council: Fourteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, 15 March 2007 (S/2007/151), para. 24.

³⁷ UN Security Council: Fifteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, 8 August 2007 (S/2007/479), para. 30.

be addressed by reducing the number of agencies to a more rational and sustainable number.³⁸

The LNP only gradually became operational again.³⁹ Donor support was necessary to allow training at the Police Academy to continue. 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 Special Security Services who were ineligible to join the new, restructured services.⁴⁰ A new director of police and several deputy and assistant directors were appointed in 2006; senior police were trained by the United Nations police and appointed to other posts. UNMIL found it necessary to recommend a revision of the appointment process to ensure transparency in hiring procedures and merit-based promotions.⁴¹ However, the presence of the LNP in the interior of the country remained very low. According to the UN secretary-general, this was partially due to the unavailability of suitable housing, vehicles, and communications infrastructure. By September 2006 the LNP had deployed only 454 officers throughout the 15 counties in Liberia. Of the remaining 1,577 trained police officers, 208 were assigned to zones and depots within Monrovia, 49 to Roberts International Airport, 300 to the LNP Support Unit, 174 to the Monrovia Central Patrol Division, and the remaining 731 to LNP headquarters in Monrovia. The United Nations police worked with the LNP to rationalize the high number of officers currently assigned to the Monrovia headquarters.⁴² The rehabilitation of police stations in the periphery progressed slowly, with only 62 police stations in 15 counties recommissioned by early 2006.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ The US-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

³⁸ 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), para. 134.

³⁹ UN Security Council: Eighth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, 1 September 2005 (S/2005/560), para. 31.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 33.

⁴¹ UN Security Council: Eleventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, 9 June 2006 (S/2006/376), para. 22.

⁴² UN Security Council: Twelfth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, 12 September 2006 (S/2006/743), para. 25.

⁴³ UN Security Council: Tenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, 14 March 2006 (S/2006/159), para. 23.

⁴⁴ 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, 8 August 2007 (S/2007/479), para. 20.

before the conflict, but due to a lack of funds—some provided by South Africa and the USA—this process was slower than expected.⁴⁵ In early 2008 a close observer noted, “Progress with military reform has also been relatively slow. Liberia still has no operational army” (Malan 2008: x). In the end, the aim was to have an army of two thousand troops. The UN secretary-general noted, “a number of factors will need to be carefully balanced in determining its eventual size, including the ability of the Government to financially sustain a professional and well-equipped army, the national requirements of the country and potential external threats.”⁴⁶

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 first joint AFL-UNMIL patrols in Monrovia were anticipated to occur in June 2008. The government would assume control over the AFL only after the conclusion of the entire training program (expected in November 2009 at the earliest).⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ The demobilization of previous AFL officers resulted in a situation where no experienced company-grade officers were available to command infantry companies. The United States and the Liberian government therefore suggested that Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) member states would provide commanders for the first three AFL companies for an interim period.⁴⁹ The distrust of the AFL (and the LNP and SSS) was such that Security Council resolutions only authorized trained and vetted members of these corps to operate weapons. Sixty-two trained officers of the Police Support Unit of the LNP were entitled to use firearms in accordance with the 2005 use-of-force policy and the 2006 weapons control policy elaborated jointly by the LNP and UNMIL. Approximately 120 of the 494 trained SSS officers were authorized to use firearms and had received relevant training. SSS weapons were involved in five accidental discharges in a six-month period in 2007. One SSS rifle had been kept in LNP custody as evidence in a shooting case that took place on July 5, 2006. In November 2007, AFL weapons remained in the custody of the United States and its contractors.⁵⁰ This outside domination of the security sector was not entirely legitimate in the eyes of Liberians (Malan

⁴⁵ UN Security Council: Ninth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, 7 December 2005 (S/2005/764), para. 34. Malan (2008: x) blames the “weak and erratic funding from the U.S. Department of State” as “the main cause of the slow pace of AFL development.”

⁴⁶ UN Security Council: Tenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, 14 March 2006 (S/2006/159), para. 26.

⁴⁷ 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), para. 135.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 136.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 136.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 143.

2008: 44). Despite numerous efforts to reform the sector, the balance sheet still appeared to be below expectations in February 2009, with the most recent relevant UN report (February) noting “significant capacity deficits.”⁵¹

A surprisingly positive picture resulted from a poll on security providers in urban Liberia conducted by a team under the aegis of this paper’s author in late 2005. Responding to open questions, 2.4 percent of those interviewed cited the police as the biggest threat to personal safety, but 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).⁵²

The rating for the army was worse. Responding to similar questions, 1.4 percent of those interviewed named the army as the biggest threat to personal safety and only 2 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 (as previously noted). 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.⁵³ This can only be interpreted as wishful thinking—what the AFL should be—as they could not be seen as being effective in practice at the time of our enquiry.

To resume the argument on Liberia, 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.

The year 2003 was the watershed which ended a period of completely arbitrary rule. Liberia’s generally peaceful situation since the peace agreement of Accra in that year—but likely due more to the external intervention in and oversight over the security forces—has contributed

⁵¹ UN Security Council: Eighteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, 10 February 2009 (S/2009/86), para. 20. See also ICG 2009.

⁵² Results of the research project “Legitimate Oligopolies of Violence.” 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.

⁵³ Ibid.

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 (see ICG 2009). The political will of the Tolbert, Doe and Taylor regimes to promote a republican army was obviously low; however, the present Johnson-Sirleaf administration can be rated much more highly in this regard, at least for the moment.

Table 1: Official Security Forces in the CAR and Liberia and Their Security Performance

	CAR	Liberia
Strength (The Military Balance 2008)	3,150	2,400
Security apparatus operates as "state in state" (score/rank) (Failed States Index 2009)	9.6 (rank 8)	6.9 (rank 53)
Security-sector Reform – status in 2008	Conceptualization phase	Advanced (in progress)
Insecurity induced by security forces	Constantly high since 1996	High before and during first civil war, topped by other armed actors during the second 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	<p>Negative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <p>Positive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited effects of outside advisors • Limited effects of SSR 	<p>Negative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <p>Positive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial results of SSR • Heavy presence of UN peacekeepers

Sources: International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) 2008: *The Military Balance 2008*, London: IISS; 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 author's compilation of qualitative data.

7 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 the 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 due to the mere physical presence of a strong UN mission than to changes in the military and political set-up. Today's government is credited with having a rather strong political will to transform the security forces into well-functioning and law-abiding institutions, something which is much less apparent in the CAR.

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-standing record of peace it is not uncommon to find a "republican" army, that is, an army oriented towards the common good, as well as police forces committed to people's security. This is usually not the case in countries which have gone through protracted phases of violent conflict. A severe crisis of confidence in 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 peacebuilding was only effective 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 riven 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. Overlapping mandates, sometimes the outcome of explicit political maneuvering, lead to contradictions and open competition between state agencies and limit the transparency and effectiveness of public security provision. Due to 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 a role 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-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. However, it seems that the ideal of a neutral and effective force loyal to the state is very much alive inside the population.

Curiously, the view “from above” on African security forces in general, and on Liberian and CAR security forces in particular, may produce even a less positive balance sheet, as the military often inspires fear in governing elites due to its established record of coups, mutinies, and disobedience. Once in power, elites therefore frequently engage in changing the balance of power or ethnic representation inside the security apparatus. This is understandable, but it can lead to a less republican army than is the case if the established rules are followed.

From outside, the security forces of weak states are predominantly seen as being equally weak. From this point of view, both the state and its security forces must be strengthened and reformed; however, too frequently this is done according to a blueprint model which 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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