

Almohad, Selman

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## Bringing regional politics to the study of security sector reform: Army reform in Sierra Leone and Iraq

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**Bringing Regional Politics to the Study  
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Army Reform in Sierra Leone and Iraq**

Selman Almohamad

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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  
<[info@giga-hamburg.de](mailto:info@giga-hamburg.de)>  
<[www.giga-hamburg.de](http://www.giga-hamburg.de)>

# **Bringing Regional Politics to the Study of Security Sector Reform: Army Reform in Sierra Leone and Iraq**

## **Abstract**

This paper argues that the scholarship on security sector reform (SSR) tends to neglect regional politics in the formulation of its concepts and policies, and that this neglect deprives the study of SSR of a valuable analytical level. It therefore uses comparative historical analysis and the model of regional conflict formations (RCFs) to examine army reforms in Sierra Leone and Iraq from a regional angle, thereby illustrating the explanatory potential that regional politics could bring to the study of SSR and its implementation. The paper also distinguishes between convergent and divergent regional formations, whereby the relationship between SSR outcomes and regional politics is conceived of as constitutive, entangled, and holistic.

Keywords: security sector reform (SSR), statebuilding, regional politics, army reform, Iraq, Sierra Leone, comparative historical analysis

## **Selman Almohamad, MA**

is a research fellow at the GIGA Institute of Latin American Studies and a member of the “Security Sector Reform and the Stability of Post-War Peace” project. He holds a master’s degree in political science from the University of Siegen.

<Selman.almohamad@giga-hamburg.de>

<[www.giga-hamburg.de/en/team/almohamad](http://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/team/almohamad)>

# **Bringing Regional Politics to the Study of Security Sector Reform: Army Reform in Sierra Leone and Iraq**

**Selman Almohamad**

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## **1 Introduction**

Violent conflicts which occur within the state usually span long periods of time and result in state fragility, the weakening of social cohesion, and the disruption or adaptation of state institutions (Ansorg and Kurtenbach 2017). Similarly, post-war and post-authoritarian societies experience the woes of fragmented institutions; a lack of security both at the level of the state and down the ladder to the level of individual citizens; and the inability of the state to monopolise the legitimate use of force, partly because of the militarisation of various substate groups which form according to different types of identities and interests.

Further, the repercussions of violent conflicts do not confine themselves within the boundaries of the affected societies. Rather, they spill over to threaten regional and international peace and stability (Rubin 2006). Therefore, it is commonplace for international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), regional governmental agglomerates such as the European Union (EU), international financial institutions (e.g. the World Bank), and also unilateral donor countries such as the United Kingdom (UK) to try to craft policies to alleviate the devastating consequences of violent conflicts transpiring in other regions of the globe. In this vein, and especially since the end of the Cold War, the security sectors of states where violent conflicts have broken out have received significant attention on the agendas of state-builders. The latter have asked how security institutions can be reformed to serve the developmental policies designed for these afflicted countries via the security sector's adherence to norms of good governance (such as transparency and accountability), respect for human rights, democratisation, and a focus on guaranteeing human security rather than merely state or regime security (Larzillière 2012).

Thus, security sector reform (SSR) is a concept that entered into the lexicon of post-conflict intervention in the late 1990s, mainly because the importance of reforming security institutions in weak, fragile, and failed states began to receive more recognition from development specialists, academics, policymakers, and donor countries as a central pillar of statebuilding. Accordingly, SSR began to gather momentum regarding how to refine its concepts: What were its elements? How could it be put into practice? Consequently, SSR became a policy discourse and began to be codified – for example, via the OECD Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) adoption of SSR as essential for development, governance, and democratisation, an endorsement which has taken off since 2004 (Sedra 2010a; Ball 2010).<sup>1</sup>

However, the meagre record of SSR initiatives in different contexts (Sedra 2018) propelled some scholars and experts to highlight the need to move the debate on SSR in new directions and towards a second generation of SSR (for example, Jackson and Bakrania 2018). Hence, this paper follows the path that SSR has taken since its primary inception as a research and policy paradigm. Relatedly, it highlights a drawback in the conceptualisation of SSR: its neglect of regional politics and the impact this could have on the implementation of its schemes.

To further explicate the role of the regional dimension, this paper analyses and compares army reforms in Sierra Leone and Iraq, using the methodology of comparative historical analysis. It also utilises the model of regional conflict formations (RCFs) in an attempt to comprehend the impact that the regional dynamics in those cases exerted on the outcomes of the reform processes. In a final step and drawing upon the two cases, the paper ventures to refine the RCFs model and underscores its constitutive connection to SSR.

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1 “The OECD uses the term ‘system’ rather than ‘sector’ to underline the interconnectivity between the numerous actors and institutions” (Andersen 2011: footnote page 10).

## 2 Security Sector Reform: An Overview

A state's capacity to legitimately monopolise the use of force within its territory represents one of the basic ingredients of statehood in the Westphalian world of sovereign states. Relatedly, reforming the security sector of the state as an avenue to strengthen its territorial jurisdiction comprises the "defining element of modern statehood" (Benedix and Stanley 2008: 97; Gordon 2014: 131). Further, SSR is perceived by leading multilateral donors such as the UN and the OECD as an indispensable precondition for development, human rights, and sustainable peace (OECD 2007; Schroeder, Chappuis and Kocak 2014: 214).

In a related vein, Chappuis and Hänggi maintain that what distinguishes SSR from security assistance during the Cold War is the emphasis that post-Cold War international donors put on the legitimacy of the reformed security institutions. To this end, SSR focuses on the transformation of state security apparatuses in ways which guarantee the respect of human rights, the democratic control of the sector, the benchmarks of good governance such as accountability and transparency, and also the effectiveness and efficiency of security institutions in ways that enable them to fulfil their duties in a legitimate manner (Chappuis and Hänggi 2009). Indeed, the post-Cold War emphasis on the legitimate provision of security conforms to the shift from the Cold War mentality of preserving the security of the state to the post-Cold War elevation of human security.

Moreover, Chappuis and Hänggi point to three contexts which ushered in the development of SSR as a policy concept and its application: First, the context of development wherein international donors envisioned the support of security reforms as facilitating development policies in recipient societies. Here, the rationale was that an efficiently run and transparent security sector would contribute to the overall development schemes international actors set up. The second context is that of democratisation, for a democratically run and accountable security sector could buttress the transition from authoritarian political systems to post-authoritarianism, as was the case with a multitude of post-Cold War East European countries. The third and final context, according to Chappuis and Hänggi, is that of post-conflict situations, because not only do states which emerge from intra- and/or inter-state violent conflicts need to reconstruct their economic or political infrastructures, but security institutions also require reconstruction in line with new normative agendas (Chappuis and Hänggi 2013; Chappuis and Hänggi 2009; Hänggi 2004).

As a corollary, the dominant vision of security reform was underpinned by a liberal understanding of the normative parameters of international intervention in situations of post-conflict statebuilding (Jackson 2018). Further, Louise Andersen points out that security reform as cherished by the UN and other international donors such as the OECD is basically a Weberian-centred, universalistic, and holistic agenda which aspires, by constructing state security institutions in accordance with liberal templates, to make human security one of the key values to be protected by modern statehood (Andersen 2011: 9-13).

However, despite the coherent articulation of the SSR agenda in policy documents, the translation of SSR principles into practice proved far from successful. This observation was reflected by many commentators' and scholars' views that SSR was a "concept in crisis" (Sedra 2007: 7-23), a concept "sound in theory but problematic in practice" (Brzoska 2006: 1-13), and an endeavour which manifested a "conceptual-contextual divide" (Chaana 2002).

Against this backdrop, local ownership was advocated by several scholars and practitioners as a new avenue for post-conflict intervention that represented a more context-sensitive approach to SSR. Scholarship on this topic is largely predicated on the assumption that in order to be sustainable, security reform should conform to the way in which local communities define (in)security. As Gordon states, "without ensuring substantive and inclusive local ownership of SSR programmes, security and justice sector institutions will not be accountable or responsive to the needs of the people and will, therefore, lack public trust and confidence" (Gordon 2014: 132). Nevertheless, the exponents of the analytical and practical shift in focus from structural SSR towards a more agent-sensitive reform scheme – whereby local actors wield more agency in designing and implementing institutional reforms – do not comprise a homogeneous whole. For instance, in terms of the debate on the breadth and inclusiveness of reform policies, Donais (2008: 9-11) differentiates between minimalist and maximalist approaches to locals' participation which range from co-opting only like-minded elites to the inclusion of civil society organisations and political parties (Africa 2008: 169-189), and even down the ladder to individual citizens (Martin and Wilson 2008: 84-103).

However, similarly to the mainstream SSR approach, the local turn was not immune from criticisms and caveats: First, focusing on national elites as the local partners of international donors could result in what Lemay-Hebert dubs the "empty-shell" approach (Lemay-Hebert 2011: 190-211). The police reform in post-2003 Iraq represents a clear example of this. The co-operation between the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MOI) empowered corrupt elites and led to counterproductive outcomes (Martin and Wilson 2008: 88-89). Second, lumping divergent social communities under the qualifying adjective "local" presupposes the homogeneity of what could be an amorphous amalgam of multiple actors holding different interests, attitudes, and power structures. This non-homogeneity is nowhere more noticeable than in the aftermath of violent internecine conflicts, rendering the presumption that local actors comprise a whole with coherent and consensual views untenable. Thus, there is a need to deconstruct the concept of local ownership "to expose the multiplicity of local actors, interests and levels of capacity, authority and autonomy" (Ebo 2007: 83). Third, another pre-assumption about the benefits of broadening local bases of participation in SSR relates to legitimacy. The underlying assumption of many calls for non-elite local participation is that the more actors' voices, fears, and priorities are heard, the more the ensuing reforms will be legitimate and endorsed by a broader cross-section of the society, which will positively impact the sustainability of the process. Nevertheless, Schroeder and Chappuis caution against romanticising local actors and attributing legitimate representation



to them when they may not enjoy this quality on the ground (Schroeder and Chappuis 2014: 137). Likewise, local communities, when looked at from the inside, may exhibit exclusionist, hierarchical, and undemocratic modes of governance (Jackson 2012: 251-270).

The third direction in which SSR scholarship seems to be moving is what some prominent scholars call the “second generation” of SSR (Sedra 2018; Jackson 2018; Donais 2018). The intellectual precursor of second generation SSR lies in the scholarship on hybridity and the interface between the international, local, formal/non-formal features of security definitions and governance, wherein statehood’s absence might be the norm.<sup>2</sup> Some of the main points that could be addressed within hybridity and the second generation of SSR relate to the need to shift the focus to local agency and the modes of local contestation of, negotiation of, and resistance to international donors’ initiatives; the need to recognise the politics entailed in the project of security reform and hence bypass the technocratic, apolitical, and linear templates of international, liberal statebuilding; and the need to adopt an evolutionary stance towards SSR which enables local groups to forge their own governance models by providing permissive frameworks rather than imposing and prioritising the establishment of titular, shell-like institutions that dovetail with donors’ mindsets rather than reflect the hidden politics on the ground (Schroeder and Chappuis 2014; Jackson and Bakrania 2018).

However, notwithstanding the seemingly nuanced and ambitious proposals of the second generation of SSR, the implementation of process-oriented security reform still needs to address the question of practicality. To give one example, the time spans that such schemes might necessitate challenge the applicability of second generation SSR. In other words, how can, for example, a long-term international commitment to establish a locally grown security governance architecture within a post-conflict society of multiple “locals” be guaranteed? What if statebuilding and SSR take place in conflict situations (rather than post-conflict situations) such as Iraq?

### 3 Regional Politics: The Missed Dimension

In tracing the scholarly development of SSR approaches – as delineated above – a notable neglect of regional politics can be observed. Whether we look at the mainstream liberal – OECD – version of SSR or the other local and hybridity arguments, all seem to conceptualise security reform in terms of the international and national/local interplay, with a bewildering absence of the transnational regional dynamics and their roles in war and peace.<sup>3</sup>

This neglect becomes even more baffling when we consider that regionalism has been a well-established analytical framework within international relations (IR) and civil war studies.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Schroeder, Chappuis, and Kocak 2014; Schroeder and Chappuis 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Amongst the rare exceptions, to which this paper is indebted, is the study of Benjamin Brast (2015: 81-99), which addresses the role of regional dynamics in statebuilding initiatives and draws on Sierra Leone as its case study.

In the realm of IR, scholars such as Bruce Russett (1967) and Barry Buzan (1983) hinted at the role of regional dynamics in explaining confrontation and cooperation in international politics, separately from the dichotomous international/national distinctions. However, state-centrism and methodological nationalism featured in most IR approaches to regionalism, without a profound analysis of the transnational, non-state properties of regional interactions (Ansorg 2011: 175).

Likewise, in the civil war literature, scholars have highlighted the interconnectedness of transnational actors and linkages and their impact on both the outbreak of civil wars (for example, Gleditsch 2007) and their escalation and dampening (for example Regan 2000; Gleditsch and Beardsley 2004). They have also elaborated on the mechanisms through which regional dynamics operate, such as contagion and diffusion. Nevertheless, the knowledge accruing from these disciplines appears not to have been transferred into the theoretical edifice of either the first or second (nascent) generations of SSR (for example, Brast 2015: 87)

This paper contributes to filling this gap by drawing on the model of regional conflict formations (RCFs). This analytical framework was developed by Barnett Rubin, Andrea Armstrong, and Gloria Ntegeye (2001) to study the regional networks that underlie the regional conflict system in the Great Lakes region in central Africa. RCFs are defined here as “sets of violent conflicts – each originating in a particular state or sub-region – that form mutually reinforcing linkages with each other throughout a broader region, making for more protracted and obdurate conflicts” (quoted in Ansorg 2011: 179-180). The model traces the transnational networks that exist between adjacent states and on which governments, non-governmental entities, and social groups can rely to exchange both material and ideational resources. Leenders follows Rubin et al. in adumbrating the four basic transnational networks of the model: First, military networks which facilitate the flow of arms and mercenaries. Second, political networks which pertain to political elites’ cross-border relations. Third, economic networks which relate to cross-border trade in “conflict goods.” And finally, social connections perceived mainly as familial, diaspora, occupational, and shared-identity relations (Leenders 2007: 961). This model is relevant to the current paper because it helps include more actors than just international/local players into the analytical locus and thus contributes to bridging the gap between the local and the international. More importantly, being attentive to the regional dimension could indeed necessitate the revision of some of the concepts, such as local ownership (see below), adopted in the SSR literature.

However, it is worth noting that the RCFs model has received criticism on different levels, including its lack of an “underlying theoretical concept” (Ansorg 2011: 180) and its methodological and analytical weaknesses in terms of data collection and systemic analysis, especially with regard to transborder clandestine networks (Leenders 2007: 968). This paper attempts to address these shortcomings in three ways: First, by showing that the RCFs model derives its explanatory merits primarily from constitutive, rather than causal, grounds. Second, by arguing that the methodological flaws of the model might be redressed by emphasising what the

scholars on hybridity have been calling for – namely, increased reliance on qualitative fieldwork with the help of ethnography.<sup>4</sup> Third, by honing the analytical lenses of the model via the differentiation of two forms of regional conflict formations: convergent RCFs and divergent RCFs.

#### 4 Case Selection and Methodology

SSR has been undertaken in both Sierra Leone and Iraq as an integral part of larger liberal statebuilding initiatives led by the UK in Sierra Leone (Horn et al. 2006) and the USA in Iraq (Jackson 2012). However, in Sierra Leone the civil war was declared over in 2002 and the state subsequently managed to monopolise large-scale violence for more than a decade, with the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) closed in 2014 to signify the transition from peacebuilding to development.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 managed to topple Saddam Hussein and dismantle his regime, with the ensuing US-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) embarking on building a new Iraqi state and security sector according to liberal templates. However, the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) seized the city of Mosul and large parts of western and northern Iraqi territory in 2014.<sup>6</sup>

Put differently, SSR in Sierra Leone represents a success story.<sup>7</sup> State security institutions preserved post-war stability, and regular elections were held in 2002, 2007, and 2012. The ability of Sierra Leone's police and army to take over their responsibilities in maintaining security with a lower level of dependence on UN troops gradually increased (Jingushi 2015: 45). In contrast, the new security institutions of the Iraqi state post-2003 were unable to prevent other non-state armed groups from fuelling insecurity, which escalated between 2005 and 2008 to the level of a civil war in the eyes of many observers (for example, Robinson 2007; Thurber 2011) and culminated in the capture of Mosul in 2014 by ISIS. This was a clear indication of the weakness and inefficiency of formal security institutions.

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4 However, advocates of hybridity basically call for more ethnographic and anthropological research as an avenue to gauge how security and insecurity are lived and understood by those who are depicted as subjects and objects of SSR (see for example Schroeder and Chappuis 2014: 141). Again, this orientation neglects the regional transborder networks and their potential relevance for and impact on how security, insecurity, resistance, participation, negotiation, etc. are defined and lived on a daily basis by local "recipients." In other words, ethnography, anthropology, and participant observation should also be used to study the ethnic, religious, economic, familial, military, etc. linkages existing *across-the-borders*, which may indeed comprise the origin of what we observe at the local/national levels as indigenous traits.

5 UNIPSIL "Feature: Drawing down – the end of UN peace operations in Sierra Leone" (2014) <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/03/465102-feature-drawing-down-end-un-peace-operations-sierra-leone>.

6 Time Magazine (2016) "The Next War for Iraq" <http://time.com/isis-mosul/>.

7 Gbla 2006; Ginifer 2006; Ebo: 2006; Jackson and Albrecht 2010; Detzner 2017. Nevertheless, some of the same authors (for example, Jackson 2011; Gbla 2006) refer to core areas where SSR was suboptimal in Sierra Leone, such as local leadership and ownership of the reforms, and the lack of civil oversight of security institutions.

One of the aims of this paper is therefore to compare army reforms in post-war Sierra Leone and Iraq, as well as their effects on post-war stability. However, prior to comparing the two cases, I analyse each on its own terms and based on its peculiar historical experience of army reform. Comparative historical analysis is utilised as the research methodology. Following Lange (2013), each case is approached historically through the within-case method of causal narrative. According to Lange, causal narrative is an “analytic technique that explores the causes of a particular social phenomenon through a narrative analysis; that is, it is a narrative that explores what caused something” (Lange 2013: 43). Relatedly, attempting to narrate cases in a causal fashion sometimes demands a descriptive outline. Here, this stems from secondary resources such as books, academic journal articles, and reports that explicate the two cases and their armies.<sup>8</sup>

After tracing the unfolding of events and processes in both cases using the within-case method, I compare the two cases. Thus, elements of similarity and difference between the Iraqi and Sierra Leonean army reforms are sought and identified as a means to probe the dynamics behind the different outcomes in the two countries in terms of stability in the aftermath of conflict. In addition, the two cases are also compared with regard to the regional economic, military, cultural, and political networks within which army reform occurred. As such, the two armies are compared in terms of their pre-war politicisation, their status and performance during the war (or the immediate aftermath), their regional contexts, and their post-war reforms.

## 5 Sierra Leone

### 5.1 *The Organisational Erosion of the Army before the War*

In 1961 Sierra Leone became independent from Britain. The country was governed by the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) between 1961 and 1967. However, with the ascendance of Siaka Stevens from the All People’s Congress (APC) party to power in 1968, security governance deteriorated conspicuously. This deterioration was accompanied by concomitant symptoms of the deinstitutionalisation of the state on the economic, social, and political levels (Ebo 2006: 484). Further, under the rule of the APC (1968–1992) the armed forces exhibited deficient professionalisation on multiple counts: First, appointment and recruitment were based on political affiliation rather than merit. Also, training, equipment, and discipline were poor, with officers and troops receiving scant attention with respect to their welfare and morale (Horn et al. 2006: 111).

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8 Although “description” is denigrated by many “positivist” scholars to a second-class status in comparison with causal inference, some scholars nevertheless emphasise that description can also “explain” because there exist causal as well as non-causal (i.e. constitutive) explanations whereby causal dependencies differ from conceptual dependencies. For more details see Alexander Wendt (1998: 101-117).

Second, the sphere of military affairs and defence was not confined to the armed forces of Sierra Leone. Stevens, in power from 1968 to 1985, attempted to establish a “quasi-personal army” (Zack-Williams 1997: 373) by relying on the Internal Security Unit (ISU) and later the Special Security Division (SSD) as parallel security groups (Nelson-Williams 2010: 124).

Third, not only did political and personal loyalties determine appointment in the army, but army interference in the politics of Sierra Leone was also more of a norm than an aberration after 1968, with Stevens, for example, surviving various coup attempts himself. Additionally, under Stevens’s rule the heads of the police and the army became ministers and members of parliament (Kondeh 2008: 283-4).

As a result, when the civil war broke out in 1991, Sierra Leone’s army was a corrupt, unprofessional, and politicised institution incapable of deterring the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels who entered Sierra Leone from Liberia.

## 5.2 *The Civil War, Security Vacuums, and the Army’s Paralysis*

The decades-long organisational erosion of the armed forces in Sierra Leone was further exposed by the eruption of the civil war in 1991. A multitude of factors and indicators demonstrated the army’s enfeebled position throughout the war. First, the abrupt attack of the RUF forces propelled the army to seek new recruits without following vetting procedures, which allowed new entrants from shady backgrounds and lacking in discipline to join the force. This situation, among other things, created what came to be known as “sobels,” army members who are soldiers by day and rebels and looters by night. This problem was accentuated by the collaboration between the RUF and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) junta that took power in 1997 (Gbla 2006: 80).

Second, the army underwent fissiparous tensions from within its officer corps’ ranks. Throughout the ruling years of the APC, first under Stevens and thereafter under President Joseph Momoh, senior army officers benefited from the corrupt system and managed to accumulate revenues (for example, via illegal appropriation of state lands) and hence perceived themselves as being in a relatively protected position. Nevertheless, junior officers did not share the stance of their seniors and experienced a sense of systematic marginalisation. This rigid situation within the institution led a group of young officers to remove President Momoh from office in 1992 and form the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) (Zack-Williams 1999: 149).

Third, the inability of the armed forces to stave off the RUF and protect the wider populace led to the emergence of local, community-based militias known as the Civil Defence Forces (CDF). Among these militias, the Kamajors (from the south, and based on traditional hunters’ guilds) demonstrated coherence and effectiveness in fighting the RUF, especially in the south. Consequently, the government of President Ahmad Kabbah (elected in 1996) relied more on

the Kamajors than on the army, which was already deemed corrupt and plagued by “sobels” (Ginifer 2006:794).

Finally, with the gradual unfolding of events and the palpable blunders of the armed forces, multiple regional, and later international, forces entered Sierra Leone and played different roles. For example, upon the request of the military NPRC government at the time, the South Africa-based mercenary group known as Executive Outcomes (EO) entered the country to counterbalance the RUF forces in 1995 (Harding 1997: 87- 97)<sup>9</sup>. Later, in 1998, the force of the Economic Community of West African Countries’ Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) intervened to topple the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), which had usurped power after overthrowing the democratically elected President Kabbah. In 1999 the ECOMOG left Sierra Leone to be replaced by the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). However, the kidnapping of UN peacekeeping troops by the RUF was among the factors that showed the fragility of the situation and drove the UK to intervene militarily (with roughly 800 troops) in 2000 (Bryden et al. 2005: 220; Ginifer 2006; Gbla 2006).

To summarise, the civil war reflected the institutional and operational paralysis of the army and its incapacity to contribute to the monopolisation of violence within Sierra Leone. Institutionally, the army suffered, inter alia, from internal schisms within the officer corps’ ranks, in addition to arbitrary recruitment measures which reinforced its deep-seated corruption and non-professionalism. Relatedly, the operational weakness of the army vis-à-vis the RUF brought about security gaps at the community level and led to the creation of the CDF groups. The progression of events during the war also drove an array of mercenary militias and regional and international actors to enter into the fray, each with their own motives.

### 5.3 *Army Reform after the Civil War*

Although the civil war in Sierra Leone was declared over in 2002, attempts at reforming the security sector took off in the late 1990s, amidst open conflict. For example, in 1999 the UK launched the Sierra Leone Security Sector Reform Programme (SILSEP), which aimed to design the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) on the basis of democratic control and in line with the dual civil/military command structures of the UK (Horn et al. 2006: 119). Additionally, to buttress SILSEP’s operational capacity, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) deployed the International Military Advice and Training Team (IMATT) in 2000. It embarked on downsizing the army, recruiting new members and imparting them with new combat skills, upgrading the equipment of the new force, and working towards better living conditions for army members (Onoma 2014:145).

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9 Other private military companies were also contracted by the government to provide security and train the Kamajors militia, such as the Gurkha Security Guards (GSG) Ltd. and Sandline International. For further details, see Solomon and Ginifer (2008); Davies (2000: 363).

The restructuring of the armed forces included a multipronged policy which cut across several elements of the reform process. For instance, recruitment became open, fair, and competitive, and no segment of the population was to be excluded. On a different plane, some measures were taken to enhance the accountability and transparency of the operating security institutions, such as the army's regular newsletter and biweekly press briefing, in addition to the crafting of a new budgeting system for all government ministries including the security sector. Further, training in the reformed armed forces did not focus merely on combat readiness. Rather, emphasis was put on increasing army recruits' awareness of human rights issues in order to protect individual Sierra Leoneans from the arbitrary actions of security agencies, something which had historically tainted their reputation and led to a loss of trust on the part of the population (Gbla 2007: 12-14).

In fact, it might be misleading to acknowledge the marked success of security reform in Sierra Leone without shedding light on the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes which predated the cessation of war. However, this paper looks only at the final phase of DDR (2000–2002) because it was the only one uninterrupted by renewed fighting, and was crowned by the official end of the war.<sup>10</sup> When DDR began in Sierra Leone under the auspices of the UNAMSIL, three armed militias were basically targeted: the RUF, the CDF, and the renegade group within the army (i.e. AFRC). As a result, almost 72,500 combatants were disarmed (ICG 2002a: 13) and 71,000 demobilised (Alan Doss, cited in Kaldor and Vincent 2006:17). However, although disarmament and demobilisation received praise from several actors, such as the UN, reintegration lagged behind, for a multitude of reasons. Social reconciliation, for example, proved complicated to achieve given the challenge of rebuilding communities' trust in ex-combatants. Further, reintegration programmes were designed to run for a six-month period, which was insufficient for most ex-combatants to acquire the skills necessary to become competitive in the market. Also, the high mobility of ex-combatants made the delivery of assistance more difficult. Finally, a dearth of investment in the economy combined with low economic growth and meagre private-sector initiatives limited ex-combatants' opportunities to find jobs, even when they garnered marketable skills (Ginifer 2003: 41-3).

Notwithstanding the setbacks that the DDR programme faced with regard to reintegration, the overall evaluation of DDR in Sierra Leone is that it was successful, because it "was able to disarm the various warring factions...The DDR programme also facilitated the successful transition to democracy in 2002 by providing a congenial and secure environment for the presidential and parliamentary elections and for other post-war recovery activities" (Sesay et al. 2009: 60).

Briefly, army reform, and more generally SSR, in Sierra Leone successfully passed the critical benchmark of preventing the country from relapsing into large-scale violence, and set the stage for a new relationship between state security agencies and the wider population. In this

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10 For an overview of the successive periods of DDR in Sierra Leone, see Sesay and Suma (2009).

vein, one signpost of Sierra Leone's ability to maintain public safety via SSR and thus be frequently cited as a success story is the diachronic change in UN missions and mandates in the country. The UN mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) started as a peacekeeping mission in 1999. It was replaced by the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) in 2006, whose mandate shifted from peacebuilding to development in 2014 when all responsibilities were transferred to the UN Country Team (Ebo 2006: 482; Jingushi 2015: 45)<sup>11</sup>.

#### 5.4 *West African Dynamics and Their Impact on Sierra Leone*

Although the civil war in Sierra Leone was declared over in 2002 and although SSR in Sierra Leone epitomised a precious success amidst a less satisfactory record of SSR initiatives elsewhere, it is nonetheless inadequate to confine our analysis to the internal traits of Sierra Leone (state-centrism) or to the roles of the UN and the UK in peacekeeping and statebuilding efforts (international-centrism). The regional dynamics within which the war was instigated and ended in Sierra Leone should not be overlooked, especially how the war in Liberia impacted Sierra Leone in ways that made the two adjacent wars "interwoven" (Davies 2005). To this end, this section briefly examines the positioning of Liberia and Sierra Leone within the West African conflict formation and how this constellation influenced war and peace in Sierra Leone.

In 1989, two years before the eruption of the civil war in Sierra Leone, a civil war in neighbouring Liberia erupted when Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) invaded Liberia from Cote d'Ivoire and seized territories reaching to the outskirts of the capital Monrovia. Subsequently, the struggle in Liberia transcended its borders to enmesh other regional countries as a result of a multitude of transnational linkages. For example, the RUF and the NPFL forces received military support and training from Libya as part of Colonel Gaddafi's endeavour to establish satellite regimes in West Africa (Davies 2005: 81). Further, the political leadership in Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire systematically transferred weapons and ammunition to the RUF, both directly to the rebels in Sierra Leone and indirectly via Charles Taylor's transborder routes (Berman 2001: 7-8).

Economically, different regional trade networks in West Africa undergirded an informal system of diamond production and exportation which had been established during the colonial era and flourished under the military dictatorships within the region (Studdard 2004: 5). During the war in Sierra Leone, an arms-for-diamonds trade intensified between Charles Taylor and the RUF (Vorrath 2014: 10), whereby the role of alluvial diamond mining and smuggling surpassed the instigation of violence to become a crucial factor in sustaining militia leaders and funding for arms (Keen 2003: 67; Bellows and Miguel 2006: 395). Indeed, the relationship between the continuation of large-scale violence in Sierra Leone and illicit transborder trade appears to have become tautological: while the RUF's ability to fight depended on the

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<sup>11</sup> <https://unipsil.unmissions.org/>.



revenues from illicit diamond smuggling, large-scale diamond smuggling, in turn, was possible only as long as the country remained in chaos (Keen 2005: 50).

On the political flank and against the backdrop of the regional conflict formations, cross-regional personal bonds between political leaders and warlords intermingled with their political schemes in manners that may blur analytical clarity. For example, one of the reasons for Burkina Faso's and Cote d'Ivoire's support for Taylor was to assist him in fighting Samuel Doe, who had orchestrated a coup in Liberia in 1980 and executed the Liberian president Tolbert's son, who, like Blaise Comporé (the president of Burkina Faso), was a son-in-law of Houphouët-Boigny (the president of Cote d'Ivoire) (Reno 1998: 81).

However, Liberia under the control of Taylor did not have a free hand to follow its policies across the region and forge transnational ties with other state and non-state actors. Instead, other dynamics were at play and these combined to dilute the influence of Taylor and the RUF, and ultimately forced the RUF to acquiesce to the DDR programme and Taylor's abdication in 2003. To illustrate, Guinea permitted the formation of the anti-Taylor rebel movement Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) on its territory, and facilitated its attack on Taylor's regime in July 2000 wherein the LURD made intrusions in north-western Liberia. In September 2000, Taylor responded by moving the conflict into Guinean territory via a counter-attack from both Liberia and Sierra Leone with forces comprised of the RUF, Liberian fighters, and Guinean dissidents. As a reply, President Conté of Guinea intensified arms support to the LURD and managed to thwart the Taylor-backed offensive and repel the RUF and the accompanying forces back to Sierra Leone and Liberia. He also broadened the scope of operations with the participation of Guinean troops. The latter reached eastern Liberia in 2001, thus threatening Taylor's traditional strongholds. By February 2002, and due to dual attacks on Taylor's forces from inside both Guinea and Sierra Leone, the Liberian army was in disorder (ICG 2002b: 4-7).

During this time, the Nigerian position of supporting state sovereignty and working to uphold regional stability was advanced in the context of West Africa. Because it was the paramount contributor to the financing and manpower of the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) troops, Nigeria led the ECOMOG in Sierra Leone in 1998 to restore President Kabbah, who had been overthrown in 1997 by the AFRC/RUF junta. Further, when the UNAMSIL took over from ECOMOG in 1999, Nigeria, and as a sign of cooperation, participated with 3,000 troops in the UNAMSIL. Moreover, Nigeria spearheaded the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL), which intervened militarily in 2003 to oversee a previously agreed upon ceasefire, and in the same year confiscated 30 tonnes of weapons sent to Taylor by Gaddafi (Gerdes 2013: 167-8). In addition, in the aftermath of the Cold War and throughout the 1990s Nigeria sensed the change in the nature of wars from localism towards more regional diffusion, and apprehended the declining importance of West Africa to the USA and Europe given the crises in Somalia and Yugoslavia. This in turn propelled it to work for a new regional security architecture within the ECOWAS. To this end, Nigeria was leading the erection of a

regionally based ECOWAS security mechanism in 1997 as a means for conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and security. In 2001 Nigeria pushed for the adoption of a protocol on democracy and governance within the ECOWAS (Rashid 2013: 6-7).

Of course, the gradual rise of anti-Taylor/RUF strategies within West Africa took place in parallel to intensified international involvement in the pressure against Taylor. Thus, in addition to the UNAMSIL's presence, the UN (with up to 17,500 troops, as well as the military backup it received from the UK in 2000) imposed arms and diamonds embargos on Liberia, installed a diamond certification system to control for diamonds exported from Sierra Leone, and established a tribunal for war crimes (Kaldor and Vincent 2006: 17). Relatedly, the confluence of international and regional resistance to Taylor and the RUF led to their successive loss of territory and control over diamond mines, cutting off their illicit transborder networks and hence causing their capacity to continue the war to dwindle conspicuously. In this regard, a negative correlation existed between the increased weakness of Taylor in terms of territory and resources, and the feasibility of recruitment for Sierra Leonean combatants. In other words, the weaker Taylor became (especially after 2001), the more difficult it became for unemployed Sierra Leoneans to join the RUF, or to find combat roles in those states (such as Guinea) that relied on Sierra Leonean fighters to combat Taylor. This dynamic is perceived to be a crucial regional trait that led many RUF and anti-Taylor Sierra Leonean fighters to accept the DDR programme in Sierra Leone and to comply with disarmament and demobilisation measures (Mitton 2013: 328).

## 6 Iraq

### 6.1 *The Subordination of the Army in the Era of Saddam Hussein*

Historically, the Iraqi army was among the British-established institutions which contributed to the formation of the Iraqi state under the British mandate from 1921 through the 1930s. However, civil-military relations in the fledgling state were characterised by mutual interference, and the army was not removed from politics. Indeed, it undertook multiple coups: in 1936, 1941, 1958, 1963, and 1968 (Hashim 2003b: 29-34).

Relatedly, long before his ascendance to the presidency of Iraq in 1979, the Baathist, Sunni Arab, and non-military Saddam Hussein viewed the subordination of the military as a major goal to be achieved as a means to securing the Baathist political grip on power. To this end, and especially after 1979, Saddam relied on several politico-institutional measures to tame the army and guarantee its submission to civilian leadership. Amongst the tools for controlling the army were the systematised rotation of officers, forced retirements, mass purges, and even executions of potential rivals from the top army positions (Hashim 2003a: 19). Additionally,

Saddam depended on his tribal kinships to form parallel security institutions to dilute the effectiveness of ordinary armed forces, especially around the capital. For example, the Republican Guard units, the Special Republican Guard, and the Baath Popular Army were established and their leaderships entrusted to the inner familial and tribal circles of the president (al-Ma-rashi and Salama 2008: 229).

Political infiltration also played a role in manipulating the armed forces. This took place, as Hashim illustrates, via two routes: First, the diffusion of the Baathist ideology throughout the multilayered structures of the army and, second, intelligence and security oversight. Political indoctrination – especially at the officer corps’ level – into the ideology of the ruling party aimed to transform the army into an “ideological” army subservient to the tight control of Saddam. This of course was institutionalised by different entities such as the Baath Party Military Bureau. Likewise, a broad infrastructure of security and intelligence services was utilised to spy on the army’s movements and activities (Hashim 2003c: 21-23). As a consequence, indoctrination, intimidation, neo-patrimonialism, and surveillance merged to enable Saddam to erect a “coup-proofing” regime and to transform the army into a compliant institution to be used later to oppress Kurdish and Shiite uprisings in 1991.<sup>12</sup>

## 6.2 *Army Reform after the War of 2003*

In 2003, a US-led coalition invaded Iraq, overthrew Saddam Hussein, and dismantled his regime. Shortly after the invasion and the removal of Hussein, the USA appointed a US-headed administrative body called the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to supervise the transition process. However, two CPA decisions early in May 2003 foreshadowed the “blunders” of the coalition in Iraq: The first was the order to undertake de-Baathification and the second was the order to disband the Iraqi army (Pfiffner 2010: 76-85). De-Baathification effectively barred the Baathists who occupied the top-four ranks in the public service from employment in the forthcoming administration, which meant that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi official employees were rendered jobless. Likewise, the disbandment meant that the army’s command and institutional bases were dismantled and more than 400,000 personnel were removed from service (Hinnebusch 2007: 17).

These two CPA policies not only decreased the managerial capacities within the Iraqi state’s civil-military apparatus, but they also signalled the end of Sunni historical dominance and Sunni over-representation in the Iraqi armed forces and the civilian Baath leadership (Marr 2006: 1-6). Consequently, the massive sociopolitical changes brought about by these initiatives marginalised the majority of the Sunni community (which is a minority in Iraq relative to the Shiites) and led to sweeping resentment. Sunni Iraqis feared being overtaken by the

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12 In a study on the Middle East, James Quinlivan defines “coup-proofing” as the “creation of structures that minimize the possibilities of small groups leveraging the system” in order to execute a coup (Quinlivan 1999: 133-134).

Shiite and Kurdish components of the diverse Iraqi society under the forthcoming government, and this fear was one of the principal motives behind the emergence of the Sunni insurgency in 2003, immediately after the invasion (Thurber 2011: 1-7).

Additionally, in the face of escalating attacks by Sunni insurgents, mainly against the coalition forces and the Shiite Iraqi collaborators, the CPA made the quick transfer of state sovereignty to an elected Iraqi parliament and government a priority. To achieve this, the CPA erected an interim Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) in 2003 to assist in governing during the transitional interregnum. However, the majority of Sunni Arabs deemed the IGC to be biased towards the Kurds and the Shiites, who appeared as victorious communities in the aftermath of the invasion (Hashim 2003a:1-4).

Furthermore, although Iraq had previously comprised a diverse yet coexistent amalgam of ethnic, tribal, and religious groups, the extent to which those primordial identities had been politicised post-2003 was conspicuous (Ottaway and Kaysi 2012). This was evident from the pattern with which the political vacuum – left after the order of de-Baathification – was filled by different political parties which mobilised along ethno-sectarian lines with identity-based modes of polarisation. Relatedly, traditional moderate and secular parties, such as the Iraqi Communist Party, were marginalised, whereas Kurdish and Shiite parties (mostly developed in exile) exploited the ensuing era, with the Sunni Arab community emerging as the seemingly less prepared community in terms of leadership and political representation (Ottaway and Kaysi 2012: 1-8).

However, the void engendered by the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime and the ensuing CPA decrees was not confined to the political sphere. Preserving security and stability in Iraq also represented a significant challenge, especially after the dissolution of the Iraqi army and other security institutions by the CPA.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is important to shed light on the security environment within which army reform in Iraq took place, for it could be the case that the relationship between army reform and the non-recurrence/non-emergence of violence in the aftermath of civil strife/external war is not a unidirectional relation. On the contrary, insecurity and political turmoil can impinge on the trajectory and shape of SSR.

A look at the non-state armed forces in post-2003 Iraq indicates three major categories of armed groupings, each affiliated with one of the major Iraqi subnational groups – that is, the Kurds, the Arab Sunnis, and the Arab Shiites. In regards to the Kurdish Peshmerga, it was allied with the two major Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which were historically located in the northern part of Iraq

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13 In addition to the Iraqi army, the following key security institutions and entities were dissolved by the CPA in 2003: the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of State for Military Affairs, the National Security Bureau, the Intelligence Service, the Air Force, the Navy, the Special Protection Force, the Directorate of Military Intelligence, the Special Security Organisation, the Republican Guard, the Special Republican Guard, the Emergency Forces, and the Baath Party Militia (ICG 2006: p9-note 51).

where the three Kurdish provinces and the Kurds' political leadership are. The second category of non-state armed groups was the Shiite militias, which basically comprised the Badr Corps that followed the Shiite Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), and the Mahdi Army, a militia affiliated with the Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. Shiite militias operated mainly in the south of Iraq, where the nine Shiite provinces are located, and also in mixed sectarian areas in the middle of Iraq, especially in Baghdad and its vicinity (Mowle 2006: 41-46). The third cluster of armed groups comprised the Sunni insurgency, which took off in 2003 after the official cessation of fighting was declared by the coalition. The insurgency was made up not only of Islamist fanatics fighting under the banner of the al-Qaeda Organisation in Mesopotamia, but also of multiple groups combined together as insurgents targeting the CPA's plans for the reconstruction of state institutions. For example, loyalists to the former regime, nationalist groups negatively affected by de-Baathification, and Sunni tribal elements all had their separate armed groups with different motives and resources (Hashim 2003a: 6-8).

Hence, the security vacuum that was created after the invasion, the proliferation of non-state armed militias, and most acutely the eruption of the Sunni insurgency in 2003 compounded the challenges faced by the CPA and drove it to approach SSR in Iraq mainly as a counter-insurgency strategy. In this vein, Christoph Wilcke (2006: 124-142) and Toby Dodge (2006: 187-200) observe several indicators that point to the flaws of the CPA's SSR strategy in Iraq: First, there was an over-concentration on numbers via the recruitment of as many personnel as possible in order to deploy them on the ground, at the expense of more rigorous vetting procedures. Second, the training periods were short, fast, and insufficient. Third, there was a dearth of attention to developing organisational structures, oversight and accountability mechanisms, and inter-institutional linkages across the different bodies of the security sector, resulting in newly constructed security services that appeared "as fundamentally unaccountable as their Saddam-era predecessors" (Wilcke 2006: 125). Fourth, a major deficiency in the US-led approach to SSR in Iraq, as Wilcke stresses, was the lack of consultation with the Iraqi component, both on the CPA's initial decision to disband the army and during the later phases of rebuilding the security apparatus.

Further, Thomas Mowle maintains that one of CPA's misconceptions was the lumping together of all the Sunni insurgent groups as terrorist groups not to be negotiated with. This stance was, Mowle holds, erroneous because security sector reconstruction should have been more inclusive in order to mitigate the fears of many disgruntled Arab Sunnis who viewed the CPA's post-2003 policies as predisposed towards the Shiite and Kurdish populations at their own expense (Mowle 2006: 50-53). Another shortcoming that tainted the CPA's approach was its inability to disarm the Kurdish and Shiite militias and reintegrate them into the newly established security institutions due to the absence of clear transition and reintegration strategies (Cordesman 2004: 6). On the contrary, the CPA's rush for quick recruitments inclined it to acquiesce in staffing the new sector with militia members without dissolving the militias, thus enabling the latter to infiltrate the security sector (Mowle 2006: 54).

### 6.3 *The US-Iranian Rivalry*

Whereas a host of regional and international interests and actors converged to contribute positively to ending the Sierra Leonean civil war in 2002, the same facilitative environment did not prevail in the aftermath of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Instead, the rivalry between the USA and Iran escalated and left its imprint on the entire statebuilding process in post-Saddam Iraq.<sup>14</sup> Prior to the invasion, the Bush administration viewed the regime in Iran as a constituent of the “axis of evil.” Further, the USA accused Iran of developing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and was antagonistic regarding Iranian nuclear activities. Iranian foreign policy was perceived by the USA as undermining the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations and also as supporting terrorism (Rogers 2006: 4-5; Taremi 2005: 31-35).

From the Iranian perspective, there was insecurity about the American preparations for the invasion, and Tehran was concerned lest the USA’s goals in Iraq bore fruit and resulted in the establishment of a client regime subservient to American designs that might function as a launching pad against Iran, forge an alliance with the Gulf states, impair the balance against Israel, and subvert Arab regimes aligned with Iran. Additionally, Iran feared strategic encirclement by the USA from the east (Afghanistan) and the west (Iraq) should the US-led invasion succeed in Iraq. Finally, the establishment of a democratic regime in Iraq was anathema to Tehran because it would expose Iran’s theocratic regime to internal and external pressure (Rogers 2006: 6; Samii 2005: 27; Taremi 2005: 32-33).

Iran’s apprehensiveness led it to envisage bogging down the USA in Iraq as a primary goal, something which could dissuade the USA from attacking Iran (Nasr 2006: 10; Zimmermann 2007: 11). To this end, Iran leaned towards using both formal and informal networks within Iraq to preserve a “controlled chaos” (Nasr 2006: 10), a “calibrated disorder” (Zimmermann 2007: 8), and a “managed chaos” (ICG 2005: 22) that would fall short of direct defiance of the US troops but would nevertheless keep the coalition forces overwhelmed, in check, and subject to attrition.

Politically and militarily, Iran capitalised on its historical relations with the main Shiite and Kurdish parties and their affiliate militias to influence the formation of the new Iraqi political institutions, such as the parliament and the government of 2005–2006, and also the filling of the security gap which followed the disbandment of the state’s security institutions by the CPA. Amongst its allies were the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which was founded together with its armed wing (the Badr Corps) in 1982 in Iran as an oppositional force to Saddam Hussein; the Daawa Party, also a Shiite political party established and financed by Iran; and the Sadrist Movement with its al-Mahdi Army militia, both of which

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14 The regional involvement in post-2003 Iraq was not confined to Iran; various Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan helped (allegedly) fuel the Sunni insurgency in Iraq (see for example, Leenders 2007:962; Nasr 2006: 9). Nevertheless, I focus only on the Iranian role in Iraq for it was arguably the most pervasive, and also because the point here is not to review the effect of each regional power’s interference as much as to highlight the significance of the regional dimension in fathoming post-conflict statebuilding and SSR.

were founded by the Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq post-2003. As mentioned before, Iranian political support did not extend just to Shiite allies; Iran also managed to maintain close ties with the two biggest Kurdish parties, the PUK and the KDP, and their historic anti-Saddam militia: the Peshmerga (Marr 2006; Zimmermann 2007: 12-17; Eisenstadt et al 2011: 8-11). Furthermore, throughout the 1980–1988 war between Iran and Iraq, a host of Iraqi opposition personnel had fled to Iran or been expelled by the Hussein regime, subsequently dwelling in Iran and receiving support from it. However, Iran's designs to outcompete the USA in Iraq did not hinge just on Iraqi political and military proxies. Iran also tasked the Shiite Lebanese militia Hizbullah with crossing into southern Iraq to carry out recruitment activities via various charitable organisations (Tanter 2004; Risen 2003).

On the economic level, Iran also managed to infiltrate both the formal and informal business spheres in ways that entrenched its political leverage in Iraq. Formally, the government of Iran signed multiple economic cooperation agreements with Iraqi ministries in the realms of finance, trade, and electricity (Taremi 2005:39). However, Iran adhered to a protectionist mode of trade with Iraq which drew on different methods such as dumping and subsidising food products. It also undercut Iraqi agricultural capacity through dam and river diversion policies, which increased Iraqi dependency on the Iranian economy (Eisenstadt et al 2011: 12-14). Of course, the economic interconnection between Iran and Iraq transcended formal channels of trade and commerce to include illicit networks of cross-border smuggling. This was the case, for example, in the northern part of Iraq, where Iran maintained good ties with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the biggest political blocks there (i.e. KDP and PUK) to receive oil smuggled from Kurdistan to Iran (Ottaway 2015: 18).

In the sociocultural domain, and thanks to the historical, cultural, and religious reciprocity between the Shiite communities in Iraq and Iran, Iran was better positioned than the CPA to garner favourable resonance among the Shiites in Iraq (who comprise the majority) with regard to the sociocultural initiatives it embarked on post-2003.

For example, religious tourism flourished after the fall of Saddam Hussein, and Shiite pilgrims from Iran and Iraq crossed the border in both directions to visit holy Shiite shrines in both countries. This activity was facilitated by travel agencies that followed the Iranian government, in collaboration with Iraqi clients from the Iraqi side of the porous and long border. Further, Iran activated and established humanitarian cross-border networks that provided social and religious services, as well as booming charitable organisations, medical facilities, and construction projects (Samii 2005; Nasr 2006). Likewise, propaganda campaigns were not absent from the Iranian agenda of infiltrating Iraqi (mostly the Shiite) society. To this end, Iran opened a host of radio and TV stations in Iraq (especially in the southern Shiite provinces) as a means of conveying the formal Iranian interpretation of events in Iraq and the region, and also of influencing public opinion, primarily amongst the Shiite constituency (Eisenstadt et al 2011: 13-17).

Indeed, I observe that the methods adopted by Iran to counterbalance the American threat in Iraq represent an ideal-typical manifestation of the regional conflict formations model. Iran managed to permeate the Iraqi state-society fabric politically, militarily, economically, socially, and culturally in ways that served Iranian allies in Iraq and enabled them not only to take over the security institutions of the state but also, and importantly, to emerge as the wielders of the lion's share of power in the parliament and government of 2005 and afterwards.

Relatedly, Raymond Hinnebusch (2007: 20-22) points out that what seemed to be a menace to Iran in the months prior to the invasion was turned into an asset in the hands of Iranian policymakers because the rise of the Shiites in Iraq (which was, ironically, buttressed by the CPA) contributed to the empowerment of Iran at the expense of the coalition forces.

Further, in a perspicacious study titled "Nation-Building in Iraq: Iran 1, the United States 0," Marina Ottaway compares the Iranian and the American visions of nation-building in Iraq and concludes that the Iraqi state post-2003 "has been shaped more deeply by Iran than by the United States. The Iranian version of nation-building, based on building organisations that share its goals, has trumped that of the United States, which depends on superimposing on Iraq institutions the U.S thinks the country should have and training people to staff them" (Ottaway 2015: 9).

In a less retrospective vein than Ottaway, Toby Dodge cites three consecutive conditions that characterise propitious exogenous statebuilding: First, the imposition of order; second, the move from coercive capacity to administrative capacity; and finally, the building of a collective civic identity linked to the state. He notes the American failure to achieve even the first prerequisite, which engendered a security vacuum in the south and centre of Iraq that was filled by non-state armed militias motivated by divergent political and non-political (for example, criminal) goals (Dodge 2006: 187-193).

In my view, one of the lessons which could be gleaned from the Iraqi case is that regional dynamics can impair more than just security reform; they can spoil entire attempts at statebuilding. That is, statebuilding which occurs amidst competitive regional/international environments cannot succeed merely by fulfilling the pre-set criteria of international donors or interveners. Instead, close attention should be paid to cross-border cultural, economic, historical, and military relations between the society under consideration and the surrounding context.

## **7 Similar Pasts, yet Different Presents: Comparing the Two Armies**

The APC ruled Sierra Leone between 1968 and 1992, whereas Saddam Hussein ascended within the Baath Party to rule Iraq between 1979 and 2003. Throughout these respective periods in Sierra Leone and Iraq, their armies shared many characteristics in common, such as being politicised according to the agendas of the leadership and existing in parallel to other security structures and armed formations such as the Republican Guard in Iraq and the SSD under



Stevens in Sierra Leone.<sup>15</sup> However, army reform in Sierra Leone and Iraq took different paths and resulted in dissimilar outcomes.<sup>16</sup> In Sierra Leone, with the UK's Sierra Leone Security Sector Reform Programme (SILSEP) and under the supervision of the IMATT, post-war army recruitment, training, equipping, and human rights awareness raising were all benchmarks on which the army witnessed positive development. Alternatively, the CPA's need to fill the security vacuum ensuing from the disbandment of the army in Iraq and to counterbalance the Sunni insurgency made "train-and-equip" the paramount approach, with recruitment more focused on numbers than on rigorous vetting procedures.

In my view, one of the notable distinctions between the security reforms in Iraq and Sierra Leone is militia disbandment. In Sierra Leone, the DDR programme paved the way for army reform and enabled the army to reintegrate some of the ex-combatants into its force. In this way, the disarmament and demobilisation of the RUF, the CDF, and the AFRC enhanced the army's capacity (and that of the entire state security apparatus) to monopolise the ability to undertake warfare and large-scale actions. In contrast, the situation in Iraq was upended when compared to that of Sierra Leone: Immediately after the invasion, a handful of militias proliferated and entered into Iraq to operate alongside the rebuilt army, while clinging to their ethno-sectarian affiliations. This development was compounded by the outbreak of the Sunni insurgency, which gave primacy to counter-insurgency policies in the formation of the new Iraqi security institutions.

However, as the two cases illustrate, the regional conflict formations in West Africa and the Middle East played a pivotal role in the success of DDR in Sierra Leone and the explosion of non-state armed groups in Iraq. In the context of Sierra Leone, transnational cross-border networks which facilitated the movement of combatants, the smuggling of weapons, and the illicit trade in diamonds were gradually diminished through a regional convergence of efforts against the RUF in Sierra Leone and, most importantly, against the forces of Charles Taylor in Liberia, as well as his logistic linkages and strongholds. Taylor's gradually dwindling clout and his increasing inability to support the RUF coincided with a decrease in the regional – for example, Guinean – demand for anti-RUF fighters, which rendered the option of joining armed groups less feasible for thousands of would-be fighters and made the subsequent disarmament and demobilisation initiatives more successful.

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15 However, if we think of the Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988, a case could be made that the Iraqi army demonstrated combat effectiveness.

16 It should be noted, however, that whereas the Iraqi army was disbanded by the CPA in 2003 and rebuilt afterwards, security changes in Sierra Leone were also more of a transformation than a reform, for some security administrations were rebuilt from scratch after the end of the civil war, such as the Ministry of Defence and the Intelligence Service (Jackson and Albrecht 2010: 215-227). Nevertheless, this paper uses the terms transformation, reform, and rebuilding interchangeably because they shed more light on the concrete overall changes in the structures and performance of the two armies under consideration, rather than delving into the potentially controversial practice of labelling.

In contrast, the conflicting powers and designs in the Middle East did not converge to counterbalance the ubiquitous impact of Iran in Iraq and its ability to infiltrate the newly built army and other security institutions via its Shiite Iraqi proxies. On the contrary, rather than curtailing the Iranian-Iraqi transborder networks and hence Iranian outreach into Iraq, other Sunni regional powers, mainly Saudi Arabia,<sup>17</sup> buttressed the Sunni insurgency in Iraq as a means to counter Iranian influence *in* Iraq.

**Table 1. Army Reform in Sierra Leone and Iraq**

Army reform	Sierra Leone	Iraq
Pre-war politicisation	Army politicised in favour of the ruling leadership/party; parallel security institutions.	Army politicised in favour of the ruling leadership/party; parallel security institutions.
Status during the war	Weakness against the RUF; poor vetting of new army recruits; the emergence of “sobels”; fissures within the officer corps’ ranks; spread of CDF groups; regionalisation and internationalisation of the conflict.	Disbandment of the army by the CPA immediately after the official end of fighting; security vacuum and the proliferation of non-state armed militias; emergence of Sunni insurgency.
Regional context	Permissive (convergent) regional configurations	Obstructive (divergent) regional configurations (see below)
Post-war reform	DDR; rigorous vetting; inclusive and fair recruitment; accountability and transparency measures; upgraded equipment and training.	No DDR programme was put forth; poor vetting and training due to hasty recruitment; lack of oversight and accountability structures.

## 8 Regionalism and SSR: A Holistic, Constitutive, and Entangled Relationship

As a corollary, the international intervention in Sierra Leone was coupled with a facilitative regional context in which multiple regional players coalesced to defeat Taylor, stabilise Sierra Leone, and initiate a successful SSR programme. Alternatively, the regional dynamics in the Middle East, in particular the Iranian posture against the US-led invasion, complicated the CPA’s mission in the country, fuelled sectarian violence, and diverted the SSR project such that formal security institutions became permeated by Iranian-backed Shiite elements and Iranian-supported militias flourished. Further, a close look at the Iraqi case reveals that neither the CPA nor the Iraqi locals “owned” the SSR programme; instead, Iran wielded the power to manipulate SSR and the whole statebuilding endeavour in ways that kept the USA overwhelmed and itself protected. As such, SSR ownership in Iraq was “regional” in the sense that although the local partners of the SSR process were Iraqis, the direction of the alleged reforms was in favour of the strong neighbour – namely, Iran. The focus should thus be on the holistic orientation of “reforms” and whom they serve, rather than on the signing of peace accords,

<sup>17</sup> See Leenders (2007: 962) and Nasr (2006: 9).

agreements, protocols, and memorandums of understanding. The interpretation and implementation of such agreements are not immune to power, and power is not only international/local but also regional.

Based on the two cases of army reform in Iraq and Sierra Leone and the previous discussion, I reason that regional politics and the RCFs model can contribute to our understanding of the success and failure of SSR and post-war stability in the following ways: First, observing the regional dynamics in the cases of Sierra Leone and Iraq reveals two distinct conflict formations which I will call “convergent” and “divergent” formations. A convergent conflict formation took place in Sierra Leone when the conflict-making capabilities (military, economic, etc.) of Guinea, the Nigerian-led ECOMIL, the anti-RUF fighters, and the LURD rebels converged to contain and eventually defeat Charles Taylor and all the regional networks and non-state groups he supported and benefited from. On the other hand, no such coalescence of regional efforts occurred in the Middle East to curb Iran’s influence in permeating Iraq militarily, economically, culturally, and in terms of sectarianism. Instead, when regional Sunni countries aided the Sunni insurgency, for example, this impinged negatively on the interests of their ally (the USA). Moreover, a distinctive characteristic of the regional conflict formation in West Africa was that Taylor’s opponents managed to transfer the conflict into Liberia, which proved vital in reducing Taylor’s and the RUF’s conflict-generating capacity.

Second, the distinction between convergent and divergent RCFs could acquire analytical relevance if we perceive the relationship between the RCFs model (and the regional politics underpinning it) and the potential of SSR initiatives in constitutive terms. This means that RCFs do not explain the success and failure of SSR programmes by subsuming SSR deductively under a law (à la logical empiricists), or by delineating the causal dynamics and processes that affect it (à la scientific realists) (Wendt 1998: 104). Instead, the RCFs model explains SSR by constituting the *conditions of possibility* for SSR to be successful. It answers the question of how it is possible that SSR works in a certain context, and what the regional structures and dynamics under which SSR can flourish are (Wendt 1998: 105). Here it is worth noting that this conceptualisation of RCFs does not reify or naturalise the concept. On the contrary, RCFs are underpinned by complex regional actors, interests, and dynamics which interact causally in ways that make the RCFs model change cross-regionally and cross-temporally.<sup>18</sup> The case of Sierra Leone proves this point because it illustrates the longitudinal change in RCFs in West Africa between the late 1980s – when Taylor was supported by Libya, Cote d’Ivoire, and Burkina Faso to instigate a civil war in Liberia, in 1989, without significant resistance from other regional actors – and the late 1990s, when regional momentum gathered to the detriment

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18 Being space-time specific is one of the traits that distinguishes social kinds from natural kinds (Wendt 1999: 69). Social kinds are understood here as the objects of social scientific inquiry such as the physical objects which have a social function, like the items of exchange; social structures, such as the family; institutions such as banks; and more abstract constructs such as languages. For more details see Currie (1988: 207).

of Taylor, thus transforming the conflict formations in West Africa from divergence to convergence.

Third, the above articulation of the constitutive relationship between RCFs and SSR enables us to recognise the entanglement of SSR and regional politics and to view their relationship as holistic. This challenges one of the main features of atomism – that is, “separability” – and thus guards the analysis against methodological individualism (Wendt 2015: 60-61), and the methodological nationalism of IR. Hence, this reasoning might be conducive to shifting the analytical focus of SSR scholarship from international-local, donor-recipient bifurcations to a new understanding whereby SSR in a certain country is approached as a constituent part of a holistic relationship with the region in which it is located.

Fourth, given that regional conflict formations are subject to change over time, and that they constitute conditions of possibility for SSR programmes (as the case studies have attempted to demonstrate), searching for grand SSR designs and/or requiring SSR approaches to have generalisable, transhistorical, and global theoretical foundations could be overburdening and incompatible with the peculiarities of different regions (spatial) across time (temporal). After all, could it not be the case that SSR is not feasible in certain regions at particular times? Do we need to achieve an SSR paradigm which applies at all times and everywhere?

Finally, the methodological weaknesses of the RCFs model (Leenders 2007) could be overcome through a reliance on ethnography, fieldwork, and participant observation as means to probe how transnational networks link people, cultures, modes of licit and illicit trade, gossip, ammunition transfer, etc.

## 9 Conclusion: Regional Politics Is Integral to SSR

This study was motivated by the intriguing under-representation of regional politics in the scholarship on security sector reform. It has therefore undertaken a review of the development of SSR perspectives in order to explore the basic analytical focus of each approach to SSR. Additionally, it has shed light on the positioning of the regional dimension in the discipline of IR and in studies on civil wars.

Relatedly, as a means of gauging the influence of regional dynamics on security reform in the aftermath of wars and civil conflicts, the paper has compared army reforms in Sierra Leone and Iraq. It has used comparative historical analysis to compare the features of the two armies before and after the SSR processes in the two countries. An integral part of the paper’s approach to the two cases has been the regional dimension and its impact on the dissimilar outcomes of security reforms in Iraq and Sierra Leone, with the model of regional conflict formations (RCFs) used as the analytical framework for studying the regional dynamics of each case.

The comparison of the two cases makes evident that the regional formation of several actors, structures, dynamics, and networks created a permissive environment for SSR to bear

fruit in Sierra Leone, while leading to faltering SSR in Iraq. This observation engendered an investigation into the distinctive regional characteristics of Iraq and Sierra Leone and led to a differentiation between two types of regional conflict formations: convergent RCFs and divergent RCFs.

Moreover, this paper has attempted to illustrate the constitutive, holistic, and entangled nature of the relationship between SSR in a specific country and the conflict formations of the region within which the country is located. Another objective has been to show that integrating regional politics into the study of SSR could enrich the epistemological scope of how we perceive security reform in post-war situations. More to the point, it has advocated the integration of the regional perspective as a critical imperative which necessitates the revisiting of some of the seemingly taken-for-granted concepts, such as local ownership, in the literature on SSR.

To summarise, this paper has aimed to underline the importance of regional politics and regional conflict formations in understanding the divergent results that security sector reforms manifest in different contexts. It has also aspired to hone the regional conflict formations model as a stepping stone for further research on the explanatory potential of this model.

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