LIBERIA: A MODEL FOR SECURITY SECTOR REFORM?

By Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard

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Liberia National Police Headquarters. (Source: Interpol Photo Gallery, http://www.interpol.int/layout/set/gallery/Media/Images/Member-countries/Africa/Liberia/Liberia/Emergency-Response-Unit-in-training-3-1, accessed 20 July 2016.)

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Israeli Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu inspects a guard of honor on his arrival at Entebbe airport Uganda, Monday, July 4, 2016. Netanyahu was on a four-nation Africa tour to Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Ethiopia. (Source: AP Photo/Stephen Wandera.)

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History of Conflict in Liberia

For most of the period from 1989 until 2003, civil war consumed Liberia. As a result of conflict, more than 250,000 people were killed and 1 million displaced. During the first civil war (1989 to 1997), rebel groups toppled the repressive government of former Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe. Doe was executed by rebels in 1990, and fighting broke out between different factions over control of the government. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) authorized a regional deployment of forces in 1990 in an attempt to keep the conflict from spreading across West Africa. The UN also contributed an observer mission in 1993. After several attempts to reach an agreement among competing factions, a brokered, fragile peace resulted in the election of Charles Taylor, a former rebel leader, as president in 1997.

Peace was, unfortunately, short lived, and conflict broke out again in 1999, after rebels backed by the Guinean government invaded Liberia in the north. Fighting continued until 2003, when U.S. and ECOWAS forces intervened to stop rebels from taking over the capital Monrovia. Taylor was forced into exile, and the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA), which included security sector reform as a key feature, was signed shortly thereafter.

Security Sector Reform

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was established in 2003 to help implement the CPA. At its largest, UNMIL included 16,115 troops. UNMIL was conceived of as a multidimensional peacekeeping operation. Its mandate was expansive. The mission was to engage not only in traditional peacekeeping activities but also to assist with reform of the police, the criminal justice system, and political institutions while being mindful of human rights issues, gender mainstreaming, and child protection. Reform of the police alone has been a massive undertaking. Even before the civil war, the Liberian National Police (LNP) had a poor reputation among the population for their aggressive and corrupt tactics. During the civil wars, the LNP were downright predatory.

Alongside the government of Liberia, UNMIL was tasked with reforming the LNP to increase its professional capacity, expand its ability to police beyond the capital and other major cities, and promote trust between the police and the community. In 2003, UNMIL started recruiting new forces and removing ex-combatants from the ranks. Currently, the LNP numbers approximately 4,100, but this number is believed to be approximately half of the size the country needs to adequately provide domestic security.

The results of police reform in Liberia have been mixed. The vetting process employed during recruitment drives has been criticized as inadequate. Based on surveys of LNP forces, a 2016 article concluded that the LNP was generally competent and aware of police procedures, but many individual members lacked basic reasoning and memory skills. In addition, corruption within the police continues to be a problem.

While UNMIL was given the bulk of security sector reform responsibilities, the CPA stipulated that the United States was to assist in reform of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). The United States had played a key role in the peace process by providing troop support, maintaining a strong diplomatic presence in the country, and participating in the drafting of the CPA. The U.S. Government enlisted the American company DynCorp to implement a large-scale reform of the AFL. The army was formally decommissioned and reconstituted as a much smaller force. After vigorous debate, it was decided that the country could afford only 2,000 troops and that these forces would not be oriented toward external defense. The army's main [functions](#) would be to "patrol borders, control immigration, and manage criminality." Almost 14,000 soldiers were decommissioned and given a [severance](#) package. Vetting of new recruits was reportedly difficult but exhaustive. Approximately [75 percent](#) of applicants were rejected.

Conclusion

After more than 12 years of reform, responsibility for providing citizen security and safety has been handed over to the government of Liberia. The process of creating virtually new police and military institutions has been difficult and time-consuming. The underlying lack of basic education in the country poses a significant obstacle to professionalism of the police. Corruption is an ongoing problem. Nonetheless, the comprehensive approach taken to security sector reform is laudable. It remains to be seen if gains will persist beyond the drawdown. Continuing international support and assistance are of the utmost importance to consolidate Liberia's reform successes.

The 2017 election further complicates this picture. Security for previous elections in 2005 and 2011 was provided by UNMIL. The current number of police and military forces is less than half the size of the UNMIL mission. In addition, it has been impossible to fully integrate all the ex-combatants into the Liberian economy because of their large number. There are concerns that they could easily be mobilized for violence. Previous elections were beset with administrative problems and threats of violence. In the absence of a capable and trusted electoral security, violence is a very real possibility.

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Historical Ties and New Challenges

Israel's relations with African nations were generally positive in the 1950s and 1960s, as a number of African nations gained independence and sought international recognition. But relations soured following the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War, which was accompanied by Israeli occupation of the Sinai and West Bank. Israel's actions were interpreted by a number of African liberation leaders as being similar to the colonial policies they had just fought against. Attempting to redeem its reputation, Israel offered funds to the Organization of African Unity in 1971 to bolster "liberation movements," in addition to the aid it provided to the medical and agricultural sectors.

Relations continued to sour as Israel developed closer ties with apartheid South Africa and as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) sought the support of other regional blocs (including sub-Saharan Africa) for its oil embargo. By 1973, following the Yom Kippur War, most African nations had broken off ties with Israel, cementing the Arab League's soft power advantage in the region, which continued until the mid-1980s. Declining patronage from Middle Eastern countries and fluctuating peace processes (including the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai in 1982), coupled with a new generation of African leadership, have allowed Israel to restore and develop full diplomatic relations with 40 countries south of the Sahara as of 2010.

Further bolstering the status of Israel among African countries is the nature of the emerging threats to African security. In the past Israel's policies towards Palestine and the Palestinian Liberation Organization may have been interpreted as oppressive. Today, however, Israel's experience combating radical extremist groups and insurgencies makes it a valuable partner for African states coping with terrorism and rebel groups. During his visit to the four East African countries, Netanyahu emphasized that Israel was a committed partner for African states seeking to secure themselves and in the fight against terrorist groups like al-Shabaab.

Courting the United Nations and Developing New Markets

Israel stands to gain in a number of ways from a renewed focus on partnering with African countries. Perhaps most concretely, Africa is an emerging market for Israeli goods. In Kenya, PM Netanyahu was accompanied by 70 Israeli business executives, representing 50 different companies, "hoping to sell Africa everything from Israeli-made plastic wrap, sprinklers and irrigation pipes to software, CCTV cameras and ... even cantaloupe seeds." Israeli exports to Africa grew more than 250 percent in the past decade. Because exports to Africa account for a mere 2 percent of total Israeli exports, the growth

potential, particularly as Africa's middle class develops, is evident. A number of Israelis have invested in the continent's oil, mineral, and real estate industries, although at times the close relationships between these investors and their host governments have been scrutinized.

No concrete deals have emerged from PM Netanyahu's visit. According to the *African Business Review*, however, during the trip, "executives discussed Magal Security Systems Ltd.'s bid to help Kenya build a wall across the Somalian border with the 'smart fencing' it pioneered in the Gaza Strip," in addition to planning "irrigation projects across Africa by Netafim Ltd., mining ventures with Israel Chemicals Ltd., and wind turbines pitched by solar energy specialist Gigawatt Global Ltd."

Military Trade and Political Support

Israel has seen a significant surge in its sales of military equipment to sub-Saharan Africa in recent years. While overall Israeli weapons exports declined by $1 billion from 2013 to 2014, over that same period deals with African countries rose from $223 million to $318 million. This hike is all the more striking in light of the sales from just a few years before: in 2009, Israel sold just $77 million worth of arms to African countries.

Although data on arms sales are somewhat unreliable, it has been confirmed that between 2006 and 2010, Israel delivered "major weapons" to Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Lesotho, Nigeria, Rwanda, the Seychelles, South Africa, and Uganda. A number of these countries are barred from obtaining weapons from the United States by the "Leahy Law," which prohibits sales of such products to countries whose armed forces commit human rights abuses. In addition to arms and weapons sales, Israel has been involved in the training of several African militaries and brokering of arms sales between African governments and other nations.

In addition to bolstering the Israeli economy, PM Netanyahu's visit also appeared to have a political aim—garnering support for Israel's agenda in the United Nations General Assembly. "Like any other nation, Israel constantly checks the horizon, trying to push its economic, strategic and diplomatic interests, looking for new friends and new markets," one African pundit noted, concluding that the Israeli Prime Minister is "looking for precious African friends on UN votes for Israel."

While any vote-garnering is speculation at this point, there are tangible development assistance programs that surround the PM's visit. At the end of June, the Israeli government approved the opening of offices of Israel's Agency for International Development in all four countries visited by Netanyahu on this trip. Israel is also launching a $13 million dollar aid program focused on improving "economic ties and cooperation with African countries."

Conclusions

Israel again seems to be courting partnerships with sub-Saharan African countries. The rising threat from rebel groups and terrorism on the continent has helped it foster ties with a new generation of African leaders. In addition to providing new markets for Israeli goods (including military equipment), these partnerships may serve to advance Israeli political positions at the United Nations General Assembly.

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Donor Darling or Cause for Concern?

Compared with its neighbors, Zambia is a southern African success story. It has avoided the civil wars that have challenged neighboring Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mozambique. In fact, it is the only country within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) that has twice peacefully transferred power to an opposition party through democratic elections. In addition, following the privatization of copper mines in the 1990s, the nation experienced strong economic growth, reaching an average of 7 percent GDP growth from 2010 through 2014.

Despite this positive history, Zambia today is beset with political and economic challenges, many of which have peaked during the short tenure of current President Edgar Lungu. Elected in a close race in January 2015 following the death of then-President Michael Sata, Lungu has overseen the implementation of a controversial mining royalty bill, an increased crackdown on media freedom, and increased repression against political opponents.

It's the Economy

For most Zambians, the tumultuous economy is a daily concern. Economic growth contracted to 3 percent in 2015, while Zambia's currency, the kwacha, lost 45 percent of its value against the dollar, before rebounding this year. This downturn is due to Zambia's overreliance on copper exports, which account for 70 percent of the country's export earnings. In 2015, global declines in the price of copper occurred simultaneously with the implementation of new royalty laws requiring mine operators to pay up to 20 percent of profits to the government. Unable to cope, international mining companies cut more than 10,000 jobs in Zambia. Although the government ultimately lowered the royalty fee, Moody's, Standard & Poor's, and Fitch credit ratings agencies all downgraded Zambia's debt to below junk status.

In a country in which 60 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, and 42 percent live in extreme poverty, economic instability is a political touchstone. In October and December 2015, miners in towns along Zambia's copper belt rioted over lost jobs and lowered pay. In April 2016, police in the capital struggled to contain violence targeting immigrants during riots that began after rumors spread that Rwandans were behind recent ritual killings in the city, but which analysts attributed to frustration with Zambia's economic struggles.

Declining Political Freedom

In response to growing frustrations, the Zambian government has attempted to limit the expression of dissent. In 2015, Freedom House ranked Zambia's media as "not free," citing government harassment of journalists during both Sata's and Lungu's presidencies. These concerns were exacerbated when Zambia's largest independent newspaper, *The Post*, was shut down by the government on June 23, 2016. Although the Zambian Revenue Authority claimed the closure was due to unpaid taxes, the paper's editor published a legal order showing that The Post should have been permitted to continue publication while the outstanding tax issue was settled in court. As one of the last remaining papers critical of the PF, The Post's closure has narrowed political discourse within Zambia.

The PF has also used its position to secure legal advantages for itself in the upcoming election. In February 2016, Lungu appointed six judges to the Constitutional Court, the body with the final say over the interpretation of the constitution, including presidential elections. The opposition protested that three of these judges had close, personal ties to Lungu that could sway their decision in the event of a contested election. In addition, opposition groups argued that a new law granting Electoral Commission of Zambia officials immunity from prosecution for actions taken during elections would provide cover for the officials to illegally alter the results to support the PF. Finally, in early June, opposition groups loudly registered their alarm at the publication of an alleged PF strategy document that outlined plans to use police to illegally monitor polling stations and coerce voters to mark PF ballots.

Conclusion

Harassment of the opposition is not new in Zambia. As *Africa Watch* noted in August 2013, then-President Sata was known for authoritarian tendencies that aggravated political violence in the country. But Lungu is campaigning from a weaker position, challenged both by the fragile economy and newly signed constitutional changes that require the winning presidential candidate to receive more than 50 percent of the votes—a feat Lungu failed to achieve in 2015. Although it is unsurprising that the PF is seeking every advantage to ensure victory in August, steps to curtail political freedom in Zambia risk marring the country's enviable record of free and fair elections, as well as the PF's own legitimacy.

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A couple leave on a motorbike as they flee from the area of previous fighting in the Jabel area of Juba, South Sudan, Saturday, July 16, 2016. (Source: AP Photo/SamirBol.)

Although soldiers on both sides of the conflict had been relocated to Juba in April under a newly reformed unity government, they failed to integrate and maintained separate camps and command structures. In this war-torn country, the prevailing fear was not if violence would erupt between the rival factions but when. In the days following the fight, the primary concern has been whether the violence will spread and reignite the country's destructive civil war. Although a number of proximate factors, including the wide availability of weapons, a stalled peace process, and a limping economy, contribute to the ongoing violence in the country, the 2011 Transitional Constitution and the late 2015 announcement of an increase in the number of South Sudanese states are structural drivers of instability.

Extent of the Crisis and Triggering Factors

The current political crisis erupted in 2013, when President Kiir dissolved his cabinet, which included Vice President Machar, on the suspicion that Machar was planning a coup; the ouster plunged the country into a destructive civil war. When the country celebrated its fifth anniversary on July 9, it did so as the site of one of the world's most critical humanitarian crises. An estimated 2.6 million people, amounting to nearly 25 percent of the country's population, have been displaced by the civil war. The conditions on the ground are so dire that South Sudan has been given the highest classification of humanitarian disasters (Level 3) by the UN, joining those in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. The violence has claimed more than 50,000 lives since December 2013, meriting the deployment of more than 12,000 UN peacekeeping troops. Although the conflict's roots are political, the violence has frequently pitted Dinkas loyal to Kiir against Nuer loyal to Machar, reflecting the extent to which ethnicity has been politicized in the world's newest country.

The conflict has escalated so rapidly in part because of the wide availability of weapons inside the country. Before South Sudan's independence, it was estimated that there were between 1.9 and 3.2 million small arms in circulation. Given the intensity of the violence, it is likely that these numbers have only increased in the years since independence, as attempts at imposing an arms embargo have failed, allowing South Sudan's government to purchase more than $20 million worth of weapons last year; self-defense militias have proliferated.

The precarious economic situation further increases the general insecurity in the country. Oil revenues, thought to account for more than 98 percent of government revenue in South Sudan, have been reduced drastically because of low global prices and lowered production. The drop in oil prices is beyond the government's control, but the decline in production is a result of insecurity surrounding the oil fields. The country has entered into a vicious cycle of instability and economic stagnation. As a result, civil servants have not been paid in months, and those citizens who receive steady paychecks find that their money does not go as far because of inflation and depreciation. All these factors have pushed the country to the brink, but there are longer term, constitutional features that must be addressed to establish peace in South Sudan.

Designed to Fail

Since the nation's independence, South Sudan's constitutionally prescribed political and legal system failed to establish a strong foundation for the country. Under the 2011 Transitional Constitution, power was centralized in the presidency to a degree that some characterized as "more commonly associated with autocracies than democracies." The President has the authority to unilaterally dismiss federal justices and disband the legislature, and checks and balances are limited. Debates over the constitution created divisions between Kiir and Machar that instigated conflict. Before being dismissed from office, Machar had proposed constitutional reforms that called for term limits and reducing the unilateral power of the executive.

The constitution continues to be a source of conflict, even after years of war. In December 2015, President Kiir further demonstrated the extent of centralization of authority when he announced that the country's 10 states had been dissolved and replaced by 28 new states. Although the proliferation of administrative units might be construed as an effort to decentralize power in the country, Kiir's handpicked selection of the 28 new governors and the lack of clarity about what sorts of authority the states would possess suggest that the reform is merely a proliferation of administrative units. Research conducted at the University of Pennsylvania, drawing on other examples from sub-Saharan Africa, found that the creation of these local government structures counterintuitively centralizes power in the federal government. The weak provisions of the 2011 South Sudanese constitution created conditions under which the executive was able to expand opportunities for patronage by adjusting the country's institutional makeup, raising the stakes in the country's winner-take-all political system. The immediate reaction by Machar and his supporters—condemning the change as a violation of the peace agreement signed between the two parties—illustrates the reform's centralizing effect.

Conclusion

The continued political manipulation of the provisions of the constitution has dire consequences for the future stability of South Sudan. A mixture of proximate triggering factors and institutional weaknesses make it likely that the skirmishes between rival factions in Juba may once again devolve into wider violence. While providing resources to those affected by the humanitarian crisis and brokering a more tenable peace agreement, the international community may also wish to focus on the need for a more balanced constitutional design in the country.

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