

Liberia

The October 2011 general elections in Liberia were the first to be wholly conducted by national institutions since the end of civil war in 2003. Although the first round of voting was generally smooth, tensions escalated before the runoff, with the opposition calling for a boycott and a clash between protesters and police. As a result, turnout in the second round of elections was significantly lower, mirroring Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's successful reelection.

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) continues to provide critical support toward strengthening Liberian institutions, with further discussions expected in 2012 on UNMIL's future role and eventual drawdown.

Regional and domestic security threats, however, including transnational crime, refugee flows, unemployment, and land disputes, continue to present challenges to nascent national capacities. In particular, electoral violence in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, the resulting influx of refugees to Liberia, and the threat posed by heavily armed Liberian mercenaries returning from Côte d'Ivoire, as well as the influx of Ivorian combatants, required rapid responses from the government of Liberia and UNMIL in 2011. In September the UN Security Council—cautious of prematurely withdrawing UNMIL before national institutions are able to manage these threats—extended the mission's mandate for an additional year against growing international pressure to quicken UNMIL's drawdown.

Background

Leading the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) from bases in Côte d'Ivoire, Charles



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UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

• Authorization and Start Date	19 September 2003 (UNSC Res. 1509)
• SRSG	Ellen Margrethe Løj (Denmark)
• Force Commander	Major-General Muhammad Khalid (Pakistan)
• Police Commissioner	Gautam Sawang (India)
• Budget	\$525.6 million (1 July 2011–30 June 2012)
• Strength as of 31 October 2011	Troops: 7,774 Military Observers: 138 Police: 1,315 International Civilian Staff: 477 National Civilian Staff: 991 UN Volunteers: 240

For detailed mission information see p. 277

Taylor invaded Liberia in 1989, igniting an eight-year civil war that caused over 150,000 deaths and displaced nearly 1 million people. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) brokered peace negotiations in 1993, which led the UN Security Council to establish the UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) to assist the ECOWAS Military Observer Group in implementing the terms of the peace agreement. After elections in 1997 brought Taylor to power, UNOMIL withdrew and was replaced with the UN Peacebuilding Support Office in Liberia. However, the peace under Taylor's new government did not last and renewed fighting broke out in 1999, fueled by exclusionary political, economic, and security policies.

Liberia's entire fourteen-year internecine conflict caused over 250,000 deaths, displaced nearly one-third of the population, and decimated state institutions and civil society. The 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between Charles Taylor and the rebel groups—Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL)—finally ended the conflict. The CPA provided for the establishment of a national transitional government to administer the country until the democratically elected government took office in January 2006, following elections in 2005. In addition, the CPA called for the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force, in response to which, in October 2003 under Resolution 1509, the Security Council deployed UNMIL under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to maintain peace and support implementation of the peace agreement. UNMIL was authorized at an initial level of 15,000 troops, including 3,500 rehatted ECOWAS troops, and 1,115 police personnel. The mission's multidimensional mandate authorized it to assist in the provision of security; support the reestablishment of national authority; implement disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR); protect UN personnel and civilians from violence and human rights

abuses; support security sector reform; and support national elections.

The 2005 presidential elections, organized with considerable assistance from UNMIL and other international partners, saw the peaceful handover from the national transitional government to a democratic government led by Africa's first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Since then, UNMIL has assisted the Liberian government in the development of national institutions. In light of increased stability, in 2007 the UN Secretary-General recommended a three-stage drawdown of UNMIL's military component. A series of partial troop reductions began in 2006, though formal drawdown took place in three stages from October 2007 to May 2010, bringing the mission to its current strength of 7,774 military troops and 1,315 police. In September 2011 the Security Council renewed UNMIL's mandate at its current strength for an additional year, with the expectation that, in 2012, a technical assessment mission will present further recommendations for the next reconfiguration of the mission.

To facilitate long-term peacebuilding and stability, Liberia requested to be placed on the agenda of the UN's Peacebuilding Commission in 2010, complementing ongoing assistance from the UN's Peacebuilding Fund. In late 2010 the government of Liberia and the Peacebuilding Commission signed a statement of mutual commitments that outlined three peacebuilding priorities: strengthening the rule of law, security sector reform, and national reconciliation. Subsequently, in May 2011 a Liberia peacebuilding program was adopted for a total value of \$72 million.

Key Developments

Political Developments

The organization of the 2011 constitutional referendum and presidential and parliamentary elections was a historic milestone for Liberia. While UNMIL provided logistical support, the onus for conducting the elections

fell on Liberian institutions, with the national electoral commission responsible for organizing the elections, and the Liberian National Police (LNP) largely responsible for maintaining law and order. The Liberian-run voter registration campaign in early 2011 succeeded in registering nearly 1.8 million Liberians—approximately 85 percent of eligible voters—paving the way for the referendum and national elections.¹

The constitutional referendum in August 2011 proposed a number of important election-related constitutional amendments that, if passed, would have significantly impacted the October national elections. However, turnout was low amid criticism that the Liberian public lacked information about the proposals and amid calls from the opposition for a boycott due to allegations that the changes unfairly favored the ruling party. Only one of the four proposals tabled—the elimination of runoff elections in local and legislative polls—garnered the two-thirds majority required for a constitutional amendment. Proposals to shorten the residency requirement clause, to delay elections until November, and to increase the mandatory retirement age for Supreme Court justices were all rejected.

The failure of the proposal to shorten the residency clause from ten years to five temporarily plunged the presidential election into turmoil, as many of the sixteen candidates, including frontrunner Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and leading opposition candidate Winston Tubman, failed to meet the ten-year requirement. However, one week before the election the Supreme Court determined that the civil war overrode the clause for this election and cleared all candidates to run.

The presidential election took place on 11 October in a mostly peaceful atmosphere, with larger turnout than was initially expected. To support the election, UNMIL coordinated international assistance, increased air patrols, and stationed ground troops at strategic locations around the country. ECOWAS, the African Union, and the Carter Center provided international observation missions, and more



AFP Photo/Getty Images/Isouf Samogo

Liberia's incumbent president and joint Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ellen Johnson Sirleaf meets with residents after casting her ballot in her hometown of Fefeh on 8 November 2011, the day after at least four opposition supporters were killed amid a boycott protest by the challenger in this disputed presidential runoff. Early voting was slow amid the tense atmosphere in the capital following the previous day's violence, in marked contrast to long lines that greeted the opening of polls during the previous month's first round.

than 4,000 national observers were accredited to observe the process. Johnson Sirleaf, with 43.9 percent of the vote, fell shy of the absolute majority required to win in the first round, necessitating a November runoff with Tubman. While election day was largely calm, isolated incidents of arson in the immediate aftermath raised concern but did not spark widespread violence. In the weeks between the first and second rounds of voting, opposition parties, citing allegations of fraud by the national electoral commission, threatened to pull out of the elections unless their demands—including the resignation of the electoral commission's chairman, James Fromayan—were met. At the end of October, Fromayan resigned, citing his interest in a peaceful runoff, and his deputy for administration and civic education, Elizabeth J. Nelson, became acting chair.

However, the reconfiguration of the commission did not mollify Tubman, who withdrew from the 8 November runoff citing fraud, though some observers have suggested

Box 2.5 Helicopters in Peacekeeping Operations

Helicopters play a key role in implementing peacekeeping mandates and reinforcing the UN's presence on the ground. However, the UN struggles with a severe shortage of these critical assets. As of September 2011, there were only 148 helicopters deployed across UN peacekeeping missions, leaving a shortfall of over 30 percent.

Helicopters have been used in peacekeeping missions primarily in a utility capacity, for logistical tasks such as transporting troops, search and rescue, following rebel movements, and conducting evacuations of wounded personnel, particularly in areas with limited road access or vast geographies. However, more recently and especially in 2011, helicopters have been deployed in an attack capacity, in order to support a much more assertive deterrent posture.

This was seen most recently in Côte d'Ivoire, where helicopters under UN command were a decisive component in the defeat of Laurent Gbagbo and his forces. UNOCI's helicopters, reinforced with rotary-wing asset transfers from the neighboring mission in Liberia (UNMIL), as well as from France's Operation Licorne, proved critical in the standoff. They extended the UN's presence and eventually fired on forces loyal to

incumbent leader Gbagbo, an act both of self-defense and to protect civilians.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), utility and attack helicopters have been critical for the UN's mission, MONUSCO. In accordance with its mandate to protect civilians, the mission has used its rotary-wing assets to assert its presence in the eastern regions and to deter rebel attacks. However, in 2011 India withdrew its remaining utility and attack helicopters from the mission to address domestic security needs, leaving MONUSCO with only fourteen rotary-wing assets (a shortfall of fifteen) and no attack helicopters. According to the Secretary-General, the shortage impacted the deployment of troops, joint operations with Congolese forces, and the mission's ability to support the November elections.

In Darfur, the UN and AU's joint mission, UNAMID, currently has only five helicopters out of the required twenty-four. This crippling shortfall has limited the mission's ability to protect civilians from attacks, or help facilitate the necessary distribution of humanitarian aid.

The process of finding replacement helicopters to strengthen the UN's missions in the DRC and Darfur has been difficult. So far, only a few African nations have pledged assistance.¹ Generally, the

pool of helicopter-contributing countries is limited. Of the 193 member states of the United Nations, just 13 provide all the military utility and attack helicopters currently deployed. Many countries simply lack the needed rotary assets to cover their own domestic needs, let alone the needs of UN peacekeeping. Meanwhile, those countries with a sufficient inventory are tied down in theaters of operation elsewhere.

There is hope that as NATO operations in Afghanistan draw down, Western helicopter units may be transferred to UN peacekeeping missions. Given the reluctance of many Western states regarding the handover of command and control, reforms to the use and management of UN helicopters—both in the field and at headquarters—are needed to address their concerns and to ensure that helicopters are used to maximum effect. The UN may also need to increase incentives for potential helicopter contributors, and improve its system of reimbursement for deployed assets.

Until a solution can be found, the shortfall in helicopter assets will continue to significantly impede the ability of UN peace operations, particularly in geographically diverse and less secure settings, to implement their mandates.

Note: 1. As of 30 June, UNAMID reports that an Ethiopian multirole logistics unit, a Rwandan medium rotary-wing utility aviation unit, and Nigerian reconnaissance and reserve companies are expected to deploy later in the year, while an incoming Senegalese battalion is expected to reach full strength by October 2011. MONUSCO has secured commitments from one country only, South Africa, in the form of one utility helicopter.

that he withdrew because he was unlikely to surpass Johnson Sirleaf in the vote. In the lead-up to the second round, clashes occurred between the LNP and opposition supporters, resulting in at least two deaths.² The runoff took place in a tense atmosphere, with many voters staying home because of security concerns or in support of Tubman's boycott. Turnout was under 40 percent of registered

voters, approximately half that of the initial vote,³ but international observers have stated that the election was largely free, fair, and transparent.⁴ Johnson Sirleaf won 90 percent of the vote and has vowed to prioritize reconciliation during her second term, calling upon fellow Nobel laureate Leymah Gbowee to lead the newly created Peace and Reconciliation Initiative.

While Liberia focused mainly on electoral preparations during the past year, the government has also strengthened its capacity through extension of administrative services at the district level and more regular payment of government salaries. Both the Law Reform Commission, which is tasked with reviewing Liberia's legal framework, and the Land Commission, designed to formulate a much-needed land policy, became operational, filling a crucial governance gap. The government also announced its first corruption conviction, though the Anti-Corruption Commission still lacks independent prosecutorial powers.⁵ Outside of Monrovia, service delivery is inconsistent and largely dependent on considerable assistance from UNMIL.

Although the economy has incrementally improved, rampant unemployment among youth and former combatants remains a potential threat. Increased interest by multinational corporations in energy and mining could open up Liberia to much-needed investment and help fill the budgetary gaps that beset many of Liberia's national institutions. However, any potential economic growth will require stability, government transparency, and credible security guarantees. Looking forward, the Governance Commission and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs introduced "Liberia Rising 2030," a national visioning paper that aims to provide a roadmap for long-term consolidation of good governance, decentralization, and the fostering of economic growth.

Security Situation

Regional instability, particularly from crises in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, significantly tested Liberian security forces in 2011. Over 200,000 refugees fleeing electoral violence in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire arrived in Liberia during the year, while heavily armed Liberian mercenaries recruited by pro-Gbagbo forces in Côte d'Ivoire used the region's porous borders to move between the two countries.

To increase border surveillance and to help stabilize the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, UNMIL shared mission assets, including troops

and military utility and attack helicopters, with the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) under an intermission agreement. While the helicopters and troops were returned to UNMIL, the two operations continue the intermission agreement on an as-needed basis and coordinate their strategies and operations in the border area to "prevent armed groups from exploiting the seam of political boundaries."⁶

Accordingly, UNMIL, UNOCI, and the LNP have increased their border patrols to monitor activities and the return of the estimated 2,000 Liberian mercenaries. These patrols, which have been instrumental in shoring up previously inaccessible areas of the border, have also seized multiple large weapons and ammunitions caches on Liberian territory, an important step in combating regional weapons trafficking.

To further strengthen the regional response to these challenges, in July 2011 President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf hosted the Ivorian prime minister for bilateral discussions on common security concerns, including the thousands of Ivorian refugees now residing in Liberia. Later that month, the Mano River Union held a security summit in Monrovia and established a technical committee to better coordinate border security.

Transnational mercenaries are not the only regional security concern for Liberia. Drug trafficking continues to destabilize the country as cocaine, heroin, and marijuana are transported across borders in the region. In particular, trafficking of domestically produced marijuana for the global market has raised concerns that the drug was replacing other agricultural activities in some areas. Human trafficking is also an increasing problem. In May the government of Liberia joined three other pilot countries as part of the UN-ECOWAS West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI), which seeks to institutionalize ECOWAS's regional action plan to combat transnational crime. Several months later, the LNP's Transnational Crime Unit was established to complement the WACI's regional framework.

Internal security remains stable, albeit with occasional violent flare-ups and persistent criminal activity. Ethnic and communal tensions continue. Recurring land and labor disputes led to violent incidents in Maryland and Grand Kru counties, requiring LNP operations with UNMIL support.⁷ On one such occasion, the LNP's Emergency Response Unit remained in the area to independently manage domestic threats and maintain peace. General criminal activity, especially rape, gun violence, and armed robbery, remain endemic in Liberian society.⁸

Security Sector Reform

Long-term peace and security in Liberia will be predicated on capable and accountable security institutions, underscoring the importance of continued security sector reform by the government of Liberia and UNMIL. These efforts were boosted in 2011 by the enactment of a national security reform and intelligence bill that provides a roadmap for improving Liberia's security architecture. However, as in years past, uneven progress puts the viability of a smooth transition from UNMIL to a Liberian-run security sector into question.

The Liberian government began 2011 by assuming full responsibility for the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) from the United States.⁹ The United States has provided support to the Liberian military since 2003, and in the past eight years has worked to develop the AFL through vetting processes, training exercises, and mentoring programs. While initial projections indicated the AFL would attain full operational capability in 2012, delays in obtaining new assets and in endorsing the national defense strategy will postpone this transition until 2014. Insufficient budget allocations have compounded infrastructural and logistical problems, including equipment deficits, hindering the AFL's ability to operate independently. In preparing for an eventual transfer of responsibilities, UNMIL continued its mentoring role in 2011 by training the AFL in civil-military cooperation, rule of law, unexploded ordnance identification, and

radio operations, and conducting joint operations, including the transportation of suspected former combatants returning from Côte d'Ivoire. UNMIL also prepared the AFL for potential future peacekeeping duties in other countries.

While the LNP managed to maintain stability in the lead-up to the first round of elections, the clashes that erupted between the police and opposition supporters the day before the runoff raised concerns about the command and control of the force. According to a preliminary statement by the Carter Center, evidence suggests that the LNP used excessive force and that UNMIL played a critical role in restraining the police and reestablishing order.¹⁰

More broadly, much work remains until the force is able to operate independently. For example, while the LNP exceeded its pre-election goal of training 600 officers for the Police Support Unit—a specialized unit intended to respond to instances of civil unrest—members of the unit are still not fully operational due to lack of equipment and logistical support, while issues relating to accountability and command and control present an even larger challenge than the capacity question. In addition, the LNP must also contend with poor community relations due to a historical pattern of abuse, despite some progress. Lax oversight and poor vetting processes further weakened the LNP, although the number of internal police investigations into allegations of crime and corruption by police officers grew in 2011 in an effort to rid the institution of spoilers. UNMIL provided critical infrastructural support to the LNP in 2011, including rehabilitation of stations, barracks, and regional headquarters to support LNP capacity to provide security, especially outside of Monrovia.

The Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN), a government security agency, played an important role during the year in response to regional instability, particularly through its increased activity on Liberia's border with Côte d'Ivoire. However, responses

by both the BIN and the LNP to security incidents emphasized their chronic reliance on UNMIL for mobility and information-gathering.¹¹ Recognizing these gaps, the UN-supported Justice and Security Trust Fund provided vehicles, training, and communication equipment to support both institutions ahead of the October elections.¹²

Justice and Rule of Law

National reconciliation has been hampered by limited implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 2009 final report. In January 2011 the Supreme Court held that implementation of the report's recommendation of political debarment would be unconstitutional, further adding to setbacks. Many former war criminals indicted in the report continue to avoid prosecution for their crimes, including former rebel leader and presidential candidate Prince Johnson, identified by the report as a notorious perpetrator of war crimes during the civil conflict. Finishing third in the October elections, Johnson supported President Johnson Sirleaf in the runoff, publicly rallying beside the president days before the second round of voting. Delays in initiating the Palava Hut program, a forum in which former combatants seek public forgiveness, also hampered national reconciliation. Further rifts could occur if Charles Taylor, currently facing war crimes charges in the Special Court for Sierra Leone for his role in the Sierra Leone civil war, is acquitted and returns to Liberia.

With UNMIL's drawdown looming, Liberia's justice sector is still weak and access to justice for the average Liberian remains limited. A severe backlog of unprosecuted cases and outdated laws that limit courts' jurisdiction have led to delays and reduced the public's confidence in the justice system. The courts also suffer from a severe shortage of qualified personnel as well as infrastructure and equipment constraints, exacerbating structural and logistical pressures.

As a result, the majority of Liberians use customary justice mechanisms, such as

community courts headed by tribal governors, as recourse for grievances. The Liberian Ministry of Justice and Law Reform Commission have led efforts in harmonizing the customary and formal justice systems. In addition, the Liberian Ministry of Internal Affairs and UNMIL's legal and judicial support division are supporting the establishment of standardized procedures for community courts and training governors in due process and human rights.

The deficiencies in the justice sector have also led to high rates of pretrial detention, a problem that Liberia's overcrowded corrections facilities, which struggle just to maintain basic human living conditions, have been unable to address. Furthermore, rule of law sector staff regularly complain of not receiving their salaries, and strikes have been threatened or taken place in a number of institutions. These limitations in infrastructure and personnel, and their impact on staff morale, mean that prisons are often unable to provide sufficient security. In 2011, more than ten escape incidents occurred at facilities in cities including Monrovia and Buchanan, requiring responses from the LNP's Police Support Unit with UNMIL assistance.¹³

To address these shortcomings, UNMIL provided technical assistance for a two-day retreat in February to strengthen coordination between the Ministry of Justice and the judiciary. Also considered at the meeting were key reforms needed to improve the criminal justice system. An additional meeting facilitated by UNMIL brought together units of the LNP with prosecutors from the Ministry of Justice to foster greater cooperation and efficiency. A government-run Pretrial Detention Task Force additionally seeks to address the underlying causes of legal delays in the justice system. UNMIL also built courthouses in Kolahun, Foya, and Voinjama districts in 2011, and construction started on the five Peacebuilding Fund-supported regional security and justice hubs, including one in Gbarnga that is set to be completed in early 2012. These hubs will expand the rule of law outside of

Monrovia through co-location of security and justice authorities, pooling of resources, and increased cooperation among agencies. The hubs are one element of a joint justice and security program, currently under development by the government, UNMIL, and the UN Country Team in Liberia. It is envisaged that the hubs will assist the government of Liberia to prepare for UNMIL's eventual transition. The Peacebuilding Fund also supported education programs intended to build respect for rule of law and formal training for legal staff.

For long-term peace consolidation, state institutions in the criminal and justice system will need to improve their credibility and expand their reach into regional and local sectors to promote rule of law and good governance.

a broadly free and fair environment, the boycott of the opposition and the performance of the police the day before the runoff underscore the continued need for reconciliation. Renewed discussions are expected in 2012 on the future role of UNMIL, amid continued pressure from the international community for the mission to draw down. Mission transition is a particularly vulnerable period, presenting new risks for sparking latent tensions and undermining fragile stability, particularly in the context of ongoing regional instability. The delay in transition planning during the election period means that significant work remains, especially in the security and justice sectors. Gains here will be imperative for ensuring Liberia's institutional capacity to respond to domestic and international security threats transparently and effectively.

Conclusion

The 2011 elections were a critical milestone for Liberia, and while they were conducted in

Notes

1. International Crisis Group, "Liberia: How Sustainable Is the Recovery?" *Africa Report* no. 177, 19 August 2011, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/westafrica/liberia/177%20Liberia%20%20How%20Sustainable%20is%20the%20Recovery.pdf>.

2. Alphonso Toweh and Richard Valdmanis, "Liberia's Sirleaf Eyes Reconciliation After Landslide," *Reuters*, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/11/us-liberia-election-idUSTRE7AA3GE20111111>.

3. "Liberia Election: Sirleaf Promises Reconciliation," *BBC News*, 11 November 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15684787>.

4. Emily Schmall, "Liberia's President Wins Boycotted Runoff Vote," *New York Times*, 10 November 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/11/world/africa/liberias-president-ellen-johnson-sirleaf-wins-election.html?ref=global-home>.

5. United Nations, *Twenty-third Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, UN Doc. S/2011/497, 1 August 2011.

6. UN Security Council Resolution 2008 (2011), S/RES/2008.

7. United Nations, *Twenty-third Progress Report*, S/2011/497.

8. United Nations, *Twenty-second Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, UN Doc. S/2011/72, 14 February 2011.

9. International Crisis Group, "Liberia: How Sustainable Is the Recovery?" This followed the AFL's 2010 resumption of responsibility for managing its development and maintenance, but other areas, including weapons control, remained under the responsibility of the United States.

10. Carter Center, "Carter Center Preliminary Statement on the Liberia 2011 Presidential Run-Off Election," 10 November 2011, available at http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/liberia-prelim-111011.pdf.

11. United Nations, *Twenty-second Progress Report*, S/2011/72, 14 February 2011.

12. United Nations Liberia, "UN Hands Over Vehicles and Equipment to Liberia's Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization," press release, 5 October 2011.

13. United Nations, *Twenty-third Progress Report*, S/2011/497.