



# Executive Summary

Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press



## BUILDING BETTER ARMIES: AN INSIDER'S ACCOUNT OF LIBERIA

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Helping allies build better armies and police forces is a strategic imperative. Operationally, building professional indigenous security forces is the exit strategy for costly stability operations like Afghanistan, because it allows those countries to bring security to themselves rather than depend on the United States to do so. Strategically, helping fragile states professionalize their military and police promotes durable development, since corrupt security forces tend to devour the fruits of development. Additionally, the United States must help its partners develop effective security forces to contend with regional and transnational threats, or it will face a Hobson's choice: Send in U.S. troops to do the job or permit minor threats to fester into major ones.

Despite this strategic imperative, recent events in Mali, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere demonstrate that few success stories exist. Liberia is a rare and qualified "success," and this monograph explores how the program's chief architect achieved it. Liberia suffered a 14-year civil war replete with human rights atrocities that killed 250,000 people, displaced a third of its population, and destabilized its neighbors. Following President Charles Taylor's exile in 2003, the United States contracted with DynCorp International to demobilize and rebuild the Armed Forces of Liberia and Ministry of Defence "from the ground up," according to the contract. The program that built the Armed

Forces of Liberia is unique and is unlike those in Iraq and Afghanistan, making it worthy of study. It was also the first time in over 150 years that one sovereign nation hired a private company to raise and train another sovereign nation's military.

Whether one is raising an army of 2,000 or 200,000, the methods are essentially the same, differing only in scale and scope. The two tools needed to help a country acquire the monopoly of force—and a monopoly that serves rather than exploits its people—are disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR). This monograph explores the theory and practice behind these two programs using the case of Liberia, where national forces were complicit in atrocities and human rights abuses. It answers questions such as: How exactly does one transform the military from a symbol of terror into an instrument of democracy? How can one make a soldier someone a child would run toward for safety rather than away from in fear?

This monograph also considers some of the benefits and problems of contracting out the making of militaries. This is important because DDR and SSR are becoming increasingly privatized, and it is doubtful that the United States, at present, could conduct this critical task without private sector assistance. The monograph concludes with 28 concrete recommendations for practitioners and six recommendations for the

U.S. Army on how to build better armies abroad.

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