



# The State of Security Sector Reform and Governance in Liberia



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## African Security Sector Network (ASSN)

Formed in 2003, the **African Security Sector Network (ASSN)**, headquartered in Accra (Ghana), is a pan-African network of practitioners and organizations working to promote effective and democratically governed security sectors across Africa.

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>AFL</b>	Armed Forces of Liberia
<b>ASSN</b>	African Security Sector Network
<b>ATU</b>	Anti-Terrorist Unit
<b>CCRB</b>	Civilian Complaints Review Board
<b>CPA</b>	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil Society Organizations
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>EPSAO</b>	ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture and Operations
<b>INPFL</b>	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
<b>LDF</b>	Lofa Defence Force
<b>LNP</b>	Liberia National Police
<b>NPFL</b>	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
<b>PRS</b>	Poverty Reduction Strategy
<b>SOD</b>	Special Operations Division
<b>SSR</b>	Security Sector Reform
<b>SSRG</b>	Security Sector Reform and Governance
<b>SSS</b>	Special Security Service
<b>ULIMO</b>	United Liberian Movement of Liberia for Democracy
<b>UNMIL</b>	United Nations Mission in Liberia
<b>US</b>	United States

## Introduction/Background

The Liberian civil war was one of Africa's bloodiest. The two phases of the war 1989-1996, and 1999 -2003, killed approximately 250,000 lives and displaced more than a million. It also destroyed much of the country's infrastructure, leaving a legacy of lives scarred by not only the conflict but the economic hardship that followed.

A range of explanations were offered by Liberian scholars for the years of conflict including ethnic divisions, abuse of power by predatory elites, a corrupt political system and economic disparities. (Root Causes of the Civil War - Liberia, Peacebuildingdata.org)

The fifteen-year Liberian civil war displaced nearly one-third of the population and took the lives of approximately 250,000 people.



Liberia Political Map (Source: [www.netmaps.net/digital-maps/liberia-political-map](http://www.netmaps.net/digital-maps/liberia-political-map))

Although the war was initially launched by the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) under the command of Mr. Charles Taylor, by the end of the conflict in 2003, the number of

belligerent groups had risen to include the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), the Liberian Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), which has two factions, the Lofa Defence Force (LDF), and members of the Armed Forces of Liberia who were still loyal to Doe's government.

By the end of the conflict, and the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in August 2003, the population and the transitional government were deeply mistrustful of law enforcement and military officials. Many members of the fighting forces had been absorbed into the police, and the level of professionalism attained within the Police service before the conflict was greatly undermined under the administration of the Chief of Police nominated by one of the rebel factions. The fragmented and disjointed Armed Forces of Liberia was not recognized by Mr. Taylor during his presidency and instead created a special Para-military group to protect his regime. Several of the NPFL fighters were also absorbed into the Police and other security institutions, particularly security units of public corporations and autonomous agencies, as a strategy for maintaining combat readiness in the event of any armed attack on his government. Consequently, police, security and military officers were not regarded as a source of protection, but rather as entities to be feared. Hence, in order to reform the security sector, the relationship between civilians and law enforcement had to be re-established. Thus, the challenge before the national, regional, and international communities lay not just in rebuilding the Liberian military and police force, which would take considerable resources, but also in determining their new roles in the post-conflict society.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Accra, Ghana. called for the restructuring of the Armed Forces of Liberia, the National Police Force, the Immigration and Customs departments, the Special Security Service (SSS) and other statutory security agencies; and the disarming and restructuring of paramilitary units such as the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), the Special Operations Division (SOD) of the Liberia National Police, and security units operating within public corporations and autonomous agencies such as the National Ports Authority, the Liberia Petroleum Refining Company, the Airports, etc. which were a part of the NPFL war machinery.

When restructured, these security forces were expected to adopt a professional orientation that emphasized democratic values and respect for human rights, a non-partisan approach to duty and the avoidance of corrupt practices.

The reform and development of the security sector was also considered critical to Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy, since without adequate security, development initiatives will be undermined. Hence one of the cardinal goals of Liberia's 2008 Poverty Reduction strategy was to create a secure and peaceful environment, both domestically and in the sub-region, that was conducive to sustainable, inclusive, and equitable growth and development. The strategy noted that the sector suffered from overlapping and duplication of security functions among security institutions, lack of accountability, and defective management of the security sector.

The PRS acknowledged the inadequate presence of security officers throughout Liberia, and that civilians and local authorities were excluded from participating in security governance. Female participation in security functions was inadequate and that security institutions lack logistics, equipment, adequate remuneration for operation, noting that training was still needed for some security institutions.

It therefore prescribed priority interventions to address the situation to include:

- Streamlining security institutions to curb proliferation of agencies
- Repealing and amending statutory provisions of streamlined security agencies and that of host agencies in line with the National Security Strategy of Liberia and National Security Architecture
- Include gender sensitive, disabilities sensitive, and environment sensitive modules in curricula of security institutions
- Reassess the ongoing vetting process and other practices relating to the recruitment, training, and deployment of LNP personnel, including consideration of establishing merit-based standards, entry requirements, accountable procedures for promotion and assignment, a Civilian Oversight Board and mentorship programmes
- Establish the National Coast Guard pending enactment of the Defence Act
- Prepare a medium-term budget for each national security institution to meet operational needs
- Enhance Community-Oriented Policing to improve relations between civilians and security institutions
- Prepare and execute comprehensive deployment plans for security institutions
- Provide adequate human and personal security, especially for women and girls of school age and persons with disabilities, including ensuring more speedy prosecution of violations against human security.

The National Security Strategy of Liberia, published in January 2008, provided guidelines on improving coordination and oversight of multi-agency security activities, the statutory instruments governing them, their accountability, sustainability, and resourcing plus their operational efficiency.

## Reform Initiatives

During the initial stages of Liberia's SSR programme, emphasis was mostly placed on the reform of the Armed Forces and the Police, at the expense of other bodies such as the judiciary, prison services, customs and immigration, intelligence, drug enforcement, and oversight and accountability institutions.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) requested explicitly that the United States play a leading role in the process of rebuilding the armed forces. The US-led reform programme, which was sub-contracted to DynCorp, included completely dismantling the existing army, recruiting and vetting recruits, and training, equipping, and sustaining the new force until it became operational. Approximately 13,770 demobilized soldiers were offered widely differing amounts in compensation, depending on their seniority and length of service and an additional 400-450 personnel from the Ministry of National Defence were also replaced with newly selected candidates (**Malan, 2008**). The recruitment process for the new AFL was open to all Liberian citizens as an opportunity to rectify the historical discrimination of applicants from rural areas. At the conclusion of the initial phase of reform of the Armed Forces, a total of two thousand soldiers had been vetted, trained and prepared for service.

### Police Reform

Unlike the reform of the Armed Forces, which was spearheaded by the United States, the reform of the Police was undertaken by the United Nations Mission in Liberia, pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1509 of September 2003 which established UNMIL's role in reforming the security sector. Specifically, the resolution stated that UNMIL would "assist the transitional government of Liberia in monitoring and restructuring the police force of Liberia, consistent with democratic policing, to develop a civilian police training programme", (S/RES/1509 (2003).

As part of the post-war transition, UNMIL was tasked with assisting the transitional government of Liberia to develop a civilian police training programme, recruit and train police, and participate in efforts to restructure the LNP (**Malan, 2008**).

To create the new Liberia National Police (LNP), all existing police officers were deactivated. Out of almost 3,000 police officers who had registered to join the new police, only 756 remained after undergoing vetting. As of 6 June 2017, the strength of the national police stood at 5,127 officers, including 970 women.

The Rand Corporation report directly questioned the logic that underlay the 'SSR' initiatives [in Liberia], including the basis for deciding the force levels in both the military and police, concluding that these were completely inadequate for deciding the national security needs of Liberia. It also pointed to the lack of synergy between military and police reform planning objectives, the absence of a national security architecture to give coherence to these reforms,

and the relatively narrow scope of ‘SSR’, and in particular the failure to address the large number of security organs inherited from the previous regime. (Eboe Hutchful, SSR and Peacebuilding)

## Legal Reform

With the exception of the Army and Police, other security institutions did not benefit fully from the restructuring exercise:

In order to enhance the reform process and promote effective governance of the security sector, several legislations were enacted as outlined below:

- National Security Strategy (2008)
- The National Security Reform and Intelligence Act (August 2011)
- Act to establish the Bureau of Veterans Affairs (2008)
- The Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency Act (October 2014)
- New National Defence Act (August 2008)
- Liberia National Police Act, (Approved July 2016)
- Liberia Immigration Service Act, (Approved July 2016)
- Financial Intelligence Unit Act
- Transnational Crimes Unit Act, and
- Liberia National Commission on Small Arms Establishment Act (August 2012)

Other security related legislation enacted were:

- The Firearms and Ammunition Control Act
- The Substance Abuse Act

Provisions were made in the National Security Reform and Intelligence Act to set up County and Districts Security Councils in the various counties to act as an early warning mechanism and a forum for managing local security concerns, among other functions.

The Police and Immigration Service revised Acts also made provisions for the setting up of Civilian Complaints Review Board to hold the Police and Immigration Services accountable to the public. The two Acts were crafted to further strengthen accountability and internal governance of these key institutions.

## After Eighteen Years after the reform started, what has been the impact?

The Security Situation in the country remains a serious challenge, with high crime rate and mob justice, unsolved murders, perceived to be extra-judicial killings, lack of confidence and distrust in the security services, and the police unable to adequately respond to incidents of crime due to inadequate resources.

The National Security Strategy of Liberia (2008) identified several national security threats which have still not been properly addressed, notable among them include **Lack of respect for the rule of law**, Economy, Poverty and unemployment, **Crime – corruption, robbery and drug abuse and trafficking**, land and property disputes, Ethnic hatred and tensions, and Ex-combatants and ex-servicemen. New emerging threats include **Elections violence**, vulnerable youths and the formation of political party militias.

Despite a good National Security Strategy and reform strategies developed by individual security sector agencies and the significant reform progress achieved, the development of the Liberian security sector remains hampered by shortcomings in coordination, oversight and financial sustainability. While the national security strategy emphasizes the need for an accountable and democratic security architecture, reform of the sector has so far focused on developing the operational effectiveness of the security institutions. Mechanisms for accountability and coordination remain weak, and civilian oversight of the security sector is ineffective. The passage in August 2011 of the National Security and Intelligence Act should help resolve the issue in the Liberian security system of multiple institutions with duplicate or archaic mandates. Nevertheless, more remains to be done in order to enhance security sector coordination and to enhance synergy and cooperation between security sector agencies. **(Liberia Public Expenditure Review Note: Meeting the Challenges of the UNMIL Security Transition.** Report No. 71009-LR: Document of the World Bank and the United Nations Mission in Liberia.)

The UNMIL Transition report contains surprising insights on both the successes and failures of the Liberia programme. For instance :

- Only 10% of the billions spent by UNMIL was retained in Liberia, and even this led first to an (uneven) economic surge (some 10% annual growth, mainly benefiting Monrovia) followed by severe deflation when the mission came to an end (read: ‘economics of peacekeeping’);
- “While the national security strategy emphasizes the need for accountable and democratic security architecture, reform of the sector has so far focused on developing the operational effectiveness of the security institutions. Mechanisms for accountability and coordination remain weak, and civilian oversight of the security sector is ineffective.” (p.12)
- An unsustainable security architecture: while Liberian (indigenous) security personnel (e.g., for the Liberia National Police) could now be hired for only one-seventh of the

cost of individual UNMIL personnel, Liberia was still not expected to find sufficient resources to afford that option.

- While attempting to tap (however selectively) into indigenous customary institutions to provide security and justice (i.e., hybridity) was regarded as one of the innovations of SSR/peacebuilding in Liberia (best exemplified by the Women’s Peace Huts), the official ideology –as reflected in this report--remained conflicted and ambivalent about the nature and integrity of these (allegedly ‘primitive’) customary formations.
- To this may be added a timid and inconsistent approach to Rule of Law issues during UNMIL’s tenure (*Lessons Identified from United Nations Mission in Liberia Support to Rule of Law in Liberia*)

**Liberia Public Expenditure Review Note: Meeting the Challenges of the UNMIL Security Transition.** Report No. 71009-LR: Document of the World Bank and the United Nations Mission in Liberia

## The ECOWAS Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance and its implementation in Liberia

Although the ECOWAS Policy Framework was adopted in 2016, information about its existence and contents was only widely known in Liberia during the African Security Sector Network (ASSN) - ECOWAS workshop on the Policy Framework held in Monrovia in August 2022. Hence it did not feature in Liberia’s UNMIL Era SSR programme.

In consideration of the essential Features of the ECOWAS Policy Framework for SSRG which provides for each ECOWAS country to develop a National Security Policy/Strategy, periodic security sector review and needs assessment, a comprehensive professionalization and modernization of the security sector, the involvement of customary authorities and community based security providers in SSRG, the effective involvement of CSOs and the media, the establishment of effective democratic control and oversight institutions. An effective resources mobilization strategy and financing of SSRG, a national framework for cooperation and partnership building, an effective communication strategy, and a monitoring and evaluation mechanism, Liberia has a long way to go in adhering to the Policy Framework.

During the 4 days workshop on the ECOWAS Policy Framework for SSRG hosted in August 2022 in Monrovia, the participants provided the following observations and recommendations; which if considered will greatly enhance Liberia’s security sector transformation and governance.

1. That Liberia’s SSR process was not holistic and conclusive in that only two of the statutory national security agencies (the Police and Armed Forces) were targeted for reform. The remaining institutions – Immigration, Fire Service, Corrections, Drug Enforcement, Customs, Executive Protection, and other public safety institutions were mostly left out of the process. There is therefore the need to continue the reform and transformation process to ensure that all these institutions are reformed to enhance their administrative and operational capacities and promote accountability and public support.

2. There were issues of overlap of functions, inadequate coordination between the various security actors, and ineffective oversight of the sector. Hence the need for a more robust and proactive oversight role by parliament, and adequate financial support for the CCRB was emphasized.
3. For SSRG to be successful in Liberia, the contributions and input of both state and non-state actors are necessary. Security actors should embrace CSOs as partners and open up to receive recommendations and technical support, and engage in continuous dialogue, providing the necessary information that will assist in charting initiatives to further strengthening ownership. Political influence and lack of respect for the rule of law was identified as a major factor that has impeded Liberia's SSRG programme.
4. There is a serious gap in information dissemination on SSRG issues and the lack of information about maritime security threats and maritime security governance. Increased awareness about the state of Liberia's security, the challenges faced by the sector, particularly financial impediments, and the lack of political will to support the process was vital to developing an effective advocacy strategy and engagement initiative by CSOs and other stakeholders.
5. That security sector reform and governance need to be taken seriously, and the necessary support provided to move the process forward. In the formulation of the national budget, all relevant SSRG stakeholders should collectively engage the national Legislature to make a case for support of the SSR and Governance in Liberia to meet the challenges faced by the sector.

#### **List of Security Agencies and Oversight bodies in Liberia**

- National Security Council
- Armed Forces of Liberia
- Liberia National Police
- Liberia Immigration Service
- National Security Agency
- Executive Protection Service
- Liberia National Fire Service
- Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency
- Transnational Crime Unit
- The National legislature
- Senate Committee on Defence, National Security, Intelligence and Veterans Affairs
- House Committee on Defence
- House Committee on National Security
- Independent National Commission on Human Rights
- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of National Defence

- Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation
- Bureau of Customs and Excise
- Financial Intelligence Unit
- The Ministry of Internal Affairs
- Civilian Complaints Review Board
- The Judiciary