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You're in the Army Now:
The Politics of Cohesion during Military Integration in Sierra Leone

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Military integration is intended to facilitate post-conflict stabilization, by creating unified armed forces from formerly antagonistic armed groups. However, integrated armies often struggle to overcome the factional identities of their soldiers, raising questions about interventionists' ability to produce military cohesion during such processes. Yet, in the established scholarship on military cohesion, largely derived from study of Western armed forces, internal small-group social dynamics are privileged over and above broader societal and political identities. This article examines the post-conflict military integration programme conducted in Sierra Leone, in order to test extant theories of military "social cohesion". Contrary to theoretical expectations, military cohesion in Sierra Leone proved highly reliant on wider (and highly politicized) societal identities, undermining integration efforts. This finding not only challenges existing understandings of social cohesion and its determinants, but also the utility of military integration as vehicle for post-conflict stabilization and civil-military change.

Military service is an activity deeply infused with social and political meaning. However, this relationship between military service and social identity can have significant implications for post-conflict stabilization, highlighting the role of internal military cohesion during such transitions. In Western armed forces, military cohesion is viewed as the essence of collective resilience, and is considered essential for organizational effectiveness.[1] Yet, in 2014, the US-tutored Iraqi Army prominently collapsed in the face of Islamic State militants, with observers citing internal sectarian divisions as a central explanation for battlefield failure.[2] Evidently, the production of military cohesion cannot be taken for granted in such fragile political environments. At the same time, though, prominent approaches to peacebuilding and post-conflict stabilization like military integration rely on the ability to produce military cohesion in socially and politically diverse armed forces. In so doing, they envision a particular relationship between social identity, military service and institutional effectiveness. Advocates of military integration view the process as necessary for political stabilization, as well as a potential exemplar for new forms of communal interaction.[3] However, the apparent difficulty in assuaging antagonistic social and political identities through military service has prompted significant debate, leading to a series of calls to abandon the concept altogether.[4] Given this, to what extent do soldiers' existing social and political identities affect the formation of military cohesion – and if so, how?

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[1] See for example, US Army. *The Army*, ADP-1 (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2012); British Army, *Land Operations,* Army Doctrine Publication AC 71940 (Warminster: Land Warfare Development Centre, 2017).

[2] Jonathan Marcus, "Factors Behind the Precipitate Collapse of Iraq's Army," *BBC News*, June 13, 2014. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-27838435/.

[3] Alon Peled, *A Question of Loyalty: Military Manpower Policy in Multi-Ethnic States* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998); Florence Gaub, *Military Integration after Civil Wars: Multiethnic Armies, Identity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

[4] Ronald R. Krebs, "A School for the Nation? How Military Service Does Not Build Nations, and How it Might," *International Security* 28, no. 4 (Spring 2004): 85-124; Ronald R. Krebs, "One Nation Under Arms? Military Participation Policy and the Politics of Identity," *Security Studies* 14, no. 3 (September 2005): 529-564; Ronald R. Krebs, "Military Dis-Integration: Canary in the Coal Mine?" in *New Armies From Old: Merging Competing Military Forces after Civil Wars*, ed. Roy Licklider (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 2014), 245-58; Ronald R. Krebs and Roy Licklider, "United they Fall: Why the International Community should not Promote Military Integration after Civil War," *International Security* 40, no. 3 (Winter 2015): 93-138.

Despite the importance of military cohesion for both civil-military relations and the production of military power, there remains a sparsity of academic interest in the phenomenon beyond the confines of professional Western armed forces. Indeed, established research has tended to privilege the experience of regular infantry formations in the US, Britain and Israel as the best window onto military cohesion.[5] While the connection between military effectiveness and civil-military relations is now well documented, corresponding links between political identity and military cohesion outside of established Western democracies remain comparatively understudied.[6] Only recently have scholars begun to explore cohesion dynamics in non-Western and non-state armed groups, alongside renewed interest in the reserve and support components of more established armed forces. Such research has highlighted the overlooked significance of commonly-held social identities and political ideals to many combatant organizations, challenging traditional conceptions of military cohesion, and with them, the praxis of intervention and post-conflict stabilization.[7]

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[5] Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1948): 280-315; Guy L. Siebold and Dennis R. Kelly, *Development of the Platoon Cohesion Index,* ARI Technical Report 816 (Alexandria, Va: US Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 1988); Anthony King, "On Combat Effectiveness in the Infantry Platoon: Beyond the Primary Group Thesis," *Security Studies* 25, no. 4 (October 2016): 699-728 Uzi Ben-Shalom, Zeev Lehrer, and Eyal Ben-Ari, "Cohesion during Military Operations: A Field Study on Combat Units in the Al-Aqsa Intifada," *Armed Forces & Society* 32, no. 1 (October 2005): 63-79.

[6] Caitlin Talmadge, "The Puzzle of Personalist Performance: Iraqi Battlefield Effectiveness in the Iran-Iraq War," *Security Studies* 22, no. 2 (April 2013): 180-221; Vipin Narang and Caitlin Talmadge, "Civil-Military Pathologies and Defeat in War: Tests Using New Data," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 7 (August 2018): 1379-1405; Ilmari Käihkö, "Broadening the Perspective on Military Cohesion," *Armed Forces & Society* 44, no. 4 (October 2018): 571-586.

[7] Tarak Barkawi, "Subaltern Soldiers: Eurocentricism and the Nation-State in the Combat Motivation Debates," in *Frontline: Combat and Cohesion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Anthony King (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), 24-45; Marie Olson Lounsbery, "Foreign Military Intervention, Power Dynamics, and Rebel Group Cohesion," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 1, no. 2 (May 2016): 127–141; Patrick Finnegan, "Professionalization of a Nonstate Actor: A Case Study of the Provisional IRA," *Armed Forces & Society* 45, no. 2 (April 2019): 349-67; Marco Nilsson, "Primary Unit Cohesion Among the Peshmerga and Hezbollah," *Armed Forces & Society* 44, no. 4 (October 2018): 647-65; Stig Jarle Hansen, "Unity under Allah? Cohesion Mechanisms in Jihadist Organizations in Africa," *Armed Forces & Society* 44, no. 4 (October 2018): 587-605; Judith Verweijen, "Soldiers Without an Army? Patronage Networks and Cohesion in the Armed Forces of the DR Congo," *Armed Forces & Society* 44, no. 4 (October 2018): 626-46; Patrick Bury, "Recruitment and Retention in British Army Reserve Logistics Units," *Armed Forces & Society* 43, no. 4 (October 2017): 608-31; Patrick Bury, "The Changing Nature of Reserve Cohesion: A Study of Future Reserves 2020 and British Army Reserve Logistic Units," *Armed Forces & Society* 45, no. 2 (April 2019): 310-32.

This article examines the impact of post-conflict identities on the formation of military cohesion during an important case of post-conflict military integration – the Military Re-Integration Programme conducted in Sierra Leone at the end of the civil war – in order to test rival understandings of military cohesion and their relationship to socio-political identity. Contrary to established theoretical expectations, military (in)cohesion in post-war Sierra Leone was partially determined by the (in)compatibility of soldiers' pre-existing political and societal identities – with significant attendant implications for the wider praxis of post-conflict stabilization.

Military Integration and the Problem of Cohesion

Military integration programmes are intended to promote stability by assuaging the security dilemmas intrinsic to many post-conflict environments.[8] Formerly warring armed groups are combined into a new unitary armed force, usually as a precursor to a wider defence reform. Advocates of military integration have argued that it represents a costly commitment by belligerents, tying them into political agreements. Rebuilt armies also provide a deterrent to potential spoilers, and act as a symbol of national unity.[9] Moreover, because domestic repression is often facilitated by partisan military recruitment, representative armies are considered important for safeguarding human security.[10] Indeed, demographically representative civilian bureaucracies have been shown to improve public perceptions of institutional legitimacy, increase support for activities like policing, and actively promote minority rights.[11] Integrated armies thus reflect the European vision of the *levée en masse* as a

[8] Caroline Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie, "Institutionalizing Peace: Power Sharing and Post-Civil War Conflict Management," *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 2 (April 2003): 318–332.

[9] Gaub, *Military Integration after Civil Wars*; Roy Licklider, ed., *New Armies From Old: Merging Competing Military Forces after Civil Wars* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 2014).

[10] Cynthia H. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980); Peled, *A Question of Loyalty*.

[11] Jessica E. Sowa and Sally Coleman Selden, "Administrative Discretion and Active Representation: An Expansion of the Theory of Representative Bureaucracy," *Public Administration Review* 63, no. 6 (November 2003): 700–10; Nick A. Theobald and Donald P. Haider-Markel, "Race, Bureaucracy, and Symbolic

"school for the nation", and are explicitly created for their political value.[12] In principle, therefore, the deeper the extent of integration the more significant the impact should be. In practice, though, programmes have often fallen short of total intermingling, being carried out by factional quota or through the incorporation of entire homogeneous units intact into a new higher-level structure. Nonetheless, military integration always envisages the creation of unified, coherent and politically subordinate national armies from politically diverse groups, for overtly political reasons. Accordingly, the utility of military integration as a tool of peacebuilding depends on the ability to overcome diverse (and often antagonistic) political identities to produce unitary (but symbolically pluralistic) military organizations.[13]

Yet, while military integration does appear to have produced coherent armies in cases like South Africa, Rwanda and Burundi, the extent to which successful outcomes can be positively attributed to integration programmes remains unclear. Typically, successful integration has been accompanied by parallel changes in civilian attitudes, as well as other security sector reforms aimed at professionalising the military, rendering the independent impact of integration uncertain.[14] Indeed, military integration programmes appear to have

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Representation: Interactions between Citizens and Police," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 19, no. 2 (April 2009): 409–26; Norma M. Riccucci, Gregg G. Van Ryzin, and Cecilia F. Lavena, "Representative Bureaucracy in Policing: Does It Increase Perceived Legitimacy?" *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 24, no. 3 (July 2014): 537-551.

[12] See Alan Forrest, *The Legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars: The Nation-in-Arms in French Republican Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009); Vanda Wilcox, "Encountering Italy: Military Service and National Identity during the First World War," *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 3, no. 2 (Winter 2011): 283-302; Sven Gunnar Simonsen, "Building 'National' Armies – Building Nations? Determinants of Success for Postintervention Integration Efforts," *Armed Forces & Society* 33, no. 4 (July 2007): 571-590.

[13] Sven Gunnar Simonsen, "Leaving Security in Safe Hands: Identity, legitimacy and Cohesion in the new Afghan and Iraqi Armies," *Third World Quarterly* 30, no. 8 (December 2009): 1483-1501; Jason Wood, "The Importance of Cohesion in the Afghan National Army to Post-Transition Afghanistan," *RUSI Journal* 157, no. 4 (August 2012): 42-7.

[14] Stephen F. Burgess, "Fashioning Integrated Security Forces after Conflict," *African Security* 1, no. 2 (December 2008): 69-91; Marco Jowell, "Cohesion Through Socialization: Liberation, Tradition and Modernity in the Forging of the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF)," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8, no. 2 (March 2014): 278-293; Cyrus Samii, "Perils or Promise of Ethnic Integration? Evidence from a Hard Case in Burundi," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (August 2013): 558-73; Katherine Glassmyer and Nicholas Sambanis, "Rebel-Military Integration and Civil War Termination," *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 3 (May 2008): 365-84.

actually incentivised recidivism in both South Sudan and the DRC.[15] As a result, the utility of military integration as a vehicle for post-conflict stabilization has been called into question. Krebs has argued that soldiers' identities are so rooted in wider political constructs that military service cannot independently shape them, rendering integration irrelevant at best. He views integrated armies as little more than the proverbial canary in the coal mine of post-conflict reconstruction – and "an endangered and expensive African parrot" of a canary at that. For Krebs, to hold military integration responsible for furthering political stability is "a bit like saying the dead canary is at fault for the coal mine's having become uninhabitable" when in reality "it is the noxious fumes that are dangerous, to canaries and coal miners alike".[16] Instead, one meta-analysis has suggested that the character of wider political commitments may in fact be determining, and even in a modestly successful case like Bosnia, it took a profound political crisis to overcome factional resistance to military integration.[17]

Successful military integration is therefore a question of the production of *military cohesion*, and its ability to reshape or overcome conflicting political identities. Military cohesion is traditionally defined as the capacity of a military organization to withstand disintegration under pressure, but the foundational relationship between military cohesion and political identity has been significantly overlooked. In their seminal study of cohesion in the Second World War German Army, Shils and Janowitz concluded that the Wehrmacht's peculiar resilience stemmed from the deliberate cultivation of *primary groups*; small, intimately

[15] In South Sudan, the process encouraged integrated groups to defect in order to re-negotiate a better integration deal; a phenomenon exacerbated in the DRC by the character of militarized patrimonial politics. Lesley Anne Warner, "Armed-Group Amnesty and Military Integration in South Sudan," *RUSI Journal* 158, no. 6 (December 2013): 40-7; Maria Eriksson Baaz, and Judith Verweijen, "The Volatility of a Half-Cooked Bouillabaisse: Rebel–Military Integration and Conflict Dynamics in the Eastern DRC," *African Affairs* 112, no. 449 (October 2013): 563-582.

[16] Krebs, "Military Dis-Integration," 245-56; see also Krebs, "A School for the Nation"; Krebs, "One Nation Under Arms?"; Krebs and Licklider, "United they Fall".

[17] Glassmyer and Sambanis, "Rebel-Military Integration," 365-84; Elliot Short, "The Orao Affair: The Key to Military Integration in Post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 31, no. 1 (January 2018): 37-64.

acquainted groups of soldiers held together by bonds of peer-pressure and mutual association. Providing these primary group dynamics were preserved, military units would endure the rigours of combat; once primary group interactions were broken, units would rapidly collapse.[18] However, these primary group bonds do not automatically guarantee loyalty, and can equally facilitate collective resistance to authority.[19] Instead, primary groups derive meaning and purpose from 'secondary' affiliations exogenous to the group, which provide the "external factors of social control…that stabilize relationship patterns" within the primary group.[20] Initially, Shils and Janowitz argued that the 'secondary' ideals which frame primary group bonding are directly inherited from wider society, such as duty, honour, masculinity – and national or political identity. In so doing, they linked the performance-related properties of military cohesion with the societal and political identities of particular concern to later scholars of post-conflict reconstruction. However, in the case of the Wehrmacht, they considered that social homogeneity was more important to the maintenance of primary groups than any widespread commitment to National Socialist ideology.[21] Other Second World War studies of cohesive American troops likewise found that "the strongest group code, except for…flagrant disloyalty, was the taboo against any talk of the flag-waving variety".[22]

Social psychologists subsequently developed this primary group thesis into a theory of *social cohesion*, defining primary group bonds by the quality of horizontal and vertical relationships

[18] Shils and Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration".

[19] Patrick Bury, "Barossa Night: Cohesion in the British Army Officer Corps," *British Journal of Sociology* 68, no. 2 (June 2017): 314-35. Also, Pascal Vennesson, "Cohesion and Misconduct: The French Army and the Mahé Affair," in *Frontline: Combat and Cohesion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Anthony King, 234-249 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015).

[20] Siebold, "Essence of Military Group Cohesion," 288.

[21] Shils and Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration," 286.

[22] Samuel A. Stouffer, Arthur A. Lumsdaine, Marion Harper Lumsdaine, Robin M. Williams Jr., M. Brewster Smith, Irving L. Janis, Shirley A. Star, and Leonard S. Cottrell Jr., *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath, Volume II* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1949), 150.

between group members and their immediate leaders. These relationships generate interpersonal trust and teamwork, which are considered to be the essence of primary group cohesion.[23] In his "standard model" of social cohesion, Siebold concluded that secondary associations are largely confined to organizational and institutional bonding processes within the military. Such a view reflects the sociological description of armed forces as "total institutions", able to exercise an unusually high degree of social control over member beliefs and interactions, and mediate their relations with wider civil and political life. Accordingly, the organizational policies of the military institution, together with informal leadership practices, are often viewed as central to effectively managing diversity in the primary group.[24] In the modern US military, for example, primary groups have been relatively immune to the ethnic and racial politics present in wider society, while in the Israeli armed forces, primary groups appear to actively reshape new conscripts' divergent identities in line with prevailing military norms.[25] The formation of social cohesion is therefore closely tied to the formal and informal mechanisms of military *socialization*, through which soldiers internalise the constitutive rules of military identity and their associated norms of appropriate military behaviour. Indeed, the standard model posits "military unit cohesion as an ongoing process of social integration among the members of a primary group, with group leaders, and

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[23] Siebold and Kelly, *Platoon Cohesion Index*; Guy L. Siebold, "The Essence of Military Group Cohesion," *Armed Forces & Society* 33, no. 2 (January 2007): 286-90; James Griffith, "Measurement of Group Cohesion in U.S. Army Units," *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 9, no. 2 (1988): 149-71; William Darryl Henderson, *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1985).

[24] Siebold, "Essence of Military Group Cohesion," 287-90; Guy L. Siebold, "Key Questions and Challenges to the Standard Model of Military Group Cohesion," *Armed Forces & Society* 37, no. 3 (July 2011): 448-468; Joerg Wombacher and Joerg Felfe, "United We Are Strong: An Investigation into Sense of Community among Navy Crews," *Armed Forces & Society* 38, no. 4 (October 2012): 557-66; Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968); Edna Lomsky-Feder, and Eyal Ben-Ari, "Managing Diversity in Context: Unit Level Dynamics in the Israel Defense Forces," *Armed Forces & Society* 39, no. 2 (April 2013): 193-212.

[25] Guy L. Siebold and Twila J. Lindsay, "The Relationship between Demographic Descriptors and Soldier-Perceived Cohesion and Motivation," *Military Psychology* 11, no. 1 (March 1999): 109-28; Dana Kachtan, "The Construction of Ethnic Identity in the Military - From the Bottom Up," *Israel Studies* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 150-175.

with the larger secondary organizations to which they belong".[26] Thus, in many cases of failed integration, poor outcomes have been attributed to poor institutional implementation leading to weak military socialization and poor conditions for primary group bonding, rather than any inherent intractability of forming armies with soldiers from diverse socio-political groups.

Historically, however, shared socio-political identities have often been central to the production of social cohesion – especially in the mass citizen armies that followed the French Revolution. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, states deliberately propagated nationalism to increase civilian propensity for mobilization, while officers likewise hoped that patriotic fervour would sustain offensive action in the face of increasingly lethal technology.[27] Importantly, soldiers that did not share core secondary identities typically struggled to integrate – exhibiting lower performance, greater disciplinary issues, and higher desertion rates proportionate to their ideological dissonance.[28] Bartov has even gone so far as to claim that in some cases, shared political ideology provided the only glue that held primary groups

[26] Siebold, "Essence of Military Group Cohesion," 288. On socialization, see Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Socialization and Violence: Introduction and Framework," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 5 (September 2017): 592-605; Nachman Ben-Yehuda, "The Masada Mythical Narrative and the Israeli Army," in *The Military and Militarism in Israeli Society*, eds. Edna Lomsky-Feder and Eyal Ben-Ari, 57-88 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (New York: Basic Books, 1999): John H. Faris, "The Impact of Basic Combat Training: The Role of the Drill-Sergeant in the All-Volunteer Army," *Armed Forces & Society* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1975): 115-27.

[27] Barry R. Posen, "Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power," *International Security* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 80-124; John A. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791-94* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Michael J. Hughes, *Forging Napoleon's Grande Armée: Motivation, Military Culture and Masculinity in the French Army, 1800-1808* (New York: New York UP, 2012); Antulio J. Echevarria, "Combat and Cohesion in the Early Twentieth-Century: Strengthening the Inverted Pyramid," in *Frontline: Combat and Cohesion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Anthony King (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), 119-133.

[28] Alexander Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland: The Polish Minority in the German Army, 1914-1918," *English Historical Review* 126, no. 552 (September 2011): 1137-66; Claus Bundgård Christensen, "National Identity and Veteran Culture in a Border Region: The Danish Minority in the German Army during the First World War," *War in History* 27, no. 1 (January 2020): 57-80; Alan Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters: The Army and French Society during the Revolution and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001).

together.[29] Moreover, political motivation remains central to primary group bonding among many contemporary non-state and non-Western combatants, as new research has highlighted.[30] In eastern Ukraine, for example, volunteer militias proved more reliable than regular conscript units during the initial fighting against pro-Russian secessionists. Although some volunteer battalions later developed unsavoury associations with neo-fascist ideology, many were underpinned by a sense of Ukrainian nationalism, and relied on popular patriotism to 'crowdfund' equipment, rations and logistical support.[31] Similarly, Peshmerga fighters are united by a shared Kurdish identity in their ongoing fight against Islamic State, with 73 percent of surveyed Peshmerga describing themselves as "fighting for Kurdistan", and 88 percent having joined to defend their homeland. While many units remain directly affiliated to Kurdish political parties, which retain political offices in Peshmerga camps, Peshmerga fighters also define their collective identity in relation to non-Kurdish out-groups and a shared history of national resistance.[32]

Recently, an alternate understanding of military cohesion, known as 'task cohesion', has challenged social cohesion's emphasis on inter-personal primary group bonding. Sociologists like Anthony King have argued that in highly-trained and functionally-specialised armed

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[29] Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992). Also, Sönke Neitzel, and Harald Welzer. *Soldaten: On Fighting, Killing and Dying - The Secret Second World War Tapes of German POWs* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

[30] Käihkö, "Broadening the Perspective"; Barkawi, "Subaltern Soldiers"; Verweijen, "Soldiers Without an Army?"; Lounsbery, "Rebel Group Cohesion"; Nilsson, "Primary Unit Cohesion"; Hansen, "Unity under Allah?".

[31] Rosaria Puglisi, "General Zhukov and the Cyborgs: A Clash of Civilisation within the Ukrainian Armed Forces", *Istituto Affari Internazionali Working Paper* 17, no. 17 (2015): 1-22, http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiwp1517.pdf; Rosaria Puglisi, "Heroes or Villains? Volunteer Battalions in Post-Maidan Ukraine," *Istituto Affari Internazionali Working Papers* 15, no. 8 (2015): 1-20, http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiwp1508.pdf; Ilmari Käihkö, "A Nation-in-the-Making, in Arms: Control of Force, Strategy and the Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions," *Defence Studies* 18, no. 2 (April 2018): 147-66; Montana Hunter, "Crowdsourced War: The Political and Military Implications of Ukraine's Volunteer Battalions 2014-2015," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 18, no. 3 (April 2018): 78-124.

[32] Matthew Franklin Cancian, and Kristin E. Fabbe, "What Iraq's Kurdish Peshmerga Believe," *Foreign Affairs*, August 25, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2017-08-25/what-iraqs-kurdish-peshmerga-believe/; Nilsson, "Primary Unit Cohesion," 6-9.

forces, high levels of collective training produce an alternate military ethos, in which primary group membership is contingent not on inter-personal bonding, but on soldiers' functional competence and performance in role. These task-focused "professional" identities underpin the development of high levels of military effectiveness, but also reduce the salience of both inter-personal sociability and wider social values in the production of resilient military organisations. In the West, these professional identities epitomise the Huntingtonian vision of independent yet politically subordinate armed forces, while simultaneously allowing the recruitment of increasingly diverse social demographics.[33] But absent these profound levels of professionalism (and, by implication, the settled civil-military relations on which they rest), and armies must rely on shared societal norms and political identities to underpin primary group motivation – or else fall back on draconian discipline.[34] Task cohesion thus rejects the explanatory power of inter-personal bonding presented by social cohesion theory, at least in highly-trained and functionally-orientated "professional" armies. Elsewhere, though, and primary group bonding is expected to remain central to cohesion – but will ultimately be conditioned by extra-military factors.

[33] King, "Beyond the Primary Group Thesis"; Anthony King, *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013); Anthony King, "The Word of Command: Communication and Cohesion in the Military," *Armed Forces & Society* 32, no. 4 (July 2006): 493-512; Eyal Ben-Ari, Zeev Lerer, Uzi Ben-Shalom, and Ariel Vainer, *Rethinking Contemporary Warfare: A Sociological View of the Al-Aqsa Intifada* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010). On debate over professionalism, cohesion and diversity, see Anthony King, "Women Warriors: Female Accession to Ground Combat," *Armed Forces & Society* 41, no. 2 (April 2015): 379-387; Leonard Wong, Thomas A. Kolditz, Raymond A. Millen, and Terrence M. Potter, *Why they Fight: Combat Motivation in the Iraq War* (Carlisle, Pa: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2003), 17-23; Robert J. MacCoun, Elizabeth Kier, and Aaron Belkin, "Does Social Cohesion Determine Motivation in Combat? An Old Question with an Old Answer," *Armed Forces & Society* 32, no. 4 (July 2006): 646-654; Leonard Wong, "Combat Motivation in Today's Soldiers," *Armed Forces & Society* 32, no. 4 (July 2006): 659-663.

[34] Anthony King, "Discipline and Punish: Encouraging Combat Performance in the Citizen and Professional Army," in *Frontline: Combat and Cohesion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Anthony King (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), 93-115. On these trends more generally, see Charles C. Moskos, "Institutional/Occupational Trends in Armed Forces: An Update," *Armed Forces & Society* 12, no. 3 (Spring 1986): 377-382; Charles C. Moskos, John Allen Williams, and David R. Segal, eds. *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces after the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000).

Nonetheless, the extent to which societal and political diversity impedes the formation of social cohesion remains contested. Bartov's description of political ideology in the Wehrmacht has, for example, been dismissed for methodologically underestimating the endurance of primary group bonds, while recent attempts to include macro-level factors like national identity in cohesion research have also been resisted.[35] Advocates of social cohesion contend that alternate task-based models confuse cohesion with collective action, while scholars of task cohesion maintain that the "standard model" is really about military motivation, not cohesion.[36] To a certain extent, these two schools talk past each-other, and the concepts of social and task cohesion may not be completely inimical.[37] That said, the debate is more than mere semantics; the two constructs present radically different implications for socio-political diversity on military groups. According to task cohesion, professional soldiers fight to maintain their status as soldiers, and can do so only by continuing to *perform* as such in their own eyes and the eyes of other soldiers. Conversely, citizen soldiers fight out of obligation to their mates, and to conform with societal expectations, and ultimately, because the army makes them. According to social cohesion, however, all soldiers fight primarily for their mates – and mates are mates because the military institution makes them so, rather than because they share important pre-existing social or political attributes that condition primary group bonding.

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[35] King, *Combat Soldier*, 87; Guy L. Siebold, "New Body of Cohesion Research at a Macrolevel", *Armed Forces & Society* online first (2018): 1-7; cf. Ilmari Käihkö and Peter Haldén, "Full-Spectrum Social Science for a Broader View on Cohesion," *Armed Forces & Society* online first (2019): 1-6.

[36] Siebold, "Essence of Military Group Cohesion"; Anthony King, "The Existence of Group Cohesion in the Armed Forces: A Response to Guy Siebold," *Armed Forces & Society* 33, no. 4 (July 2007): 638-645; James Griffith, "Further Considerations Concerning the Cohesion-Performance Relation in Military Settings," *Armed Forces & Society* 34, no. 1 (October 2007): 138-147; Guy L. Siebold, "The Misconceived Construct of Task Cohesion," *Armed Forces & Society* 41, no. 1 (January 2015): 163-7; Guy L. Siebold, Tyler Crabb, Rachel Woodward, and Anthony C. King, "Combat, Cohesion, and Controversy: Disputatio Sine Fine," *Armed Forces & Society* 24, no. 2 (April 2016): 449-462.

[37] See Patrick Bury and Anthony King, "A Profession of Love: Cohesion in a British platoon in Afghanistan," in *Frontline: Combat and Cohesion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Anthony King (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), 200-15.

If the dominant paradigm of social cohesion holds, the quality of primary group interactions will be substantially determined by the managerial practices of the military institution, which displace antagonistic societal identities by socializing soldiers with new, specifically military identities. When applied to military integration, social cohesion thus provides the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis A: If military integration produces intermixed primary groups and institutional sources of secondary association, social cohesion will develop regardless of soldiers pre-existing socio-political diversity.

If, conversely, societal and political 'secondary' identities continue to independently shape primary group interactions – irrespective of the quality of programmatic implementation or institutional policies – military integration will struggle to produce cohesive military groups without concomitant shifts in extra-military attitudes. Hence, when applied to military integration, task cohesion's emphasis on collective training and military professionalization in building effective yet socially diverse military organizations provides the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis B: Intermixed primary groups and institutional sources of secondary association will not produce social cohesion, unless military integration is accompanied by a reduction in the political salience of diversity in wider society.

Clarifying this relationship between soldiers' political identities and the formation of cohesion is therefore vital to the conduct of military integration and post-conflict reconstruction; especially as, by definition, primary "group members know each other not just by name, face, and role but as individuals with a history, personality, and attributes beyond those of the position they occupy".[38]

[38] Siebold, "Essence of Military Group Cohesion," 289.

Examining Cohesion During Military Integration

Existing literature thus provides two mutually exclusive theoretical claims about the relationship between political identities and military cohesion, with direct and rival implications for the conduct of post-conflict military integration. In order to examine this relationship between socio-political identities and post-conflict military cohesion, a single case study is adopted: the Military Re-Integration Programme (MRP) conducted at the end of the civil war in Sierra Leone. This recruited former militia combatants from various antagonistic factions via a dedicated selection process. Successful applicants then undertook basic military training before incorporation into the existing military, which was itself simultaneously retrained and restructured. The MRP in Sierra Leone represents a particularly useful case for studying the impact of post-conflict political identity on military cohesion, as the social and political conditions under which military integration was conducted were unusually propitious. Although Sierra Leone had experienced a brutal civil war, giving rise to exactly the febrile political atmosphere military integration is intended to address, the conflict was not characterised by the intense ethnic or ideological divisions that have presented barriers to military integration elsewhere, as for example in Bosnia. Former combatants integrated into the rebuilt Sierra Leonean armed forces also had good reason to co-operate with the MRP, and little to gain from resistance – unlike in the case of South Sudan and the DRC.[39] Moreover, Sierra Leone is generally viewed as a 'poster-child' for successful post-conflict stabilization, having subsequently transitioned to a multi-party democratic system without significant violence or resumption of hostilities. Indeed, the rebuilt military was praised as one of the few institutions that did not crumble under pressure during the recent

[39] See Alexander B. Downes, "The Problem with Negotiated Settlements to Ethnic Civil Wars," *Security Studies* 13, no. 4 (Summer 2004): 230-279; Valery Perry, "Frozen, Stalled, Stuck, or Just Muddling Through: The Post-Dayton Frozen Conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Asia Europe Journal* 17, no 1 (March 2019): 107-27; Short, "The Orao Affair"; Warner, "Military Integration in South Sudan"; Baaz, and Verweijen, "Conflict Dynamics in the Eastern DRC".

Ebola crisis.[40] The MRP in Sierra Leone thus constitutes a relatively 'easy' test case for the extant theory of social cohesion during military integration, reflecting what Levy calls the inverse Sinatra inference of case study selection: "if I cannot make it there I cannot make it anywhere".[41] Yet, despite these comparatively favourable circumstances, the success of the MRP in Sierra Leone is far from clear. While Kovacs is cautiously positive about the programme's impact on transitional politics, Burgess considers it to have been a failure, at least initially. Instead, existing analyses have typically emphasized the impact of subsequent security sector reforms aimed at military professionalization, over and above the MRP.[42]

Analytically, process tracing is employed deductively to arbitrate between the rival theoretical claims within the case. As Bennett and Checkel note, "the deductive theory-testing side of process tracing examines the observable implications of hypothesized causal mechanisms within a case to test whether a theory on these mechanisms explains the case".[43] Used in this fashion, process tracing employs in-depth description to arbitrate at critical junctures between a theoretically-derived (or 'prior') causal hypothesis and alternative rival explanations. It provides a methodological "armature" around which to structure narrative,

[40] David H. Ucko, "Can Limited Intervention Work? Lessons from Britain's Success Story in Sierra Leone," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 39, no. 5-6 (2016): 847-877; Kieran Mitton, "Where is the War? Explaining Peace in Sierra Leone," *International Peacekeeping* 20, no. 3 (June 2013): 321-37; Ashlee Godwin and Cathy Haenlein, "Learning From Ebola in Sierra Leone," *RUSI Newsbrief*, January 26, 2015, https://rusi.org/publication/newsbrief/learning-ebola-sierra-leone/.

[41] Easy tests follow the logic of 'most likely' case study selection, but make no claim to represent the *absolute* best possible circumstances available in the wider universe of potential cases. David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 4 (October 2011): 825-7; Jack S. Levy, "Qualitative Methods in International Relations," in *Millennial Reflections on International Studies*, ed. Michael Brecher and Frank P. Harvey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 442.

[42] Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs, "Bringing the Good, the Bad and the Ugly into the Peace Fold: The Republic of Sierra Leone's Armed Forces after the Lomé Peace Agreement," in *New Armies from Old: Merging Competing Military Forces after Civil Wars*, ed. Roy Licklider (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 2014), 195-212; Burgess, "Fashioning Integrated Security Forces"; Peter Albrecht and Paul Jackson, *Security System Transformation in Sierra Leone, 1997-2007* (Birmingham: Global Facilitation Network for Security Sector Reform, 2009); Peter Albrecht and Paul Jackson, *Securing Sierra Leone 1997-2013: Defence, Diplomacy and Development in Action* (London: Routledge, 2014).

[43] Andrew Bennett, and Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Process Tracing," in *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*, eds. Andrew Bennett, and Jeffrey T. Checkel (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), 7-8.

allowing the researcher to "assess not merely the presence or absence of an antecedent but the logic of the association between antecedents and outcomes" in context.[44] As Collier explains,

> process tracing focuses on the unfolding of events or situations *over time*. Yet grasping this unfolding is impossible if one cannot adequately describe an event or situation *at one point in time*. Hence, the *descriptive* component of process tracing begins not with observing change or sequence, but rather with taking good snapshots at a series of specific moments. To characterize a process, we must be able to characterize key steps in the process, which in turn permits good analysis of change and sequence.[45]

In the case of military integration, social cohesion implies a particular causal pathway that leads to cohesively integrated armed forces. First, integration programmes produce intermixed units and sub-units, down to the small-group level. This then allows mixed primary groups to form, which, providing favourable institutional conditions, bonds soldiers to each other and the military organization. Integration programmes must therefore produce intermixed units, and then ensure the organizational conditions required for primary group bonding, in order to overcome soldiers' antagonistic pre-existing identities. If, however, societal and political identities directly shape primary groups irrespective of organizational practices, then minimally congruent (or at least agnostic or not actively antagonistic) socio-political identities can be seen as a necessary but not sufficient antecedent condition for primary group bonding during military integration.

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[44] Nina Tannenwald, "Process Tracing and Security Studies," *Security Studies* 24, no. 2 (April 2015): 227; Pascal Vennesson and Ina Wiesner, "Process Tracing in Case Studies," in *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Military Studies*, ed. Joseph Soeters, Patricia M. Shields and Sebastiaan Rietjens (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 95.

[45] Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," 824.

In line with the Siebold's description of trust and teamwork as the "essence" of primary group bonding, social cohesion can be operationalized through the level of trust and co-operation displayed between soldiers of different wartime backgrounds, and by the quality of the relationship between soldiers of various backgrounds and the military institution.[46] If wartime affiliations gradually become irrelevant, having little bearing on interactions between factions in the military either at group or organizational levels, then soldiers' diverse pre-existing socio-political identities will have had no impact on cohesion dynamics. If, conversely, soldiers continue to be judged according to their wartime background, to the detriment of teamwork and trust within units or the interactions between those soldiers and the military institution, then factional wartime affiliations will have directly impeded the development of military cohesion. Hence, the presence of diverse socio-political identities within a military organization does not itself indicate a lack of cohesion; rather, soldiers' inability to trust or co-operate with soldiers possessing a different social or political background *because* of those differences does – particularly if the theorised determinants of social cohesion are otherwise present.

As a result, a qualitative approach to the collection evidence has been adopted. Although quantitative measures of primary group cohesion do exist, these typically rely on questionnaires to provide a snapshot of dynamics at the time the survey is administered, and so are unsuitable in a historical case.[47] Instead, qualitative research can be a particularly useful way to "unravel the chronological flow and see which events led to which consequences and derive fruitful explanations".[48] In past research, observations have been

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[46] Siebold, "Essence of Military Group Cohesion," 288.

[47] See Siebold and Kelly, *Platoon Cohesion Index*; Griffith, "Measurement of Group Cohesion".

[48] Sebastiaan Rietjens, "Qualitative Data Analysis: Seeing Patterns in the Fog of Civil-Military Interactions," in *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Military Studies*, ed. Joseph Soeters, Patricia M. Shields and Sebastiaan Rietjens (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 130.

used to provide a qualitative evidence base for the analysis of cohesion dynamics, augmented by participant interviews and documentary material.[49] While conducting fresh observations in a retrospective case study is impossible, the cohesion dynamics in Sierra Leonean units were observed by a third party at the time: the International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT). IMATT was established by the British military at the end of the civil war, rationalising the operational support provided by the UK during the conflict. It was intended to provide technical assistance to reform the Sierra Leonean military, as part of the UK's commitment to democratic transition and post-conflict stabilisation. Although also staffed by military officers from as far afield as Canada and the US, it was a British-led and run organization. IMATT was also tasked with administering aspects of the MRP. Interviewing IMATT officers can therefore shed light on historic cohesion dynamics in the Sierra Leonean military, while also providing evidence on the institutional processes employed to conduct integration.

The use of interviews with IMATT officers raises a number of potential concerns. Firstly, objections might be raised as to the reliability of the evidence provided. Memory can be fallible, and is often subconsciously shaped by personal biases and subsequent experience; especially a decade or more after events. Moreover, IMATT's active involvement in the process of integration might serve to prejudice participants' impartiality. Interviewees might be inclined to conceal personal or collective failings and inflate successes, or otherwise self-censor in order to protect public reputations and oblige the interviewer.[50] However, this danger can be mitigated through the application of robust analysis procedures, and in particular, triangulation across interviews and cross-referencing between different types of

[49] See King, *Combat Soldier*; King, "Beyond the Primary Group Thesis".
[50] See Glenn Beamer, "Elite Interviews and State Politics Research," *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 86-96.

source in order to establish the veracity of participants' accounts.[51] Accordingly, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted, comprising 22 former or serving British officers, ranging in rank from Captain to Brigadier (one-star general officer) at the time of their deployment to Sierra Leone, together with three deployed civil servants. All participation was voluntary and based on the principle of informed consent; some participants have been anonymised accordingly. In order to facilitate triangulation, interview transcripts were coded thematically using NVIVO software, which is widely used to segment and compare qualitative material at scale.[52] This process was reinforced by the use of secondary sources and documentary material to cross-reference interviews. Here, published Sierra Leonean accounts were employed wherever possible, partially offsetting the absence of a local 'voice' in participant interviews. Nonetheless, while IMATT interviews can provide good evidence for Sierra Leonean military behaviour, their limitations in accessing local beliefs and self-conceptions must also be acknowledged.

Secondly, it might be questioned whether which British officers, even at the time, were genuinely aware of cohesion dynamics in Sierra Leonean units. With this in mind, participants were purposively-selected to cover the duration of IMATT's existence in Sierra Leone, on the basis of their purview over the military reform process; either by virtue of their direct involvement with the MRP, or according to their role as embedded advisors overseeing the Sierra Leonean military hierarchy's management of the force. Admittedly, assignments to IMATT ranged from a few months to two years, implicitly limiting foreign officers' familiarity with the nuances of Sierra Leonean society. As one senior British officer remarked, "it was very difficult for an outsider to know exactly the backgrounds of all those

[51] See John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches, Second Edition* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003), 196.

[52] For more information, see "What is NVivo?" at https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/what-is-nvivo/.

individuals",[53] while another conceded that "a Sierra Leonean would recognise where another Sierra Leonean was from based on his accent and his appearance in a way that I couldn't".[54] By the same token, however, the rotational nature of IMATT postings equally provides a series of discrete participant observations substantially uncoloured by personal involvement in prior (and in many cases, subsequent) events. In the words of a senior IMATT officer, "it wasn't my role to judge people on the basis of their role during the civil war. It was my role to use the army to do a job".[55] Thus, as King has argued with the use of comparable published recollections, such material "must be treated with care, but they should not be dismissed per se as evidence".[56]

This article now turns to the MRP in Sierra Leone as a case study in cohesion during military integration. First, a brief overview of the Sierra Leonean civil war is provided, outlining the conditions under which military integration was conducted and underlining its selection as an 'easy' case. The MRP is then examined in detail, to assess the extent to which formal incorporation produced integrated primary groups, and the immediate impact on trust and co-operation. Next, the analysis turns to the organizational and institutional processes employed to support primary group bonding, discussing their effect on soldiers' interactions and identities. As will be seen, the MRP in Sierra Leone did succeeded in creating integrated units, supported by widespread reforms to military administrative, organizational and career processes. However, military identities continued to be heavily embedded in unreformed societal constructs, perpetuating wartime divisions and complicating primary group cohesion.

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[53] Brigadier (retd.) I. Cholerton (Commander IMATT, 2007), interview with author, July 16, 2015.

[54] British Officer 'B' (Served in Sierra Leone, 2002-3, 2005-6, 2012-14), interview with author, June 14, 2015.

[55] British Officer 'G' (Served in Sierra Leone, 2001-2), interview with author, September 21, 2015.

[56] Anthony King, "The Special Air Service and the Concentration of Military Power," *Armed Forces & Society* 5, no. 4 (July 2009): 648-9; also, Beamer, "Elite Interviews".

Accordingly, the paper concludes that in the integrated post-war army, cohesion was conditioned by politics.

Sierra Leone as a Case Study in Military Integration

In 1991, the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) crossed the border from Liberia, initiating the Sierra Leonean civil war. The RUF initially made rapid gains, spurred on by discontent at the country's economic collapse under President Momoh's northern-backed All People's Congress (APC) one-party dictatorship. Nonetheless, the conflict soon descended into a protracted insurgency, leading to Momoh's overthrow by disgruntled junior officers. The ensuing military junta proved no more able to combat the insurgency, however, first calling in Nigerian troops and then South African mercenaries to bail it out.[57] This resulted in a military stalemate, with both sides forced to accept an internationally-brokered peace deal. Democracy tentatively returned, heralding the election of President Kabbah from the southern-backed Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). Unfortunately, as the mercenaries departed and UN peacekeepers deployed, the RUF reneged on the peace agreement. With the rebels advancing, rank-and-file soldiers staged a further coup, forcing Kabbah into exile. The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) promptly invited the RUF to share power, jointly sacking the capital, Freetown.[58] Kabbah was eventually restored by the combined efforts of Nigerian troops and "Kamajor" militias from his party's southern heartlands, later formalised as the Civil Defence Forces (CDF). However, government writ did not extend much beyond the capital, and the insurgency continued – exacerbated by rebel ex-army militias.

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[57] See Jimmy D. Kandeh, "What does the 'Militariat' do when it Rules? Military Regimes: The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia," *Review of African Political Economy* 23, no. 69 (September 1996): 387-404; David Shearer, *Private Armies and Military Intervention*, Adelpi Paper 316 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998).

[58] Lansana Gberie, "The May 25 Coup d'Etat in Sierra Leone: A Militariat Revolt?" *Africa Development* 22, no. 3/4 (1997): 149-70; Steve Riley, "Sierra Leone: The Militariat Strikes Again," *Review of African Political Economy* 24, no. 72 (1997): 287-92.

In 1999, Kabbah and the RUF entered into a further internationally-sponsored power-sharing agreement; this time, with provision for a new integrated army. The Lomé Agreement sought to stabilise Kabbah's reinstated government by providing RUF leader Foday Sankoh with a political office. It also envisaged the demobilisation and disarmament of the Sierra Leone Army, RUF and CDF, prior to the formation of a new military recruited from combatants of all wartime factions. Between October 1999 and April 2000, the UN established nine "Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Re-integration" (DDR) centres, and collected some 12,500 weapons from former fighters. However, political commitment to the scheme was lukewarm on all sides, and many of the weapons handed over were sub-standard, prompting concerns that the better equipment was being secretly retained. In early 2000, the programme acted as a catalyst for the collapse of peace, after RUF commanders tried to forcibly reclaim their members from UN-run demobilisation camps, claiming that they were deserters.[59] The RUF then reneged on the peace agreement and again resumed hostilities. This time, British troops deployed to prop-up the beleaguered UN peacekeepers, hastily re-equipping the loyalist remnants of the partially-disarmed Sierra Leonean military and mentoring them to fight the advancing rebels.[60] By early 2001, the linked UN disarmament and MRP programmes were able to resume, following a series of cease-fire agreements between the RUF and the Government of Sierra Leone – themselves facilitated by the RUF's much deteriorated military position.

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[59] Eric G. Berman, *Re-Armament in Sierra Leone: One Year after the Lomé Peace Agreement*. Occasional Paper 1 (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2000); International Crisis Group, *Sierra Leone after Elections: Politics as Usual?* Africa Report 49 (Freetown/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2002).

[60] Paul Williams, "Fighting for Freetown: British Military Intervention in Sierra Leone," *Contemporary Security Policy* 22, no. 3 (December 2001): 140-168; Andrew M. Dorman, *Blair's Successful War: British Military Intervention in Sierra Leone* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

The restarted MRP focused on integrating former RUF and CDF fighters into the loyalist shell of the Sierra Leone Army, which was itself reconstituted as the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). Entire Sierra Leonean battalions underwent basic retraining courses run by the British, mirroring the initial training run for MRP entrants, while RSLAF units continued to be mentored by IMATT even after the fighting ended. These regularization activities were subsequently guided by IMATT's formal vision for the future of the RSLAF, known as "Plan 2010". Released in 2004, Plan 2010 provided the first structured roadmap for defence reform. To a certain extent, this codified the various strands of IMATT activity already underway. Following the country's first post-war Defence White Paper, however, Plan 2010's purview could also extend beyond the immediate regularization of the force to include issues of long-term financial sustainability. This resulted in a series of redundancy tranches aimed at downsizing the RSLAF's wartime strength to a more affordable establishment, beginning tentatively in 2004, alongside an ambition to deploy RSLAF troops on Peace Support Operations.[61] Nonetheless, the RSLAF's post-war resource based remained low, precluding the kind of intensive, functionally-orientated collective training considered essential to the development of task cohesion.

<INSERT TABLE 1: TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS HERE>

During the war, each of the factions involved in the MRP had displayed distinct socio-political identities. The RUF had initially claimed to pursue a revolutionary ideology based around Ghaddafi's *Green Book*, and RUF leaders like Foday Sankoh (himself a former Sierra Leonean soldier) had been schooled in Libya. As the war progressed, however, the movement developed its own distinct rebel counter-culture, based around opposition to traditional social

[61] Albrecht and Jackson, *Security System Transformation*, 97-105; Albrecht and Jackson, *Securing Sierra Leone*, 28-34.

hierarchies and values. This was typically inculcated through complicity in atrocity – often directed against family or village members – which served to break alternate social ties and preclude return to pre-existing communities.[62] The CDF developed in response to this violence, initially as local self-defence militias drawn from the southern Mende-speaking communities living in the warzone. It was broadly aligned to the SLPP government, and the movement's titular leader, Chief Hinga Norman, served as Kabbah's Deputy Defence Minister. However, there was little love lost between the CDF and the regular military, and during the war CDF groups conducted at least one full-scale attack against an army headquarters. For its part, the army at one point issued orders to shoot CDF militiamen on sight.[63] Indeed, Sierra Leonean soldiers gained the nickname "sobel" during the conflict – a contraction of soldier-rebel – owing to their predatory and self-serving behaviours. The military itself had slowly fragmented during successive wartime coups, with elements breaking away to form independent militias. The remaining rump of the army was similarly divided between so-called loyalist (pro-Kabbah) and rebel (former AFRC) factions.[64]

While the MRP in Sierra Leone was therefore subject to the factional security dilemmas and febrile politics inherent to transitional post-conflict environments, the situation was nonetheless unusually conducive to military integration. Firstly, the ethnic and ideological differences between the warring factions were relatively limited, and essentialist ethnic dynamics were not predominant. Indeed, the majority of combatants on all sides were drawn from the same social strata of disenfranchised young men, and there was little profound

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[62] Chris Coulter, *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women's Lives Through War and Peace in Sierra Leone* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 95-153; David Keen, *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), 36-9, 56-81.

[63] Danny Hoffman, *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 42-3; Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*, 199-200.

[64] Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*; Mats Utas and Magnus Jörgel, "The West Side Boys: Military Navigation in the Sierra Leone Civil War," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 46, no. 3 (September 2008): 487-511. See also Lansana Gberie and Peter Penfold, "An Interview with Peter Penfold," *African Affairs* 104, no. 414 (January 2005): 117-125.

ideological dissonance between the factions.[65] In the case of the Sierra Leone Army, for example, British officers later concluded that whether a soldier became a loyalist or a rebel was often simply an accident of the unit he served in at the time.[66] Indeed, in common with the wider Mano River Basin area, political identity in Sierra Leone is layered and fluid. Political power is typically exercised via patrimonial transactions, in which 'big men' provide personal or collective favours to their followers in return for political support. Typically, patrimonial relationships develop along ethnic, tribal or kinship lines, and party politics in Sierra Leone largely mirrors the country's major ethno-linguistic and geographical divisions, with northern Temne-speaking groups historically favouring the APC and southern Mende-speaking groups inclined to the SLPP. However, such relationships are rarely static or essentialist, and clients may court several patrons at once, or shift between 'big men' to further their own interests. Intermarriage between ethnic and religious groups is also relatively common in Sierra Leone, meaning individuals often possess layered identities, deploying particular social affiliations at different times according to context.[67]

Secondly, there were also compelling reasons for each faction to make integration work. As Mitton notes, war weariness pervaded civil society *and* combatant factions on all sides.[68] The RUF had been soundly defeated by the end of the civil war, providing limited scope for further recalcitrance, while their history of atrocity made the MRP appear relatively attractive

[65] Krijn Peters, *War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 22-31; Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*, 102-5; see also, Hoffman, *War Machines*.

[66] Colonel (retd.) M. Dent (IMATT advisor to the Sierra Leonean MOD, 2000-2), interview with author, November 20, 2015; Major General (retd.) J. Thomas (British Chief-of-Staff embedded in Sierra Leonean Defence HQ in 2000), interview with author, January 13, 2015.

[67] Magnus Jörgel and Mats Utas, *The Mano River Basin Area: Formal and Informal Security Providers in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2007), 6-15; Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008); Morten Bøås, "Liberia and Sierra Leone: Dead Ringers? The Logic of Neopatrimonial Rule," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 5 (October 2001): 697-701; also, Allen M. Howard and David E. Skinner, "Network Building and Political Power in Northwestern Sierra Leone, 1800-65," *Africa* 54, no. 2 (April 1984): 2-28.

[68] Kieran Mitton, "Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Sierra Leone Case Study," Stabilisation Unit Report, February 2018, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elite-bargains-and-political-deals/.

in comparison with civilian reintegration. The army too had been thoroughly delegitimized in the eyes of wider civil society; both by its own predatory wartime behaviours, and its repeated inability to independently secure the country against the RUF. Although the rebels were eventually defeated following significant international intervention, the army's professional incapacity and institutional decline limited its ability to outwardly resist an MRP backed by the weight of international mandate. Finally, the CDF was largely composed of local militias aligned to the SLPP government, and for his part, President Kabbah was persuaded that their integration into the army was necessary and desirable. Moreover, as Hoffman has highlighted, the CDF was essentially a militarized social network rather than a distinct formal organization.[69] This comparatively propitious context helps explain why a relatively high degree of military integration was aimed at, with CDF and RUF combatants being incorporated into the RSLAF on an individual basis rather than by formed units or under a quota system.

Camps and Cohesion: The MRP and Primary Group Integration

If the circumstances surrounding integration were relatively favourable, to what extent did the MRP itself facilitate incorporation at the primary group level? Did the formal process of inclusion succeed in creating cohesively integrated primary groups, as demonstrated by mutual trust and co-operation between the intermingled soldiers, irrespective of their previous wartime affiliation? This section examines the conduct of the MRP, from the selection of entrants and their initial training through to incorporation into the RSLAF. It will assess both

[69] Danny Hoffman, "The Meaning of a Militia: Understanding the Civil Defence Forces of Sierra Leone," *African Affairs* 106, no. 425 (October 2007): 639-62. A plan was initially drawn up to convert the CDF into a "Territorial Defence Force" along the lines of an Army Reserve, likely as a means of retaining control of former CDF militiamen who continued to maintain shadow command structures even after demobilization, but the idea was never put into effect. See International Crisis Group, *Sierra Leone after Elections*, 11-12; International Crisis Group, *Sierra Leone: The State of Security and Governance*. Africa Report 67 (Freetown/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2003).

the cohesion outcomes resulting from the programme, and the extent to which the implementation of the MRP process was conducive to primary group integration, according to the theoretical expectations of social cohesion. Practically, the MRP was to be achieved in three phases. First, volunteers from the UN demobilisation scheme were assessed during a selection process. Successful applicants then completed a period of initial training with the RSLAF, before being posted to operational units. Each element of this process will now be examined in turn.

The MRP was re-established in 2001 as a corollary to the wider UN-run DDR programme. Former combatants from the RUF and CDF volunteered to join the MRP after entering the UN demobilisation scheme. In return for handing in a weapon, combatants would receive an ID card and the option of either entering the MRP selection process, or a cash payment and skills training as a pre-cursor to re-joining civilian life. The system was open to abuse, however, and a number of combatants arrived directly at the MRP selection centre at Kabata Junction still armed.[70] The process of assessing MRP volunteers' suitability for integration into the RSLAF was largely conducted by British officers from IMATT. Indeed, British involvement with the scheme was key to convincing President Kabbah that military re-integration would support political stability, rather than undermine it as previous attempts had done. In order to legitimate the MRP, candidate selections were confirmed by a panel of UN officers on a weekly basis, though the British remained firmly in the driving seat.[71] During the selection process, volunteers were screened for suitability at Kabata Junction. Hopefuls were required to complete a mile and a half run, a written test, and were interviewed by a

[70] Lieutenant Colonel (retd.) J. Stadward (MRP selection officer at Kabata Junction, 2001), interview with author, September 8, 2015; Brigadier (retd.) B. Le Grys (Served with UNAMSIL, 2001, and Commander IMATT, 2006), interview with author, July 24, 2015.

[71] Dent, interview with author; M. White (DFID programme manager, 2004-6), interview with author, July 17, 2015.

British officer. Candidates were then ranked using a points system, which determined if they were accepted for military integration and whether they would enter the scheme as potential soldiers, NCOs, or commissioned officers.[72] To ensure confidence and transparency, the RUF and CDF both provided liaison officers to observe the process and assist with the management of former combatants.[73] Successful applicants then moved to holding camps at Lungi and Mape, before undergoing formal military training at the RSLAF's Benguema camp.[74] On completion of initial training, the successful entrants were then posted to RSLAF units, with the final course ending in May 2002.

The conduct of the selection process was intended to build trust through co-operation at the primary group level. IMATT interpreted formal selection criteria liberally, instead focusing on candidates' willingness to work together. At the selection centre at Kabata Junction, volunteers from the RUF and CDF were intermingled to form syndicates of 30, accommodated together, and treated identically. The first question on the written test required applicants to write their name; anyone unable to do this was automatically disbarred. However, Major Stadward, who ran the selection process, was less interested in whether candidates were genuinely literate than whether they were willing to co-operate in order to make a pretence at the minimum standard. He took the view that those unable to write their name in the written test were unsuitable for integration, not because they were illiterate *per se*, but because they had failed to learn how to *draw* their name from other candidates in their syndicate. Similarly, many candidates had evidently picked up much of their military

[72] Stadward, interview with author.

[73] Stadward, interview with author; M. Dent, "Sierra Leone Background Brief," Unpublished IMATT Briefing Document, July 24, 2002, 27; Albrecht and Jackson, *Security System Transformation*, 65-7.

[74] Initially recruits were only screened at Kabata Junction and then formally assessed at Lungi, but from October 2001 all assessment took place at Kabata Junction to reduce the manpower burden on IMATT. The camp at Lungi was then used to accommodate entrants prior to military training, and provided a degree of citizenship education and vocational training. Stadward, interview with author; Dent, "Sierra Leone Background Brief": 27-8.

knowledge from other applicants, in the hope of improving their chances. Candidates could typically explain the rough concept of an ambush, for example, but struggled to demonstrate sufficient depth of understanding to convince Stadward that they had ever actually conducted one. Yet this mattered little; the fact that they had sought help from others in their syndicate demonstrated the required willingness to integrate. Indeed, Stadward made it known that the more candidates from a syndicate that passed, the more favourably the whole syndicate would be judged. This was manifestly untrue; each candidate was scored on individual merit, but the rumour encouraged co-operation rather than competition.[75] Pass rates at selection were correspondingly high, varying by cohort from 50 to 90 percent, with an overall average of 80 percent.[76]

This approach was maintained during initial training. The first course for MRP soldiers began in October 2001, and saw 889 new entrants from the MRP jointly trained by British and RSLAF instructors. Former CDF and RUF members went through initial training together, while potential officers were commissioned on integrated courses alongside new civilian recruits and officer cadets from the existing army. At nine weeks, the training courses run for MRP soldier entrants were 50 percent longer than equivalent re-training programmes run by the British for existing Sierra Leonean soldiers; a fact that likely reflects the increased concerns around MRP entrants' political reliability, as well as their lower levels of pre-existing military skill.[77] Indeed, the training process was viewed by IMATT as an opportunity to build a new military identity among MRP entrants. As successful candidates left Kabata Junction, Stadward recalled how:

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[75] Stadward, interview with author.

[76] Dent, "Sierra Leone Background Brief": 28; Albrecht and Jackson, *Security System Transformation*, 66; Stadward, interview with author.

[77] Dent, "Sierra Leone Background Brief"; Stadward, interview with author.

> I always did a little…thing when they were getting on the buses at the end, and said:
>
> 'Who here CDF?'
>
> '*Aaaay!*'
>
> 'Who here RUF?'
>
> '*Aaaay!*'
>
> 'No! Nobody here is CDF or RUF. What are you?'
>
> And they'd think and go '*RSLAF!*' and you know, that was it; you're now in the army. We were trying this cohesion from the very beginning. Forget who you are, forget who you were, forget what you've done: you're in the army now.[78]

New entrants subsequently received citizenship classes in literacy, history and human rights while in holding camps, prior to the start of their training.[79] In all, 98 percent of accepted MRP candidates passed out of initial training, with 56 MRP entrants receiving commissions in the RSLAF officer corps, and a further 290 appointed to NCO ranks.[80]

In principle, therefore, the design and implementation of the MRP appears highly conducive to the production of social cohesion, with significant efforts made to intermix former combatants on equal terms at the primary group level during selection and initial training. Admittedly, this policy was somewhat less successful in posting MRP entrants into the RSLAF. IMATT officers recognised the importance of distributing MRP entrants throughout the force in order to preclude the resurgence of previous wartime cliques. Indeed, it was considered best practice to post all RSLAF soldiers away from their tribal homelands more

[78] Stadward, interview with author.

[79] Stadward, interview with author.

[80] International Crisis Group, *Sierra Leone after Elections*, 9; Dent, "Sierra Leone Background Brief", 28; Albrecht and Jackson, *Security System Transformation*, 66; Stadward, interview with author.

generally, in order to encourage the formation of specifically military identities and discourage the development of local patrimonial ties. However, implementing such mechanisms proved difficult given the low-resource base of the post-war RSLAF. As Brigadier Le Grys, IMATT commander in 2005, later explained, "you can't expect soldiers to start moving across the country at vast expense when they haven't got any money".[81] As a result, soldiers tended to coalesce in particular units, and IMATT officers later acknowledged that one southern battalion consequently gained a reputation as "the RUF battalion".[82] However, this should not automatically be considered inimical to inclusive primary group bonding. While the dispersal of ideologically recalcitrant Polish soldiers was important in Watson's study of cohesion in the Imperial German Army, the simultaneous maintenance of informal 'Danish' enclaves appears to have had some benefits for the management of diversity – something mirrored by contemporary Israeli experience.[83] Moreover, the scale of the MRP still represented a significant shift in RSLAF demographics. In all, 2349 MRP volunteers were ultimately incorporated into an existing army of around 12,500 soldiers, meaning that integrated ex-combatants approached 20 percent of the RSLAF's existing strength. Thus, while the scale of the MRP was significant both for post-conflict transitional politics and the overall composition of the RSLAF, MRP entrants nonetheless remained a minority in most units – even accepting the difficulties of uniformly distributing them throughout the force.[84]

[81] Le Grys, interview with author; also, Brigadier (retd.) D. Santa-Olalla (Commander IMATT, 2005), interview with author, June 29, 2015; Colonel (retd.) J. Martin (Commander IMATT, 2011-13), interview with author, July 21, 2015; Cholerton, interview with author.

[82] British Officer 'D' (Served in Sierra Leone, 2008-9), interview with author, November 24, 2015; British Officer 'E' (Served in Sierra Leone, 2007-9), interview with author, November 26, 2015.

[83] Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland"; Christensen, "National Identity and Veteran Culture"; Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari, "Managing Diversity in Context".

[84] International Crisis Group, *Sierra Leone after Elections*, 9; Dent, "Sierra Leone Background Brief": 28; Albrecht and Jackson, *Security System Transformation*, 66; Stadward, interview with author.

At first, the process of integration appeared to engender a degree of trust among former belligerents. Observing officers repeatedly expressed their surprise at combatants' capacity to co-operate during the programme, in stark contrast to the communal antagonisms many had witnessed on previous assignments in Northern Ireland, Kosovo and Angola.[85] One IMATT officer who visited an MRP camp later recalled how candidates "all looked at each other evilly when you got them in there; 24 hours later they were playing football together and getting on with it, which I just found astonishing".[86] While this might be dismissed as the temporary product of a desire to pass selection, similar dynamics were evident among 'loyalist' and ex-AFRC factions in the existing army. One senior British officer, Colonel Thomas, recalled the case of a 'loyalist' major whose deputy during the latter stages of the civil war had been an AFRC captain: "at first there was a real, sort of, unwillingness to work together, but by the time we left they were working together quite fine. And actually they were getting on together". Thomas likewise observed senior officers who had fought on opposite sides "reminiscing about the old days" over drinks, as if the war had little more than "an unpleasant spat between them".

Yet, these outward displays of trust belied more profound cohesion issues. Behind the scenes, these outwardly friendly officers told Thomas "things about the other one, about why I should never trust them" and "underneath there was always this, you know, 'you were on the opposite side to me', and I think it was probably…too visceral between them at that level".[87] Such behaviours mirror the wider experience of post-conflict transition in Sierra Leone,

[85] British Officer 'A' (Served in Sierra Leone, 2000), interview with author, October 1, 2015; Stadward, interview with author; Thomas, interview with author.
[86] British Officer 'A', interview with author.
[87] Thomas, interview with author.

characterised more by mutual tolerance than genuine forgiveness or forgetting.[88] Beneath the veneer of reconciliation, factional affiliations remained a source of tension and mistrust. As Stadward recalled, there "was a certain degree of funniness" about MRP entrants joining the RSLAF; particularly at the prospect of former rebels becoming NCOs or officers.[89] Indeed, even the extended initial training received by MRP entrants was perceived as evidence of British favouritism by existing soldiers.[90] By 2004, IMATT officers "occasionally heard a comment from somebody, about somebody else, about where they came from", but did not think of this as "a barrier to development of the armed forces".[91] Two years later, though, the IMATT commander continued to note that "one heard from different people that so-and-so had been reintegrated into the RSLAF", but felt that by that point, MRP entrants remained in "such small numbers [that] I don't think it was any longer of relevance".[92] While the MRP did initially succeeded in incorporating former belligerents into the RSLAF, their presence was evidently not welcomed by their new comrades; nor did their wartime affiliations disappear with time. That MRP entrants were an increasingly marginal component of the RSLAF by 2006 raises further questions about the receptivity of the RSLAF's institutional environment. Downsizing certainly proved widely unpopular, and after an initial voluntary tranche (largely comprised of overage, medically unfit and absentee soldiers), subsequent redundancies were necessarily compulsory. By IMATT's reckoning, moreover, the average Sierra Leonean soldier supported up to ten dependants on his RSLAF salary, such that it is hard to believe that many MRP entrants left service voluntarily without good cause – especially given the lack of alternate civilian employment prospects.[93]

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[88] Kieran Mitton, "A Pragmatic Pact: Reconciliation and Reintegration in Sierra Leone," in *Evaluating Transitional Justice: Accountability and Peacebuilding in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone*, eds. Kirsten Ainley, Rebekka Friedman, and Chris Mahony (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 217-240.

[89] Stadward, interview with author.

[90] International Crisis Group, *Sierra Leone after Elections*, 10.

[91] British Officer 'F' (Served in Sierra Leone, 2004-5), interview with author, July 24, 2015.

[92] Santa-Olalla, interview with author.

[93] British Officer 'H' (Served in Sierra Leone, 2010-12), interview with author, October 27, 2015; Cholerton, interview with author; Santa-Olalla, interview with author; Albrecht and Jackson, *Securing Sierra*

Socialization and the Politics of Institutional Belonging in the RSLAF

If the experience of integration did not directly reduce the salience of antagonistic wartime identities for the development of trust in the post-war force, despite some success during the MRP selection and training process, then perhaps the fault lies with the RSLAF's institutional environment. Certainly, the MRP succeeded in incorporating significant numbers of former combatants into the RSLAF, while IMATT simultaneously ensured that existing 'loyalist' and ex-AFRC factions were forced together. Although MRP entrants were not distributed uniformly throughout the force, they were incorporated as individual soldiers rather than by cohort, and significant numbers were also appointed to officer and NCO ranks. Moreover, the process of integration stressed co-operation and trust-building, with a socializing focus on replacing pre-existing identities with a new loyalty to the RSLAF. In order to explain the enduring importance of extraneous identities, despite this intermixing at the primary group level, we must now assess the organizational policies instituted in the RSLAF to facilitate primary group bonding following integration.

The institutional fabric of the military had gradually collapsed during the civil war, such that by the end of the conflict, many administrative policies were inconsistently applied or altogether absent. The IMATT commander in 2003, Brigadier Freer, felt that the "rule of law was fairly rudimentary" in the RSLAF, with discipline having "vacillated between completely ineffectual and overly zealous".[94] Consequently, IMATT strove to regularise the RSLAF's administrative and managerial practices following the conflict, formalised in 2004 under Plan 2010. These institutional reforms formed the cornerstone of British efforts to

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Leone, 79-82; IRIN News, "1,000 Soldiers to be Retired this Year," *The New Humanitarian*, August 14, 2003. http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/45491/sierra-leone-1000-soldiers-be-retired-year.

[94] Interview with Major General (retd.) A. Freer (Commander IMATT, 2002-3), interview with author, July 29, 2015.

regularise the RSLAF, and in principle, should have reinforced horizontal and vertical bonding in the primary group. Indeed, IMATT focused on developing more meritocratic, transparent and accountable formal practices in the RSLAF. Consequently, IMATT ensured that salaries switched from cash to bank payment, reducing misappropriation. Uniform career structures were introduced, creating defined criteria for promotions and appointments based on successful completion of new professional courses, rather than background or affiliation. IMATT equally sought to ensure the RSLAF could live within its means; something essential both to the development of capability, but also the regular and routine operation of internal career and management processes.[95]

However, many of the organizational polices enacted following integration appear to have disproportionately affected MRP entrants. Large numbers of former RUF and CDF soldiers had missed out on formal education during the war, and despite access to remedial courses, struggled to meet the newly increased educational standards.[96] Equally, the wartime habits of many MRP entrants proved to be fundamentally incompatible with military service, leading to higher rates of discharge. As one IMATT officer later recalled:

> more of the RUF and the Kamajor…were given the push, frankly, because the behaviours they exhibited were probably the worst and therefore the most problematic…Initially the thought was…let's try and keep them in if they can be rehabilitated and then we've given them a chance. Some of them were, but some of them were too disturbed, and they had to be discharged.[97]

[95] Albrecht and Jackson, *Security System Transformation*; Albrecht and Jackson, *Securing Sierra Leone*, 19-55.

[96] British Officer 'C' (Served in Sierra Leone, 2004-5), interview with author, October 26, 2015; British Officer 'B', interview with author.

[97] British Officer 'C', interview with author.

Indeed, MRP entrants were only offered one-year initial contracts, and unlike other soldiers, their appointed ranks on entry were considered temporary, subject to review after six months of service.[98] Arguably, the uneven impact of institutional reforms may have encouraged a sense of insecurity among remaining MRP soldiers, perpetuating wartime identities and preventing full integration.

Equally though, the RSLAF had already begun to develop socialization practices designed to promote a common military identity, even before Plan 2010's reforms developed in earnest. In fact, British officers had actively pursued this prior to the MRP, in response to wartime exigencies. Unit mentors had, for example, encouraged various Sierra Leonean battalions to adopt unit songs and nicknames in an attempt to foster pride in soldiers' collective identity. Some battalions had even managed to source unit t-shirts emblazoned with their unit's new slogan. Such methods were seen as necessary means to an end; as one IMATT major later concluded, they were "a bit cheesy…[but] suddenly you had a useable battalion".[99] The RSLAF likewise sought to maintain its military traditions and heritage, as a focus for institutional identity. The force continues to trace its history back to its British colonial origins, maintaining these links through celebrations like Myohaung Day, named after an antecedent Second World War battle honour.[100] Similarly, Colonel Martin, the last IMATT commander, recalled how the RSLAF "had a keen sense of their traditions and history, and were very proud of it", hosting "dining in nights for the new officers, new officer cadets joining" at the RSLAF's Myohaung Mess, inculcating them with the rituals and identity of

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[98] Albrecht and Jackson, *Security System Transformation*, 65-6.

[99] British Officer 'A', interview with author.

[100] Mohamed Konneh, "Sierra Leone: President Kabbah Honours Myohaung Celebrations," *Standard Times*, 27 January 2005, https://allafrica.com/stories/200501311076.html; RSLAF, "Establishment and Development of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF)," Document on Sierra Leone Ministry of Defence Website, http://www.mod.gov.sl/docs/TheHistoryOfRepublicOfSierraLeoneArmedForces-RSLAF.pdf/.

the force in the style of the British military.[101] While institutional regularization may have unevenly affected some MRP entrants, the RSLAF still sought to develop shared military identities to foster bonding among its primary groups even prior to subsequent downsizings.

In fact, the regularization process significantly accounts for subsequent increases in the RSLAF's operational capabilities, culminating in resilient performances during Ebola and on Peace Support Operations. Shortly after the civil war, IMATT mentors were generally unimpressed by the attitude to soldiering presented by RSLAF detachments. Stadward felt that RSLAF border security operations were "better off when they were led by Brits than when they were led by Sierra Leoneans, 'cos the Sierra Leoneans don't really want to do it. It's a bit hard".[102] Brigadier Cholerton, Commander IMATT in 2007, similarly felt that RSLAF detachments only really performed when IMATT was watching, while an IMATT unit mentor likewise concluded that RSLAF operations "fell down unless very quickly there was some form of constant supervision".[103] The re-establishment of the institutional fabric of the RSLAF was therefore essential to the development of a rudimentary expeditionary capability; especially given the limited resources available to the RSLAF for collective training. In 2010, the RSLAF had consolidated sufficiently to make its first foray into peacekeeping as part of UNAMID in Darfur, although sustaining the deployed company still proved logistically fraught. By 2013, however, capabilities had appreciably improved, and RSLAF troops operating in Somalia compared favourably with other national contingents. Indeed, the RSLAF was offered an expanded role in AMISOM in 2014, following the robust performance of its seconded battalion. In the words of one deployed Sierra Leonean, "we fought war, Kenya never did" – a sentiment corroborated by observing British officers.

[101] Martin, interview with author;
[102] Stadward, interview with author.
[103] Cholerton, interview with author; British Officer 'D', interview with author.

Although Ebola curtailed the deployment of follow-on roulements, these troops subsequently formed the backbone of Sierra Leone's domestic pandemic response.[104] Institutional regularization certainly appears to have had some effect in the RSLAF, at least insofar as its operational performance is concerned.

Importantly, though, all RSLAF soldiers continued to embed their military identities in wider societal practices and affiliations, despite the growing strength of the RSLAF as a formal institution. To a certain extent, these practices were relatively inclusive, tied to politically uncontroversial social customs that IMATT was content to condone. Brigadier Le Grys, for example, later recalled how units would:

> take the four tonne trucks, put all the families in their Friday or Sunday best, and go to Mosque or Church, and it was very important to them…Now some of my staff said, 'They shouldn't be using their trucks to go to church, sir, it's bad use of military petrol', but actually, you know what, in terms of cohesion, why not?[105]

In fact, British officers occasionally made use of this relationship for their own instrumental reasons. In order to solicit honesty in the MRP selection tests, for instance, Stadward had perpetuated the belief that he was a witch-doctor, whose lazy eye could see into their souls and tell if they were lying.[106] RSLAF units were also encouraged to conduct regular PT sessions in the public eye, running through local streets in formation wearing combat trousers and white t-shirts. But while such activities helped to improve public perceptions of the RSLAF as a disciplined "force for good", they also reciprocally encouraged the RSLAF to

[104] Quoted in Peter Albrecht and Cathy Haenlein, "Sierra Leone's Post-Conflict Peacekeepers", *RUSI Journal* 160, no. 1 (February 2015): 31; British Officer 'I' (Served in Sierra Leone, 2013-4), interview with author, August 12, 2015; British Officer 'B', interview with author.

[105] Le Grys, interview with author.

[106] Stadward, interview with author.

view itself through societal lenses.[107] Indeed, the RSLAF placed significant emphasis on its military band, which was used as public symbol of military status. Much to the chagrin of IMATT, senior RSLAF officers often exhibited a greater interest in band equipment and ceremonial uniforms than collective training, highlighting the importance of societal image in the RSLAF's organizational priorities.[108] In fact, a prominent IMATT-sponsored barracks building campaign called Operation Pebu floundered after the civil war, in part because the quality of housing it provided fell short of the RSLAF's view of its place in society.[109]

Problematically, wartime identities also remained salient for civil society and party politics in Sierra Leone. With an absence of alternate forms of employment, many demobilized combatants formed urban gangs, known as 'Ghetto Boys', creating a reservoir for political discontent and civil disorder. A notable number appear to have taken up work as motorbike taxis, forming their own biker gangs. Respondents to perception studies conducted in 2005-6 described the latent CDF network and other ex-combatant gangs as significant continuing security issues.[110] Moreover, Sierra Leonean political parties continued to instrumentally exploit these identities for their own political agendas. During the 2007 election cycle, which saw President Kabbah's SLPP lose power to the APC opposition, both parties raised significant party militias from former wartime combatants. The SLPP largely drew on ex-

[107] British Officer 'H', interview with author.

[108] Martin, interview with author;

[109] Aldo Gaeta, "Operation Pebu and the Ministry of Defence," in *Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone 1997 - 2007: Views from the Front Line*, ed. Peter Albrecht and Paul Jackson (Berlin: Lit, 2010), 61-2; Colonel (retd.) P. Stack (IMATT and RSLAF Deputy Joint Force Commander, 2004), interview with author, August 17, 2015; British Officer 'G', interview with author; Le Grys, interview with author; Cholerton, interview with author.

[110] Jörgel and Utas, *Mano River Basin Area*, 44-50; International Crisis Group, *Sierra Leone: The Election Opportunity*, Africa Report No. 129 (Dakar/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2007), 5; Le Grys, interview with author; British Officer 'D', interview with author. See also, Judy Smith-Hoehn, "Public Perceptions of Security in Post-Conflict Urban Liberia and Sierra Leone: Part II – The Aftermath of Withdrawal in Sierra Leone," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 3, no. 2 (2007): 90-6; Maya M. Christensen and Mats Utas, "Mercenaries of Democracy: The 'Politricks' of Remobilized Combatants in the 2007 General Elections, Sierra Leone," *African Affairs* 107, no. 429 (October 2008): 515–539.

army militias like the AFRC and West Side Boys, with the APC recruiting ex-RUF members, while the newer People's Movement for Democratic Change attracted CDF constituencies. Though initially unarmed, party militias quickly adopted firearms and their old wartime customs and rituals, leading to a degree of violence during the election cycle – particularly between the first and second rounds.[111] Reportedly, the (unsuccessful) SLPP presidential candidate even promised to absorb demobilised former soldiers joining his party militia back into the RSLAF, in return for their support during the elections.[112] Indeed, former militiamen from all factions, euphemistically described as 'youth', actively exploited their combatant status to secure an ongoing livelihood. Many former militia leaders deliberately used their wartime networks to carve out a role for themselves as election muscle, becoming influential political brokers in their own right. The RUF has even reinvented itself as a political party, and continues to put up candidates in Sierra Leonean national elections.[113]

The relationship between military and societal identities in the RSLAF ensured that past politics continued to frame primary group bonding, with wartime background viewed as a proxy for allegiances beyond the military institution. For instance, Major General Alfred Nelson-Williams, who retired from the RSLAF as Chief of Defence Staff, later described the MRP as a little more than a naked attempt to introduce pro-SLPP groups (like the CDF) into the military.[114] Such objections might be seen as a defence of the military's professional impartiality in the face of political gerrymandering under an SLPP president; especially given

[111] Jörgel and Utas, *Mano River Basin Area*, 68-70; "Election Violence Hits Sierra Leone: Dozens Injured in Clashes Ahead of Presidential Run-off," *Al Jazeera Online*, September 1, 2007. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2007/09/2008525135028542267.html.

[112] Christensen and Utas, "Mercenaries of Democracy," 528.

[113] Ibid; Mitton, "Where is the War?" 329-32; Kieran Mitton, "Engaging Disengagement: The Political Reintegration of Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front," *Conflict, Security & Development* 8, no. 2 (June 2008): 193-222.

[114] Alfred Nelson-Williams, "Restructuring the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces," in *Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone 1997 - 2007: Views from the Front Line*, ed. Peter Albrecht and Paul Jackson (Berlin: Lit, 2010), 132.

the historic relationship between the ethno-political stacking of the army and coups d'état in Sierra Leone.[115] However, the majority of ex-combatants reintegrated into the RSLAF – 65 percent in all – actually came from the RUF, not the CDF.[116] Rather, such statements must be viewed in the light of the army's own defined political preferences. The first post-war elections held in 2002 revealed a strong preference for APC and ex-AFRC politicians among the embodied security forces.[117] The APC had been the party of government before the war, and the deposed President Momoh had himself been a former general. Though the National Provisional Ruling Council junta that ousted him executed a number of pro-APC officers, and indeed, one of its subsequent leaders is currently Sierra Leone's incumbent SLPP president, contemporary observers nonetheless noted the continuing ties between a number of APC grandees and both wartime military coups.[118] Hence, the post-war tensions between MRP entrants and long-serving soldiers can only be understood in the context of the army's longstanding institutional – and by extension, fundamentally political – preferences.

Tellingly, Major General Nelson-Williams later recalled with some relish how MRP officers were among "the first casualties of the downsizing phase for officers" in 2004 and 2005.[119] For their part, former combatants integrated into the RSLAF repeatedly expressed concern that RSLAF commanders would single them out for redundancy on account of their previous wartime allegiances, and, despite IMATT assurances to the contrary, continued to complain that their careers were being unduly disadvantaged by their previous wartime affiliation as a

[115] See Anton Bebler, *Military Rule in Africa: Dahomey, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Mali* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1973).

[116] International Crisis Group, *Sierra Leone after Elections*, 9; Dent, "Sierra Leone Background Brief," 28; Albrecht and Jackson, *Security System Transformation*, 66.

[117] International Crisis Group, *Sierra Leone after Elections*, 9-10.

[118] Agence France-Presse, "Former Soldier Julius Maada Bio wins Sierra Leone Presidential Election," *The Guardian Online*, April 5, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/05/sierra-leone-election-president-julius-maada-bio-wins/; Gberie, "May 25 Coup d'Etat," 157-8; Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*, 94-6, 197.

[119] Nelson-Williams, "Restructuring," 132.

late as 2012.[120] Moreover, though IMATT was determined to establish fair and meritocratic military processes that did not prejudice any constituent group in the RSLAF, it also sought to hand over day-to-day internal management of the RSLAF to local officers wherever possible, creating scope for the army's old political preferences and prejudices to undermine new socialization and cohesion-building mechanisms. Indeed, many individual IMATT officers found the nature of the wartime atrocities committed by all sides hard to digest, making close working relationships with some local officers a challenge. One British officer later commented that it was "morally uncomfortable working with some of these [RSLAF] officers".[121] Although IMATT did oversee RSLAF disciplinary processes, senior officers were keen not to become embroiled in individual cases. Equally, though IMATT did oversee the selection of candidates for redundancy, it likewise relied on RSLAF officers to provide much of the information on which these processes were based. With specific regard to tensions in the RSLAF resulting from the MRP, one senior British officer later remarked that "we let that run its course. We kept an eye on that situation, but generally it was handled by the Sierra Leonean commanders themselves".[122] As a result, cohesion remained contingent on a degree of congruence between soldiers' societal identities and the established organizational politics of the force, regardless of institutional efforts to develop inclusive primary groups. In this context, the uneven impact of institutional regularization appears to have been important only because cohesion in the RSLAF was *already* conditioned by wider societal identities and affiliations.

Conclusions: The Politics of Cohesion during Military Integration

[120] British Officer 'B', interview with author.

[121] British Officer 'G', interview with author.

[122] British Officer 'C', interview with author; Cholerton, interview with author; Santa-Olalla, interview with author; British Officer 'G', interview with author.

According to the traditional concept of social cohesion, military organisations are held together by social interactions at the primary group level, which are fundamentally structured by the managerial practices of the military institution. Hence, it has been argued that integrated armies should be able to produce internal cohesion regardless of the divergent social backgrounds or political identities of their soldiers, providing they incorporate soldiers at the level of the primary group, and provide a regular administrative and managerial framework to structure primary group bonding. The MRP conducted in Sierra Leone at the end of the civil war provides a valuable test case for this envisaged relationship between political identity and primary group cohesion. During the MRP in Sierra Leone, former combatants were intermixed, treated with transparent equality, and incentivised to work together. As one IMATT assessing officer impressed upon successful applicants, "forget who you were, forget what you've done: you're in the army now".[123] This appeared to have some effect during the selection process. However, MRP entrants struggled to cohere once posted into the mainstream force, despite a host of concomitant reforms aimed at inculcating specifically military sources of secondary association, and strengthening the fabric of the military institution. Instead, military identities across the RSLAF continued to be nested in wider societal associations, perpetuating prior wartime affiliations and exacerbating factional mistrust. Such identities also remained salient in wider civil society, with the result that groups within the military were inherently viewed in the light of their former comrades' present political status. Despite the willingness to integrate displayed by volunteers during the integration process, and the plethora policies implemented to support the formation of cohesion at both the small-group and organizational levels, existing soldiers continued to view MRP soldiers as a challenge to the corporate identity and political integrity of the post-war military institution. In the post-war RSLAF, cohesion remained political.

[123] Stadward, interview with author.

The experience of military integration in the RSLAF challenges existing theories of social cohesion, refocusing attention on the hitherto overlooked role of Shils and Janowitz's secondary associations. As the case of the RSLAF shows, these secondary associations can in fact assume primary importance in defining military group identities, impeding the formation of robust unit cohesion. It might be argued that IMATT's inability to fully insulate MRP entrants from the effect of pernicious political attitudes reflects the limitations of programmatic implementation in Sierra Leone. Yet, equally, the enduring presence of these antagonisms *in spite of* the concerted organizational efforts to foster new sources of military association only serves to reinforce the link between extra-military politics, organizational agendas, and military cohesion. This finding suggests that the existing model of social cohesion must be revised to include a greater focus on extra-military secondary associations as necessary (but not sufficient) preconditions for both vertical, and horizontal primary group bonding, underscoring the relationship between institutional form, military identity, and societal values.[124] Moreover, as the circumstances surrounding the MRP in Sierra Leone were comparatively favourable, representing an easy test, cohesion dynamics in many other armed forces are likely to be far more reliant on societal and political dynamics than is presently recognised.[125] Scholars like Krebs have long contended that military integration is an imperfect tool of political change, based on a confused understanding of the relationship between military and societal identities.[126] This article's focus on the determinants of military cohesion in one such case helps further elucidate why this is so, demonstrating how social

[124] Shils and Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration"; King, *Combat Soldier*.

[125] This conclusion is supported by recent studies of some European units. See Chiara Ruffa, "Cohesion, Political Motivation, and Military Performance in the Italian Alpini," in Frontline: Combat and Cohesion in the Twenty-First Century, ed. Anthony King, 250-65 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015); Mikaela Sundberg, "Hierarchy, Status, and Combat Motivation in the French Foreign Legion," in ibid, 216-33.

[126] Krebs, "A School for the Nation?"; Krebs, "One Nation Under Arms?".

cohesion dynamics interact with societal, political and institutional identities to complicate integration at both the small-group and organizational levels.

Despite this, the MRP in Sierra Leone cannot be considered a total failure. The MRP did succeed in incorporating former combatants into the RSLAF, even if many appear to have subsequently been discharged. Importantly, Sierra Leone has not descended back into civil war, and the existence of the MRP may have contributed to this national transition at the political level, regardless of its military impact within the RSLAF.[127] At the same time, however, subsequent security sector reform activities aimed at ensuring civilian control of the military appear to have significantly concealed, and may even have partially offset, the organizational limitations of the MRP. Thus, while the value of the MRP for stabilising transitional politics cannot be ruled out, it is hard to view military integration as a necessary prerequisite for the development of civil-military accountability. Indeed, the politicised nature of military cohesion during military integration in Sierra Leone raises further questions about a number of prominent policy approaches to post-conflict stabilization. Following the 'local turn' in peacebuilding scholarship, institutional approaches to stabilization like security sector reform have become distinctly unfashionable, with attention increasingly turning to grass-roots alternatives.[128] However, the importance of social and political identities in shaping RSLAF (in)cohesion, and the attendant military politicization this perpetuated, suggests that scholars and practitioners alike can ill afford to ignore institutional processes altogether. Instead, closer attention must be paid to the interconnections between grass-roots social identities and the political economy of key state institutions like the military. As the

[127] See Kovacs, "Bringing the Good".

[128] Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P. Richmond, "The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace," *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5 (June 2013): 763-83; Hanna Leonardsson and Gustav Rudd, "The 'Local Turn' in Peacebuilding: A Literature Review of Effective and Emancipatory Local Peacebuilding," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (June 2015): 825-39.

challenges of military integration in Sierra Leone attests, understanding these linkages are vital to both political stabilization and institutional effectiveness, and must lie at the heart of future military capacity building endeavours.

Table 1: Timeline of Key Events

	Key Conflict Events	Military Integration Activity
1999	Lomé power-sharing agreement between RUF and Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL). UNAMSIL deployed.	UN begins DDR as precursor to MRP activity.
2000	Civil war resumes, RUF advance on Freetown.	UN DDR and planned MRP collapses.
	British military intervention in civil war.	IMATT established to mentor SLA. Some demobilised SLA soldiers recalled.
		British Short-Term Training Team (STTT) retraining courses for SLA units begin.
	First Abuja ceasefire agreement between RUF and GOSL.	
2001	Second Abuja ceasefire agreement between RUF and GOSL.	UN DDR resumes, linked MRP selection process begins.
		British STTT courses for SLA units complete. First MRP initial training course begins.
2002	Civil war officially declared over.	Sierra Leone military renamed the RSLAF.
	First post-war presidential elections held.	Final MRP initial training course complete.