3.4

Liberia

The year 2005 was a watershed for the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The main challenge the peace operation faced was how to translate security gains into meaningful political, economic, and social progress. The operation accomplished a central goal by assisting the political transition to an elected government, while continuing to provide security throughout the country. Innovative measures to improve economic governance were agreed on with international partners, though implementation is not likely to be easy. Useful steps were taken to improve integration within the mission, and new forms of cooperation with neighboring UN peace operations were adopted. The year ended with a stable though fragile peace, as thoughts turned to how the international community could best help to consolidate the gains made.

Background

UNMIL was deployed to oversee implementation of the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) of 18 August 2003, which brought to an end civil war between the government of Charles Taylor and two rebel groups, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). LURD first emerged in 1999 and, later joined by MODEL, demanded the resignation of Taylor, whose election to power in 1997 ended seven years of civil war. Up to 250,000 people, out of a total population thought to be 3 million, died in Liberia's fourteen years of violence.[1] Almost half the population was displaced.

The conflict embroiled the subregion. For many years, Taylor provided financial and other support to opposition rebels in Sierra Leone and Guinea, which led to the imposition of UN sanctions in 2001 and, from 2003, a travel ban on government leaders. Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, in turn, were alleged to have been backing Liberian rebels financially and militarily. Up to 300,000 of Liberia's displaced fled to Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) brokered peace talks in June 2003 between Taylor and the rebels, which were abruptly canceled after Taylor was indicted for war crimes by the Special Court for Sierra Leone. A cease-fire agreed on 17 June failed to prevent heavy fighting in the capital Monrovia and, amid a mounting humanitarian crisis, pressure increased for international intervention. The United States, in particular, was called on to intervene, given its historical ties with Liberia, and the George W. Bush administration deployed three US warships near the coast in late July.

Taylor was finally persuaded to resign, and on 11 August 2003 took up Nigeria's offer of asylum. This opened the way to the ECOWAS-sponsored peace agreement, which provided for a transitional government and set in place the timetable for a transition to an elected administration in January 2006. The national transitional government of Liberia (NTGL) took over from an interim regime on 14 October 2003.

Liberia is rich in mineral deposits including gold, oil, and iron ore, with large timber and rubber resources and a long, accessible coastline. Yet decades of graft and mismanagement

left over 80 percent of the population below the poverty line. In 2003, unemployment is estimated to be around 85 percent, with high levels of youth illiteracy.

Mission Mandate and Deployment

The Security Council authorized the establishment of an ECOWAS peacekeeping mission on 1 August 2003 (Resolution 1497), after donor governments agreed to provide the financial resources for an interim period pending establishment of a UN operation. The neighboring UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was tasked with providing logistical support to the ECOWAS force. On 19 September the Security Council adopted Resolution 1509, establishing UNMIL and authorizing the transfer of authority from ECOWAS to the UN mission by 1 October 2003.

UNMIL was designed as a broad multidimensional UN operation deployed under Chapter VII of the Charter. Its mandate is divided into five broad areas: support for implementation of the cease-fire agreement; protection of UN staff, facilities, and civilians; support for humanitarian and human rights assistance; support for security sector reform; and support for implementation of the peace process. The mandate and functions of the previous UN Office in Liberia (UNOL) were transferred to UNMIL.

Some of the mandated tasks fall within the "traditional" functions of multidimensional UN peacekeeping: monitoring the cease-fire; implementing a comprehensive disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation (DDRR) program; facilitating the provision of humanitarian assistance and promoting human rights; helping to rebuild the Liberian police force; and assisting with national elections. Other functions reflected the evolution of UN peacekeeping over the past decade, as well as recognition that previous efforts of the international community in Liberia had inadequately addressed the causes and consequences of a long civil war: the protection of civilians under imminent threat of physical violence;

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Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section

UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

- Resolution passage and start date — 19 September 2003 (UNSC Res. 1509)
- SRSG — Alan Doss (United Kingdom)
- Force commander — Lieutenant-General Chikabidid Obiakor (Nigeria)
- Police commissioner — Mohammed Al hassan (Ghana)
- Budget — $722.54 million (1 July 2005–30 June 2006)
- Strength as of 31 October 2005 — Troops: 14,645
  Military observers: 199
  Civilian police: 1,101
  International civilian staff: 558
  Local civilian staff: 834
  UN volunteers: 435

"helping to establish the necessary security conditions" for humanitarian assistance; providing security at key government installations; assisting the transitional government to restore proper administration of natural resources; and assisting with the establishment of state authority and a functioning administrative structure at the national and local levels. Two especially noteworthy features of UNMIL's mandate are the comprehensive rule of law functions and

Child soldiers disarm at a UN-run disarmament camp in northern Liberia, September 2004

the mission's role in forming a restructured Liberian military, as well as police force.

The rapid timeline for startup of the mission meant UNMIL was a laboratory for UN rapid deployment efforts.[2] Some of the initiatives undertaken reflected lessons learned from past operations; others represented a first attempt to implement recommendations contained in the Brahimi Report. The UN financed, for the first time, some elements of troop-contributing country (TCC) predeployment reconnaissance visits. The rehatting of 3,500 ECOWAS troops facilitated rapid deployment, although the benefits were diminished by the lack of sufficient equipment. Civilian deployment was assisted through the first use of a rapid deployment team roster of prescreened and trained UN staff, although it was more successful getting support than substantive civilian staff to the field. The roster was not helpful in filling longer-term civilian posts, and the incumbency rate was less than 50 percent six months into the mission, which delayed the setting in motion of elements of UNMIL's mandate, particularly

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Box 3.4.1 Inter-Mission Cooperation

An important innovation since 2003 has been the emphasis on inter-mission and cross-border cooperation among UN peacekeeping missions in West Africa: UNMIL, UNAMSIL, and the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). This was largely a consequence of the regional context of peace and stability in West Africa, reflected in the complex linkages of the conflicts, refugee return, repatriation of ex-combatants, implementation of DDR programs, arms transfers and cross-border smuggling, and humanitarian assistance. Security Council concern to maximize efficiencies between neighboring missions as a way of controlling rising UN peacekeeping budgets also factored into the consideration.

Consultation between the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General for Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, West Africa, and Guinea Bissau increased in 2005. An inter-mission working group was established to develop long-term strategies for the peace processes in the region and to coordinate activities. At the operational level, a joint early warning initiative was put in place by the military components of the three missions. Liaison officers are in the three military headquarters. Cross-border cooperation, including joint patrolling, is under discussion, but is complicated by the political and legal considerations that need to be addressed to enable military personnel from one

peacekeeping force to operate in more than one mission area. Another issue under discussion is the possible establishment of a subregional reserve force, based in one mission area but rapidly deployable to all three.

The impending closure of UNAMSIL, and the installation of a successful peacebuilding mission, led UNMIL to assume responsibility for security to the Special Court for Sierra Leone on 1 December 2005. In preparation, a company of 250 UNMIL troops was deployed to the court on 15 November, with a small support unit in Freetown. The UNMIL force commander has overall command of these troops.

in relation to rule of law reform and political affairs. Mission startup was also facilitated by the establishment, within thirty days, of an interim force headquarters for UNMIL through the deployment of the Standby High-Readiness Brigade for UN Operations (SHIRBRIG). Pre–commitment mandate authority, recommended in the Brahimi Report, provided early financing for costs associated with technical assessment missions and strategic lift. And the Strategic Deployment Stocks (SDS) mechanism provided UNMIL with equipment to launch the mission.

Key Developments and Challenges

Early Challenges

By early 2004, UNMIL forces were deployed countrywide and basic stability had been achieved. Two weaknesses from UNMIL's first year continued to be felt into 2005: poor integration of the mission's components, and a false start on DDRR. Some argued the first problem stemmed from a failure to fully incorporate humanitarian and development partners in the initial planning phase for the mission. The multiple locations of UNMIL components in Monrovia did not help matters, nor did tensions between the military and humanitarian actors regarding security restrictions around the country. The existing UN Country Team in Liberia did not feel adequately consulted as the key forum it is meant to be under the integrated mission concept.[3] Cooperation between UN humanitarian, development, and security components in Liberia improved with the appointment of Alan Doss, a UN Development Programme (UNDP) career professional, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in August 2005.

The initial—and in retrospect premature—launch of the DDRR program in December 2003 led to widespread riots, violence, and looting across the capital, forcing UNMIL to suspend the DDRR program after ten days. The program was relaunched in April 2004 with more success, and it came to a formal end in November of that year. As of August 2005, a total of 37,500 demobilized ex-combatants were in rehabilitation and reintegration projects funded by bilateral partners and a further 35,448 accommodated in projects covered by the UNDP's trust fund for DDRR. Continued funding shortfalls meant that 26,000 ex-combatants remained outside such programs. The volatility of disgruntled ex-combatants, many of them young men, was seen as the most significant threat to stability in Liberia.

Political Transition: Elections

One of UNMIL's main functions in 2005 was to assist the political transition through national elections, which according to the CPA had to be held no later than October 2005. UNMIL's role was to provide security, assist in the establishment of electoral offices countrywide, and provide public information and voter education training. The UNMIL Electoral Division provided technical assistance and capacity-building support to the National Elections Commission (NEC), and coordinated other international assistance to enable the NEC to meet its responsibilities. Notwithstanding allegations that former president Charles Taylor was trying to disrupt Liberian politics from his asylum in Nigeria, security remained stable throughout the run-up to the elections. This was due in part to UNMIL's Chapter VII mandate, substantial presence (15,000 troops), cordon and search operations to recover hidden arms caches prior to the polls, and signals by the SRSG in August that it would "react robustly" to any effort to destabilize the polls.[4]

The main challenges were logistic, notably voter registration and the organization of three levels of elections in a single day during the rainy season. Over 1.3 million voters were registered, although the decision not to register refugees in camps outside of Liberia elicited wide debate among UN bodies in Liberia. The election campaign started officially on 15 August, with twenty-two presidential candidates and political parties involved. A large turnout voted on 11 October, with no incidents of violence reported at 3,070 polling sites across the country. As no presidential

Box 3.4.2 HIV/AIDS and Peacekeeping

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has set a precedent in the UN's efforts to assess the impact of its programs to address the risk of peacekeepers contracting or spreading HIV. It was the first operation to have an HIV/AIDS policy adviser from the start of a mission. In May and June 2005, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) collaborated on an HIV/AIDS knowledge, attitude, and practice survey, interviewing 667 UNMIL uniformed peacekeepers, including military observers, civilian police, and personnel from eight different contingents. The survey found:

• Eighty-eight percent of respondents stated that they had been tested at some point in their lifetime; 80 percent had been tested specifically in preparation for deployment to Liberia, of which only half had received any counseling with the test. Even within given contingents, differences were reported on whether the test had been mandatory or voluntary.
• Ninety-one percent had received pre-deployment HIV/AIDS training and, of personnel who had been deployed for at least a month, 88 percent had received training in the mission area. However, peer education programs were very weak.
• Overall, 76 percent of respondents were considered to have a comprehensive knowledge of HIV; this was determined on their ability to correctly identify three ways to prevent the transmission of HIV and also reject three misconceptions on transmission.

The need to address HIV/AIDS was originally underlined in Security Council Resolution 1308 of June 2000, which focused attention on the potential links between the disease and instability. This has led to a wide variety of initiatives:

• In 2001, the UNAIDS and the DPKO signed a collaboration framework to coordinate strategies and technical support; and in 2003, the UNAIDS seconded an AIDS adviser to the DPKO headquarters.
• In 2005, the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly approved a post for an AIDS policy adviser within the DPKO. All peacekeeping operations have either AIDS advisers or, in the case of smaller missions, focal points.
• HIV/AIDS is included in pre-deployment training guidance and materials and UNAIDS has developed a peer education kit and provides HIV/AIDS awareness cards in twelve languages.
• Responses to HIV/AIDS are also being mainstreamed into UN-mandated functions, such as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs and training for national police forces.
• In the past year, efforts have been made to link increased awareness of sexual exploitation and abuse and HIV/AIDS education for peacekeepers.

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A Liberian woman casts her ballot during the presidential runoff election in the capital, Monrovia, 8 November 2005

candidate scored the required absolute majority in the first round, a runoff between former professional footballer George Weah and former UN and World Bank official Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was held on 8 November. Johnson Sirleaf won in the second round, garnering almost 60 percent of the vote. When supporters of Weah took to the streets in protest, SRSG Doss repeated his warning that UNMIL "would react robustly to any effort to disrupt the hard won peace that this country now enjoys,"[5] and made good on the threat two days later when UN police fired tear gas to disperse a stone-throwing crowd. After investigating allegations of electoral fraud, the National Electoral Council proclaimed Johnson Sirleaf the winner on 23 November.

Economic Recovery: Governance
Economic governance was a central issue for peacebuilding in Liberia throughout 2005 and led in September to the initiation of a potentially significant international oversight process for postconflict countries. Decades of mismanagement of public finances, exploitation of natural resources, and widespread graft played a large role in Liberia's conflicts, and the installation of the transitional government in 2003 did not break this pattern. European Commission–funded audits of the Central Bank of Liberia (CBL) and five state-owned enterprises, International Monetary Fund consultations, and an investigation by ECOWAS all revealed extensive corruption. The UN's Panel of Experts, reviewing the sanctions in place since 2003, concluded in June 2005 that transparent and accountable mechanisms for the oversight of the timber and diamond industries were still lacking and that current sanctions on Liberia should be maintained.

In May 2005, international partners, led by the European Commission and the World Bank, and with some consultation with UN headquarters personnel, initiated an action plan for Liberia that would have provided for international control over Liberia's revenue streams, budgeting, and expenditure management through the assignment of international experts with cosignature authority in the Central Bank, finance, and other key ministries. The NTGL objected to

the plan as tantamount to international trusteeship and presented its own counterproposal, the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP), on 19 July. A compromise plan, retaining the key cosignatory element of the international plan, was hammered out and presented to the NTGL on 10 August. However, the chairman of the transitional government continued to withhold agreement, notwithstanding personal interventions from the UN Secretary-General, as well as threats by the European Commission and the World Bank to suspend assistance. On 9 September, just before departing for the World Summit in New York, Chairman Bryant signed his government's agreement to GEMAP.

The controversy surrounding GEMAP's negotiation does not augur well for its implementation, and the attitude of the newly elected government remains to be seen. Coordinated international efforts and funding will be required. UNMIL, which had actively participated in the negotiation of the GEMAP, is expected to assist in efforts to establish an anticorruption commission, while the UNDP will support efforts to ensure local governance capacity building. UNMIL will serve on the apex Economic Governance Steering Committee (EGSC), which monitors the implementation of the GEMAP, as well as the technical committees of the EGSC. The Security Council, in renewing UNMIL's mandate on 19 September, requested the Secretary-General to include information on GEMAP's implementation progress in his regular reports on UNMIL.

The year 2005 ended on a positive note in Liberia, with the completion of peaceful elections. But difficulties encountered during the year revealed the scale of the peacebuilding challenge ahead. Hesitancy in charting new ways to support institution building and governance reform illustrates the conceptual and operational gaps that still exist between peacekeeping and peacebuilding in UN peace operations. The installation of an elected government provides UNMIL an opportunity to develop a long-term postconflict strategy.

Notes

1. Figure cited in International Crisis Group, *Rebuilding Liberia: Prospects and Perils,* Africa Report no. 75, 30 January 2004.

2. This section draws on United Nations, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Best Practices Unit, *Lessons Learned Study on the Start Up Phase of the United Nations Mission in Liberia,* April 2004, available online at http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbpu/library/liberia%20lessons%20learned%20(final).pdf.

3. The initial experience of integration in Liberia was an incentive for the independent study of integrated missions carried out in 2004–2005 at the request of the UN Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA). Espen Barth Eide, Anja Therese Kaspersen, Randolph Kent, and Karen von Hippel, *Report on Integrated Missions: Practical Perspectives and Recommendations,* Independent Study for the Expanded UN ECHA Core Group, May 2005.

4. Nick Tattersall, "UN Force Plans Tough Action to Guard Liberia Polls," Reuters, 25 August 2005.

5. "Liberia: Sirleaf Heads for Victory as Authorities Study Weah's Complaint," IRIN, 10 November 2005, IRINnews.org.