AFRICA CENTER
FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Liberia Case Study

Working Paper
(Preliminary Draft)

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July 2018

Introduction

Liberia, the oldest African Republic, experienced a 14-year civil war as a result of long unresolved political and ethnic differences. The conflict took the lives of about 250,000 people, destroyed the Liberian state and economy, and spread to neighboring countries, particularly in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. At the end of the conflict, Liberia was confronted with a combination of more than a century of poor security sector governance, a legacy of a decade and half of civil war, the implication of being located in an unstable region and the lack of strategy as to how to reverse the situation.[1] The country began its reconstruction after a successful and peaceful democratic election in 2006 with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first elected female President in Africa. One of the daunting challenges she identified was to reform the security sector to ensure sustainable peace and democratic politics and security in post-conflict Liberia. After two terms in office, on 25 January 2018 she handed over power to George Weah as President. It's against this backdrop that the Liberia National Security Strategy will be examined. This study will attempt to describe the legal and security policy frameworks that paved the way for the development of Liberian National Security Strategy. It will also highlight key elements of the developmental process and the implementation mechanisms with the view of identifying obstacles and challenges to the NSS process in Liberia.

1. Laying the Foundation for a National Security Strategy after the conflict

The Security Sector Reform (SSR) process and the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) are the two key elements that paved the way for the development of the National Security Strategy in Liberia.

Security Sector Reform in Liberia: The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in Accra at the end of the conflict in 2003 called for a complete restructuring of the country's two main security institutions, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and the Liberian National Police (LNP). The process started in 2004 with the United States with support from several ECOWAS countries taking responsibility for the AFL, while reform of the LNP fell under the supervision of United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Even though it is generally accepted that SSR in Liberia provided mixed results, it's worth noting that some achievements, including the consolidation of peace and stability and improved social cohesion, were made possible thanks to the impact of the SSR process launched at the end of the conflict.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS): from conflict to development.

The Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), finalized in 2008, was the first policy paper developed after the civil war by the Government of Liberia. It provided a vision and strategies for rapid, inclusive and sustainable growth and development of the country. The Poverty Reduction Strategy was built on the government's first 150-day action plan and its Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy that underlined the importance of making the nexus between development and security through the concept of

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[1] National Security Strategy of the Republic of Liberia, 2008.

"Breaking with the Past: From Conflict to Development." The PRS policy paper was formulated through broad-based consultation with Liberian citizens in cities, towns and villages throughout the country, members of the business community, civil society groups, the legislature and international partners[2]. This laid the foundation for the development of the National Security Strategy of post conflict Liberia.

The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Liberia (2008)

The Liberian National Security Strategy was developed by the Governance Commission after broad-based, inclusive, and participatory consultations in the 15 counties of the country. The Governance Commission was created by the 2003 Accra Peace Conference and is mandated to promote good governance, advise, design, and formulate appropriate policies and institutional arrangements and frameworks required for achieving good governance. The Liberia National Security Strategy designated the following vision for the country: "a country in which all the population can live without fear of repression and suppression, poverty, crime, hunger and unemployment; a society in which Liberians can freely express themselves and make decisions about the way in which their country is governed."[3] Thus, national security in the Liberian context is defined as "*the process of ensuring the protection of all of Liberian citizens, its sovereignty, its culture, its territorial integrity and its economic well-being.*"[4]

The Revised National Security Strategy (2017): Clarifying the Roles of Security Institutions.

The Government of Liberia (GoL) initiated a formal review of their National Security Strategy in 2013, but this review was postponed in July 2014 due to the Ebola outbreak. The GoL eventually reviewed and updated a National Security and Implementation Plan in September 2017 with support from UNMIL. It emphasizes human security, and clarifies the roles of security institutions. The costs of implementation are being factored into an ongoing public expenditure review that will assist the Government in sustaining the financial planning of the justice and security sectors, which is being led by the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, with support from the World Bank and the United Nations.[5]

2. Implementing NSS in Liberia

Liberia National Security Architecture

In order to meet the full range of security needs and national security goals, the security architecture of Liberia is built on the following pillars: Protection of the people and sovereignty of Liberia, Law enforcement and border security, Protection of state officials, properties and documentation, intelligence and Promotion of human rights. The pillars mentioned above are articulated and implemented by the following institutions:

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[2] Poverty Strategy Reduction of Liberia, IMF, 2008.

[3] National Security Strategy of Liberia.

[4] Ibid

[5] Final Progress Report of the Secretary General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia, Security Council, April 2018.

- The National Security Council chaired by the President of the Republic; it is the highest security coordinating body with the sole responsibility for national security policy issues. A National Security Advisor is appointed for the coordination role among security agencies.
- Intelligence and Security: Intelligence and counter intelligence responsibilities are vested to the Liberia National Police and coordinated by the Ministry of Justice.
- Defense: The Armed Forces of Liberia are mandated by the Constitution to defend the territorial integrity of Liberia against external aggression and assist in response to natural disasters. The Liberia Coast Guard protects the maritime borders and the natural resources therein.
- The Police is the primary operational agency responsible for internal security.
- Liberia Immigration Service ensures border security and management. They work closely with custom excise and the coast guard.
- The Executive Protection Service has the responsibility to protect the Head of State, key government officials and VIPs.
- National Fire Service: Fire prevention and control and assisting the police in arson investigations.
- Liberia Anti-corruption Commission (LACC) is performing Law enforcement and Intelligence functions.
- Non-Military Security Issues: Non-military threats to Liberian National Security interests are addressed by institutions such as the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, Health, Finance, Planning and Economic Affairs, Education and Defense.

3. Monitoring and Oversight Mechanisms

The new security institutions listed above are now subjected to effective civilian management and legislative oversight and that was not the case over the past quarter century. Accordingly, the legislature with the Committees on Defense and Security enacted several laws reforming the security sector but are sometimes plagued by a lack of sufficient money, sporadic corruption, executive domination and the lack of technical capacity to perform their function. Because of the poor past record of security institutions regarding human right abuses, arbitrary arrests and the use of official powers for private gain, persist. The judiciary has been strengthened to ensure that rule of law is respected throughout the country and by so doing, it participates in overseeing and monitoring national security strategy implementation.

Civil society role has been emphasized explicitly in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2003 regarding oversight and local participation in the SSR process. A group of civil society active in security related issues organized themselves into a coordination working group on SSR but their initiatives have demonstrated limited impact on the process. Meanwhile independent oversight bodies were also created to support the effective functioning of the security sector reform process including the Governance Commission, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, and the Independent National Commission on Human Rights. These independent institutions are currently playing key roles in the decision making and the implementation of national security in Liberia.

4. Challenges and Prospects

<u>Ebola and National Security</u>: The outbreak of Ebola in Liberia from 2014 to 2015 demonstrated that National Security Strategy needs to be broadly and appropriately defined in order to be flexible and pro-active enough to face all sort of threats to national security interests. Lessons learned from the Ebola outbreak with regard to implementing national security in Liberia is that health insecurity can lead to a severe degree of human insecurity and may subsequently lead to the collapse of the state. During the crisis, personal insecurity with the spread of Ebola developed mistrust, fear, anger, denial and confusion. The socio-economic impact created by the stalling of imports and agricultural production resulted in astronomical increases in prices, impacting negatively the cost of living and basic security needs. Ebola threatened not only the security of individuals but also peace, the national cohesion and regional security. The Ebola outbreak is a typical example underlining the importance of taking into account the regional dimension and implications of some threats when developing a national security strategy.

<u>National ownership and sustainability</u>: The 14- year civil war completely destroyed Liberia's socio-economic base, making it heavily dependent on external aid. Since its inception in 2004 following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, SSR processes in Liberia have been externally driven, led principally by the United States of America and the United Nations. With the end of the mandate of UNMIL on 30 March 2018, the country must now take full ownership of the implementation of the entire security process in order to sustain peace and foster development in the country. Measures to accompany the Government of Liberia following the closure of UNMIL must be strong enough in order to avoid reversals in the past decade's achievements. The United Nations will continue to support justice and security sectors under a three-year joint program led by UNDP and focused on the development of institutions, including the Liberia National Police and the Liberia Immigration Service. Bilateral and regional support is also expected to continue.[6] Even though UNMIL is putting in place an integrated transition strategy for Liberia, the issue of sustainability of the funding of the implementation of the National Security Strategy remains to be addressed. The new government has made it an issue of national sovereignty, and is in the process of exploring a full range of options internally as well as externally to include new bilateral partners in order to take up the challenge.

Conclusion

Liberia can be considered as a typical case study for post-conflict countries which went through a Security Sector Reform process and developed a National Security Strategy to consolidate peace, security and development. Liberia National Security Strategy defined security from a broader perspective and implemented it as well as possible with the strong support of the international community. The closure of the United Nations Mission in Liberia on March 30, 2018 will definitely be a test of the capacity of the institutions and the people of Liberia to take their destiny in their own hands.

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[6] Ibid