ONCE A GENERAL, ALWAYS A GENERAL?

MID-LEVEL COMMANDERS AS BROKERS OF WAR AND PEACE IN POST-WAR LIBERIA

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Abstract

Recent studies have highlighted the inability of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs to dismantle command structures in the aftermath of civil war. The effect that lingering military networks have on peace and security is, however, ambiguous; on the one hand they can be used to remobilize for war, on the other hand they also constitute an important source of employment and friendship for ex-fighters. Even if there is a growing awareness of the dualistic nature of such structures, there is a lacuna when it comes to understanding why some informal military networks are remobilized during times of war, while others are not. In this paper, we seek to address this question by comparing two former mid-level commanders (ex-MiLCS) in Liberia and the networks that they control; one that remobilized his ex-combatants to fight in Côte d'Ivoire in 2011, and one that did not, despite being asked by Ivorian recruiters. Based on this comparison we find evidence that suggests that ex-MiLCs are most likely to remobilize their old command structures if they have a weak broker status in the political and economic networks controlled by governing elites.

Keywords: former mid-Level commanders, generals, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), peacebuilding, brokerage, ex-combatant networks, elite embedded networks, post-war, Liberia

PLEASE DO NOT QUOTE OR CITE, WORK IN PROGRESS!
“Hierarchical predominance is more of function of one’s reputation and social connections than it is an institutional position” (Newell 2012:95)

Introduction

A central component of most contemporary peacebuilding efforts is the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants (DDR). A main objective of such programs is to break up the command and control structure of armed groups and make ex-fighters economically independent of their wartime leaders. It is thereby expected that the ability of the former belligerents to mobilize for war is impaired. However, recent studies have highlighted the difficulties of dismantling military networks. In fact, in many post-civil war societies ex-combatants and commanders continue to interact and fraternize with each other long after leaving their armed units. Such informal military ties often reach the highest echelons of society, incorporating Big Men1 – such as politicians, ex-warlords, ex-generals and businessmen – that led or financed the previous armed struggle (Torjesson in Berdal; Utas 2012). In the Republic of Congo, for instance, many ex-Cobra fighters were able to integrate themselves into the regime’s patronage system via their old commanders after the end of the war in 1999. Not only did many former Cobras live in the same quarters of Brazzaville as their ex-commanders, the latter often kept in regular contact with ex-Cobra warlords that had been included in the post-war government. Meanwhile, during 2005-06 Kenneth Banya – the former number three commander of the Ugandan rebel group Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) – ran a farm using 120 ex-child combatants as laborers. To oversee the work, Banya hired

1 In this article we use term patronage and patrimonial structure when other authors do so, but ourselves use the prism of Big Men and networks highlighting how such structures are flexible and shifting over time and only partially inherited, kin and ethnicity based – a fact that is lucidly clear in this article. Big Men characters are not inherently African, not the “traditional” political structure, but rather a feature of current African states, thriving when state structures are weak and legal systems incomplete. Individuals relate to several Big Men at the same time and on several levels. A Big Man also has his Big Man. The concept Big Man is not gender specific (Utas 2012). The mid-level commanders we discuss below are Big Men in relationship to their former soldiers, but they in their turn are dependent on their own Big Men within the political and economic elite.
seven of his former deputies, creating fears that wartime structures were being recreated (Eichstaedt 2009: 104-106).

The effects that such informal military networks have on peace and stability are ambiguous. Previous research has, on the one hand, identified how they can be employed to engage in a number of different illicit activities; ranging from organized crime and vigilantism, to riots and electoral violence (Hoffman 2007; Themnér 2012; Utas 2003). At worst they can be used for warfare. In the Congolese case mentioned above, the government was able to remobilize an estimated 2,000 of their former fighters thanks to ties that continued to thrive between them, their former commanders and ex-combatants during renewed fighting with rebels in 2002 (Themnér 2011). Some scholars have, on the other hand, highlighted how such networks play important economic and social roles and are often structurally necessary for post-war reconstruction and reconciliation to take place. Not only can they generate social goods – such as friendship, a sense of belonging and forum for sharing – they are also a major source of employment opportunities for ex-combatants (Buxton 2008; Hoffman 2007; Persson 2012; Utas 2005, 2012). Due to the dialectic informal nature of networks of former rebel groups and militias – either reinforcing or undermining peace – they can best be described as morally neutral. A major concern is therefore to understand when ex-military structures contribute and when they are detrimental to peace. This paper aims to take a first step in addressing this question by looking at why some demobilized command structures are remobilized during times of war, while others are not. Here special focus will be given to ex-mid-level commanders (ex-MiLCs) and the networks of ex-combatants that they control. The reason for this is that we in our research have identified ex-MiLCs as the gatekeepers, or social membranes (see below), into ex-combatant communities; without their services elites have few prospects of remobilizing former fighters for war (see also Hoffman 2007, Christensen 2013).

In this paper we find evidence that suggests that ex-MiLCs are most likely to remobilize their old command structures if they have a weak broker status in post-civil war societies; in other words if government elites do not employ them to distribute patronage to ex-combatants. Under such
circumstances, engaging in war offers ex-MiLCs an opportunity to pull fledging ex-combatant clients back by providing opportunities for economic gain, through pay or loot. These insights entail that it is not always the strongest ex-military networks that constitutes the gravest threat to peace. In fact, since such networks are often well integrated into the structures of governing elites, they tend to have a stabilizing effect on ex-combatants by providing the latter with employment, food and money, and depriving ex-fighters of the opportunity to take to violence. To highlight these arguments we conduct a structured, focused comparison between two Liberian ex-MiLCs and the networks that they control; one that remobilized his ex-combatants to fight in Côte d'Ivoire in 2011, and one that did not, despite being asked by Ivorian recruiters. In this text we thus challenge much of earlier work that proposes that short term economic benefits are the prime motive for remobilization of ex-combatant as mercenaries and instead point towards more long-term strategic explanations of both mobilization and rejected mobilization. In the following text we also argue that for many ex-MiLCs their former soldiers and chain of commands is their key asset in the post-war society.

DEMOBILIZING AND REMOBILIZING MILITARY NETWORKS: PREVIOUS RESEARCH

With the arrival of peace, a major dilemma is how to deal with wartime actors. According to the dominant Western modes/formulas of postwar reconstruction, guerilla and paramilitary groupings, criminal networks, and militarized refugee camps must be dismantled, institutions based on democracy and the rule of law must simultaneously be (re)built. For this endeavor peacemakers have developed an array of peace- and statebuilding mechanisms: amnesties, DDR, international criminal courts, power-sharing, rebel-to-party transformations, refuge repatriation, security-sector reform (SSR) and transitional justice, to mention a few. Of these tools DDR is often heralded as one of the most important ones (Stedman, 2003: 109). Even if policymakers and scholars are increasingly

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2 This is not to say that economic motives are the only reason for joining armed movements. Social and political aspects can also play a role.

3 On the other hand elites who are not in power may use these networks as means to challenge incumbents.
developing new and broader indicators to measure the successful implementation of DDR-programs – such as contributing to general economic development, democratization or transitional justice (Sriram & Herman; Söderström) – most DDR processes are still largely evaluated on the basis of their ability to deliver macro-level security. By removing the means by which the war was fought, uprooting command structures, and creating alternative sources of livelihood for those who fought, peacemakers hope to prevent the eruption of new armed conflicts.

Despite the vast resources invested in DDR-processes, more and more scholars are coming to the conclusion that DDR-programs are rather inefficient at achieving one of its stated goals – the dismantlement of military structures. This observation is supported by quantitative, comparative and qualitative anthropological studies. For instance, Humphreys & Weinstein (2007: 49) hold that their large-N study of ex-fighters in Sierra Leone “[…] produces little evidence in support of claims that they [DDR programs] effectively break down factional structures.” Drawing on the experiences of DDR-programs in Afghanistan, El Salvador, Kosovo and Sierra Leone Özerdem (2009) comes to a similar conclusion. Many ex-commanders, for instance, work hard to create a “post-DDR constituency for themselves” by assisting both combatants and non-combatants to enter DDR-programs (Özerdem, 2009: 177). Meanwhile, Themnér (2011) finds that despite large-scale investments in DDR-programs in the Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, there were dense ties between ex-combatants, commanders and different national and regional elites several years after the cessation of hostilities. Finally, drawing on in-depth field research, Munive (2010a, 2010b), Persson (2012) and Utas (2005) have shown how command structures thrive in post-war Liberia; often due to the ease with which such networks can be transformed into local business (plantation work, brick-making or infrastructure rehabilitation) and slightly paradoxically security ventures.

One reason for why informal military networks are so resilient is that there is often a large demand amongst post-war elites for the labor that ex-combatants can provide. In fact, in many post-war societies government officials, generals, ex-warlords, oppositional leaders, businessmen and even drug barons, employ the services of former fighters to further their own political or economic
agendas. There are especially four qualities that ex-combatants possess, which make them attractive as employees. First, former fighters are generally accustomed to working collectively and taking orders; skills that many acquire during their military service.\(^4\) Having such talents mean that ex-combatants are ideal candidates for tasks that necessitate co-ordination, logistic know-how, as well as rapid deployment and implementation over vast geographical areas. Second, having fought for rebel groups or paramilitaries – whose activities often center on avoiding detection – ex-combatants have experience of working clandestinely; services that can be useful when involved in illicit sectors.\(^5\) Third, the very success and often survival for ex-MiLCs and ex-combatants is often dependent on the functioning of secretly knit informal networks, a dependency that demands strict loyalty, higher risk-taking and acceptance of dangerous work environments involving illegal trade, criminality if not mobilization as mercenaries and rebel soldiers. Finally, as professionals in the usage of violence, ex-combatants have skills and experiences that elites can use to threaten or attack economic or political rivals, or to protect themselves and their property (Arnaut 2012; Böäs & Utas 2013; Christensen & Utas 2008; Käihkö 2012; Themnér 2012; Utas 2003).

Due to the diverse repertoire of qualities that ex-combatants possess, they can be used by elites to either engage in activities that are conducive or detrimental to peace (Hoffman 2007). It is, for instance, not unusual for businessmen and landowners to hire ex-fighters as agricultural laborers, miners, plantation workers or security guards (Hoffman 2011; Munive 2010a, 2010b; Persson 2012; Themnér 2012). Such arrangements are often beneficial for both ex-combatants and elites. After demobilizing, many ex-combatants struggle to sustain themselves economically. Being employed by elites therefore offers an important opportunity to gain an income. If successful, such transactions can even result in ex-combatants being integrated into Big Man networks and the acquirement of additional economic benefits. Meanwhile, besides benefitting from the work that ex-combatants carry

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\(^4\) Studies have shown that command and control function even in loosely organized rebel and militia groups (see e.g. Utas and Jörgel 2008).

\(^5\) In a political economy where a large part of activities is carried out outside the formal state clandestinely is also very much part of the everyday activities of a licit sphere that is not easily separated from the illicit one (Utas 2012).
out, elites also gain access to a new category of clients by employing ex-fighters; supporters that can, for example, later be mobilized as voters (Christensen & Utas 2008). Hence, from a peace perspective elite-ex-combatant interactions can have a stabilizing effect on post-war security; by distributing jobs elites can ensure that ex-combatants support the new order being built.

During certain circumstances it may, however, be tempting for resourceful actors to engage ex-combatant clients for more malign purposes. For instance, in the absence of strong security institutions, some elites may set up criminal enterprises and hire ex-combatants to smuggle or sell narcotics, while other elites may use the same category of individuals as the backbone of local vigilante groups (Kantor & Persson: Themnér 2012, Vigh). Ex-fighters are, furthermore, oftentimes used during times of intense political competition, such as elections. Christensen and Utas (2008) have, for example, shown how the main political parties in Sierra Leone hired ex-combatants to engage in electoral violence in 2007. From a peace and development perspective, the worst is, however, if elites seek to remobilize informal military networks for war. This may not only result in ex-combatants participating in new rebellions – as has happened in Liberia, Nicaragua, Mali and Timor-Leste – it can also lead to an escalation in fighting that is already ongoing. It is, for example, not uncommon that spoiler groups – already engaged in war – seek to reinforce their ranks by enlisting ex-combatants (Käihkö 2012, Nilsson 2005, Vighs). By receiving experienced fighters warlords, and also regular armies, can gain a boost in fighting capacity that may quickly be translated into success on the ground. During the 2002-03 fighting in the Republic of Congo it was first when Ntsihounou-rebels were able enlist several hundred ex-guerillas that they were able to threaten the government’s hold on Brazzaville (Themnér 2011). The usage of hardened ex-combatant recruits can also increase the imagery of savagery of the violence being committed.6 During the second civil war in Liberia ex-Civil Defense Forces (CDF) combatants from Sierra Leone – fighting on behalf of

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6 Utas and Jörgel (2008) has shown how rebel and militia soldiers are playing on fears and images of their savagery among civilians (and to some extent enemies) in order to advance and take over territory. In Sierra Leone West Side Boys militias described this as a wartime tactic, of “making the ground fearful”. 
Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) – were responsible for some of the worst atrocities committed against civilians (Hoffman 2004). The ease with which informal military structures can be remilitarized – and result in an escalation of fighting and atrocities – highlights the importance of trying to understand when and how such networks are remobilized.

Irrespective of whether elites enlist ex-combatants as workers, voters, criminals or warriors they are seldom able to do so, on their own. Having few direct channels into ex-combatant communities, elites are generally dependent on intermediaries who can represent them in their dealings with former fighters. Research has shown that some of the most efficient intermediaries are ex-MiLCs; which Themnér (2012) defines as “the military personnel that was previously situated between the rank-and-file combatants and the highest military leadership, and who personally led their subordinates in battle.” In fact, in many post-war societies such commanders function as “gate-keepers” that “[…] continue to wield influence over their old subordinates, jealously guarding access to them” (Themnér 2012). By monopolizing interactions between elites and ex-combatants, ex-MiLCs can establish themselves as ‘employment officers’ selling the labor of their former subordinates. The central asset of such intermediaries is not just the facilitation of contacts and services, but also the ability to limit such relations. The ex-MiLCs that we study capitalize on their gatekeeper position (cf. Hannerz 1990:191) and thus function as ‘social membranes’ controlling what will get through to the other side. Capitalizing on information, loyalty and trust is the prime method, but to further enforce the utilization of their service, violence or violent threats may be used. Former commanders thereby become brokers in a labor system based on what Hoffman (2007:402) describes as the “barracks” – concentrations of young male ex-combatants living in urban or peri-urban centers that “can be employed quickly and efficiently” and “[…] called up at any moment as laborers on the battlefield, workers on the plantation or diggers in the mine.”

The services of ex-MiLCs are particularly valuable during times of renewed war. Being well-known figures in their communities it may be difficult – not to mention illegal and dangerous – for elites to
personally recruit hundreds if not thousands of fighters. Elites do, furthermore, not possess the means to control ex-combatants. Based on their military knowledge and practice of command and control, in combination with credentials in wartime bravery and personalized fear, ex-MiLCs have assets needed by elites.\(^7\) Many ex-combatants also find it difficult to trust and communicate with elites. This is one reason for why many of the former prefer working through an ex-MiLC that they already know. Under such circumstances it can be wise for elites to outsource military recruitment to a group of ex-commanders who have an easier time identifying suitable recruits, can move around undetected and reach a larger number of recruits in a shorter period of time. For instance, in the LURD enrollment of ex-CDF fighters mentioned above, one of the most important recruiters in Sierra Leone was a former commander of CDF. Thanks to his services, large numbers of Sierra Leonean ex-fighters were funneled from Freetown to LURD-bases in Guinea (Hoffman’s 2004, 2007). Themnér (2011) draws similar conclusions. Comparing the frequency of organized violence committed by ex-combatants in the Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, he finds that war-making elites seldom take direct responsibility for remobilizing ex-fighters – due to problems of span of control – and when they outsource recruitment they do so almost exclusively to ex-MiLCs. Themnér furthermore argues that ex-MiLCs’ involvement in war-making is not restricted to enlistment; more often than not ex-commanders also lead their ex-combatant recruits into battle.

These findings give a clear indication that to understand how and why informal military networks are remobilized, it is necessary to focus on the role played by ex-MiLCs. Even if there is a growing realization that ex-commanders are key agents when former military networks are remobilized there is a conspicuous lack of theorizing about how, when and why they do so. When it comes to addressing these issues, previous research provides little guidance besides offering a number of general statements or lessons learned from individual case-studies. Most of these explanations

\(^7\) In Liberian politico-economic networks there are always persons whose functions are substantially illegal (Utas 2012) and who have man power to conduct the dirty work, commonplace they maintain close contacts with youth in the streets. In the post-war there is an overlap of activities between criminals and some ex-MiLCs.
concentrate on factors relating to economic grievances. Themnér (2011), for instance, only briefly touches upon the topic and suggests that ex-commanders’ belligerency could be explained by their economic situation; if the latter have problems sustaining themselves and do not receive either formal or informal peace dividends they are more likely to become brokers of new wars. Torjesson (2009: 61) and Mukhopadhyay (2009: 552) are of a similar opinion. Torjesson argues that one of the main reasons for why the peace process in Tajikistan did not falter was that ex-commanders were given “tangible economic benefits and positions.” Meanwhile, Mukhopadhyay describes how the provision of land hindered some ex-commanders from resorting to violence in Afghanistan.

A problem with economy-based propositions, like the ones suggested above, is that they cannot help us to distinguish between ex-MiLCs that are economically aggrieved – and take to arms – from those whose economic situation is similar, but do not resort to violence. In fact, if economic grievances were the main determinant of ex-MiLC violence, we should see many more cases of former commanders becoming wartime brokers. This is particularly true when considering how common it is that ex-MiLC:s are disillusioned by the peacetime spoils that they receive (Alden 2002, Bhattia & Muggah 2009: 133-134; MacKenzie 2009: 255, Themnér 2011). However, despite such tendencies, aggrieved ex-MiLC:s do not en masse remobilize their ex-combatants when asked by elites. In fact, many disgruntled ex-commanders refute such offers, even when they include cash payments and promises of loot and employment. The limited explanatory power of such economic grievance-variables is also highlighted by findings generated by historical sociologists studying popular resistance against statebuilding during the 18th and 19th centuries (see e.g. Gould 1996, 1998). It was, according to them, not collective identities and grievances – for instance, economic disempowerment – that pushed social groups, such peasants, petty bourgeois or local elites, to rebel against the state. In fact, armed resistance was just as often characterized by intense intra-group conflicts as conflicts between certain groups and the state. For example, while some local elites and peasants opposed

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8 In the literature there is an extreme focus on formal peace dividends, however according to us the informal ones are generally much more central for sustained peace.
centralizing efforts in many countries, others were happy to collaborate with state officials as it offered them access to new forms of resources. What explains such collective outbursts of violence was rather whether statebuilding efforts improved or threatened to undermine the relative position of individuals in different patronage networks.

What implications do such thoughts have for the study of ex-MiLCs and their networks? First, just as collective grievances – such as economic disempowerment – cannot illuminate why only some peasants and local elites resorted to arms in the 18th and 19th century, it is also unlikely to give a satisfactory explanation for why ex-MiLCs differ in their willingness to remobilize ex-combatant clients. Second, former commanders’ decision to sponsor ex-combatant violence may, in fact, be a function of their relative position in larger political and economic networks. It is, in other words, necessary to focus “[…] on the patterns in systems of social relations when trying to account for the placement of lines of conflict, coalition, and consensus” (Gould 1996: 404) when studying ex-MiLCs; something which we develop further below.

**BROKERAGE IN POST-CIVIL WAR NETWORKS**

Why would ex-MiLCs’ relative position in political-economic networks determine their willingness to remobilize ex-combatant clients? We argue that this can best be understood through the lens of brokerage. According to this perspective ex-MiLCs are most disposed to violence when they fail to establish themselves as brokers of patronage – that distribute economic resources between governing elites and ex-combatant communities – in post-civil war societies. War-ridden societies are often characterized by weak bureaucracies, judiciaries, legislative bodies, police and armed forces that struggle to establish themselves over the populace they claim to rule (see e.g. Utas 2012). At times, such institutional shortcomings oblige governing elites to outsource different state functions to influential private persons, or brokers – for instance businessmen, religious leaders, youth group
leaders and former mid-level commanders – who not only possess a network range that includes governing elites and local communities, but who more or less monopolize contact between these two sets of actors (Themnér 2012). These individuals are employed precisely because they can offer services that state bureaucrats in their official capacity cannot; an understanding of and following amongst different local communities. By employing the services of such brokers elites are not only able to distribute patronage, extort resources and mobilize potential supporters outside the reach of formal institutions – villages, slum dwellers, ethnic-religious groups, ex-combatant communities, university students – but also placate powerful individuals that may otherwise oppose their political and economic agendas or align themselves with their adversaries. Under such circumstance, governance becomes a system of brokerage based on informal networks and understandings. For a variety of leader figures such arrangements can be quite beneficial, since brokers are paid or usually take a share of the resources that pass through them (Wellman 1983: 177).

As the transition from war-to-peace is consolidated there is, however, usually domestic and international pressure to develop more formalized patterns of rule through the establishment or strengthening of state institutions. This creates both opportunities and challenges for brokers. Regimes may, for instance use informal networks and agents as the basis for new institutions by simply providing brokers with official positions, such as mayors, district councilors, bureaucrats, police chiefs or heads of security (Böås 2012; Christensen 2012; Christensen & Utas 2008; De Waal 2009; Persson 2012; Reno 2010). Even if governing elites choose to by-pass long-serving informal brokers when revitalizing institutions, they may still wish to continue using the services of the latter. This is prevalent in many African states as systems of governance are based on formal and informal structures which complement and overlap each other (Utas 2012). For governing elites there are clear benefits of possessing such dualistic systems of rule. Brokers controlling informal networks can, for instance, be used to engage in dubious activities that governing elites wish to remain undetected, such as intimidation of political rivals or illegal economic activities (ibid.). Statebuilding processes may, however, just as well constitute a threat to the broker status of local elites. As regimes develop more
formal channels to govern through, they may select other individuals as official agents. This may not only result in less access to flows of patronage, but also that clients seek new brokers that are either part of or have channels into the new structures being built.

Exactly how does ex-MiLCs – and the networks that they control – fit into the transition from informal to more formal modes of governance? During war ex-MiLCs often acquire a substantial amount of social, economic and political power. By controlling the men and women under their command, they can extract economic resources and obtain social recognition (Bhatia & Muggah 2009: 134; Torjesson 2009: 415; Utas 2008, 2009; Utas & Jörgel 2008). However, once the fighting has stopped, and their fighters have been demobilized, they risk losing their most important asset; the labor provided by their former subordinates. One efficient strategy to prevent post-war marginalization is therefore to try to retain influence over their former fighters and become brokers in the game of informal governance. Such efforts can sometimes be likened with what Mukhopadhyay (2009: 560) has described as “disguised combatanthood” where “[…] actors with predatory habits join the state-building project along the way as part of a bargain, or racketeering arrangement, with the state.” In other instances, the ultimate motive for becoming a broker is more benign; for instance, to gain official employment or access to government contracts. It can also be advantageous for governing elites to employ ex-MiLC:s – and the networks they control – to further their rule.⁹ Persson (2012) has, for example, shown how vigilante groups – where ex-MiLC:s and their former subordinates often play a leading role – have been supported by the Liberian regime to uphold public security in the absence of a functioning police force. Meanwhile, during times of ex-combatant disturbances in Liberia – such as riots and turbulent protests – Liberian government officials have made use of influential ex-MiLC:s to negotiate with former fighters and calm them

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⁹ At this point it is important to point out that this does not mean that ex-MiLC:s simply abandon their previous roles as brokers of violence. Quite the contrary, their cross-competence is a central asset in their new governance role (Utas 2012).
down. Oftentimes such interventions have resulted in ex-commanders distributing money and food – on behalf of government elites – to the disgruntled ex-combatants. 10

As statebuilding progresses there is, however, a risk that the broker status of former commanders are undermined. With increased bureaucratic and institutional presence governing elites may have less use for the informal networks that ex-MiLCs possess. Hence, if ex-commanders are unable to convince governing elites to incorporate them into the new structures being built – or create dual systems of governance based on both formal and informal rule – they risk being replaced with professional administrators, supervisors and police officers. It is, however, not only from above that the broker status of ex-MiLCs can be challenged; it can also be disputed from below. Statebuilding in post-war societies is often characterized by structural volatility. As wartime leaders seek to retain their positions and other elites hope to carve out a space for themselves, there is typically a reconfiguration of political, military and economic power (Mukhopadhyay 2009). For ex-combatants this transition offers an opportunity to find new sources of patronage; instead of being confined to their commanders for support – as during the war – they can attach themselves to other resourceful actors, for instance other ex-MiLCs with better ties to governing elites.

There are reasons to believe that ex-MiLCs may respond to such pressures by attempting to remobilize their informal military networks, if given the chance. According to Gould (1998) the threat of being eclipsed as broker is one of the main determinants for why local elites have, historically, supported rebellions. Studying armed resistance against statebuilding in 18th century United States, he argues that such opposition should be seen as a function of “network structure rather than economic position” (Gould 1996). For instance, in 1794 local elites in Pennsylvania mobilized militia groups when the expansion of federal power and the arrival of federal officials threatened to “[…] make their position irrelevant by shifting the locus of brokerage from the state (i.e. local elites) to the federal level” (Gold 1998: 42). Without personal connections to the new

10 Interviews with ex-MiLCs and combatants in Tubmanburg, Liberia, October-November 2012.
federal agents these local elites could no longer protect their clients and distribute money, jobs and munitions to them. This “spelled political doom” as they risked losing their supporters to political rivals, who had stronger ties to the federal government (Gould 1998: 38). One reason for why this pushed them to lead the insurgency was that they could thereby prove to their clients – of which many had been hit hard by new federal taxes – that they were still politically relevant and thereby improve their standing amongst the latter. Local elites with connections to the federal government did, however, have few reasons to join the uprising; thanks to their ties to government representatives, federal centralization promised to entrench their broker status, since they would receive more – not less – clients.

These findings are of interest since it points to the power and resources vested in brokerage and highlights the lengths with which individuals can go to retain their broker status. But why would ex-MiLCs come to the conclusion that they could salvage their position as brokers by remobilizing their informal military networks? If governing elites fail to employ ex-commanders to distribute economic resources – such as jobs, money and food – there is a risk that ex-combatants begin to pay homage to competing brokers or, in some instances, even governing elites or other kinds of Big Men. This would, in Gould’s (1998: 38) words, ‘spell political doom’ for ex-MiLCs. In political systems where social advancement is a function of “wealth in people” (Bledsoe 1990) – the ability to mobilize clients as voters, laborers and fighters for elites – ex-commanders risk becoming marginal figures once their ex-combatant networks disintegrate. With little else to offer, inclusion in military missions – compensated through cash payments and promises of loot – can therefore be one way for ex-MiLCs to prove their worth as providers and pull fledging followers back. This is particularly true when considering that ex-combatants are well aware of the economic benefits that can be made during war and that demobilization often entails economic re-marginalization for ex-fighters (Themnér 2011; Utas 2005).
METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To assess the explanatory value of the proposition that it is foremost ex-MiLCs with weak broker status that remobilize their informal networks for armed violence, it is necessary to develop indicators that can empirically distinguish between weak and strong forms of brokerage. An ex-MiLC will be seen as being a ‘strong broker’ if: (a) governing elites (presidents, members of the cabinet or legislative bodies, senior government advisors, bureaucrats, army generals and government-affiliated businessmen) employ his or her services to distribute patronage (employment, money, food, and other types of material and economic assistance) to his/her ex-combatants and (b) most of the latter do not have other Big Men – governing or non-governing elites, or competing brokers (such as ex-MiLCs) – that they can ask economic assistance from (i.e. patronage). Furthermore, we consider that a remobilization has taken place if an ex-MiLC recruits, and leads, his or her ex-fighters to participate in organized violence – a situation where “[…] at least two organized groups of specialists in coercion confront each other, each using harm to reduce or contain the other’s capacity to inflict harm” (Tilly 2003: 104).

Themnér (2012) sees ex-MiLCs as “the military personnel that was previously situated between the rank-and-file combatants and the highest military leadership, and who personally led their subordinates in battle.” To give more precision to this broad definition, we confine ourselves to one subset of ex-MiLCs – former battalion commanders, generally referred to as generals. In the Liberian context such commanders typically led groups anywhere between 30 and 150 fighters.11 The defining qualities of ex-battalion commanders are, by and large, that their position is based on their personal ability to organize larger groups of men as well as inflict fear and respect amongst enemies, colleagues and subordinates, rather than on long and loyal service in formal military institutions and an official rank that has been bestowed upon them. Hence, even if they are generally not part of the highest echelons of the military, they hold much informal power, allowing them to take certain

11 Information on the size of the battalions in Liberia is based on field work conducted by Ilmari Käähkö during March-October, 2012 and Utas March 2013.
liberties such as semi-independent decisions on the battlefield. This is also reflected by their ability to attract fighters to their ranks (Böås & Dunn 2007; Clapham 1998; Reno 1998). There are also reasons to believe that this type of ex-MiLCs is particularly likely to end up as post-war brokers.\(^\text{12}\) They are, on the one hand, generally not part of the real wartime political and economic establishment, and are thereby improbable candidates to become peacetime governing elites. On the other hand, due to the prestige and power they had during the war, they are likely to retain a certain amount of influence amongst their former fighters, making them attractive partners for governing elites seeking to reach out to ex-combatants. It is, finally, necessary to define two additional concepts that are central to this study: ex-combatants and informal military networks. The former are held as individuals that have taken direct part in the hostilities on behalf of a warring party and have either been discharged from or voluntary left the military group they were serving in. An informal military network is defined as a group of individuals composed of an ex-MiLC and those former subordinates that the latter meets or speaks to at least once per month.\(^\text{13}\)

In this paper we have chosen to compare the experiences of two Liberian ex-MiLCs. Liberia was selected since it fits well with the scope of the study. Despite having one of the largest DDR-processes – with a caseload of 101,495 fighters\(^\text{14}\) – several studies have shown that informal military networks continue to thrive in the country, binding former combatants, ex-MiLCs and national elites together (Hoffman 2007; Kantor & Persson; Persson 2012; Reno). In addition, during 2011 a large number of Liberian ex-commanders were contracted to mobilize ex-combatants to fight as mercenaries in the Ivorian civil war that pitted loyalists of President Laurent Gbagbo against

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\(^{12}\) On the other hand it should be pointed out that some people without commanding background from the civil war has also taken similar brokering roles in the postwar with scores of ex-combatants as subordinates. It is not an exclusive business of MiLCs.

\(^{13}\) It is however crucial to point out that ex-MiLCs may also have other kinds of clients – such as relatives, neighbors, members of the same religious community or ex-combatants from other units or factions. This study does, however, only focus on ex-combatant clients that previously fought for the ex-MiLC. The reason for this is that previous research has identified that it is this kind of network that is most likely to be remobilized for war (see e.g. Themnér 2011).

\(^{14}\) UNMIL Today (July 2009, 6 (2), p. 1. This refers to the number of fighters that were demobilized. It is, however, important to note that many of these are believed to have been civilians pretending to be combatants.
supporters of Alassane Ouattara. The fighting in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire therefore provides an opportunity to compare networks that were remobilized, with those who were not. The two ex-MiLC:s – here referred to as David and George – were selected according to two criterions. First, there is an interesting variation in the outcome of interest; while George accepted offers to remobilize his ex-combatants to fight in Côte d'Ivoire, David refused similar propositions and actively prevented his former subordinates from taking to arms. Second, besides their differing attitudes concerning the Ivorian crisis, David and George shared several similar traits, minimizing the risk of individual-specific factors biasing the analysis. They were both ex-battalion commanders that fashioned themselves as generals, had fought for Charles Taylor’s Navy Division, lived in Monrovia, possessed similar sized networks of ex-combatants (David 28 and George 33), worked hard to maintain their broker status and were generally seen as brave and competent commanders.

The empirical material about David and George, and their networks, is based on interviews conducted during field research in September 2011. Three interviews were held with both David and George, while each ex-fighter in their respective networks was interviewed once. It was the ex-MiLC:s themselves that assisted the research team in getting in touch with their former fighters. In order to control for potential selection bias, the ex-fighters were asked if they knew any ‘sleepers’; in other words ex-combatants that had fought under their ex-commander but who were not on the list of ex-fighters provided by the latter. In all seven such sleepers were interviewed (five from David and two from George). All interviews were semi-structures and numbered 74 in total. Contact with the ex-MiLC:s were made via two local assistants that did not know each other and worked independently of each other. It was thereby possible to provide diverse entry points and minimize the risk of selection bias. To complement this material and gain a broader understanding of brokerage in governing elites networks, we also employed one PhD student, engaged two additional researchers and carried out

15 David and George are not their real names.
16 Interviews were also held with ex-combatants that had fought under George – and which the latter helped the research team get in contact with – but who met or spoke to George less than once per month. Because these ex-fighters met with George less often than the once per month minimum, they were not deemed as being part of George’s informal military network.
five additional fieldtrips (between November 2010 and March 2013). These studies adds to a body of research collected by us in Liberia from 1996 and onwards.

Liberian Civil War and Liberian Mercenary Activity in Neighboring Countries

The Liberian civil war started on Christmas Eve 1989 when a small group of rebel soldiers, trained in Libya, entered the country from adjacent Côte d'Ivoire. The movement became known as NPFL and soon split into two; NPFL under the leadership of Charles Taylor and INPFL under Prince Y. Johnson. Even if the two rebel groups quite rapidly pushed back the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), within months reaching the capital Monrovia and killing President Samuel Doe, they failed to end the war and within soon the number of rebel groups multiplied. The war waxed and waned but it was only after democratic elections in 1997 that Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic Party (NPP) managed to get to power. After a few years however LURD rebels attacked from Guinea and a new war started. Within soon LURD split into two; LURD predominantly with support from Guinea and Sierra Leone and the South Eastern based Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) with support from Côte d'Ivoire. In 2003 LURD and MODEL in joint military effort managed to thwart pro-Taylor forces resistance and Taylor, as part of a peace plan, was airlifted to Nigeria and a safe haven in Calabar. Later he was transferred to the Hague and sentenced by the Special Court for Sierra Leone. The exit of Taylor ended the civil war and after a transitional government, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected President in November 2005.

The reasons for the civil wars are many. The dominance by a tiny group of Americo-Liberians who controlled both political life and the economy implied a severe marginalization of the majority of Liberians hailing from outside Monrovia. A Military coup by junior officers with roots from the interior put a halt to this dominance in 1980, but soon led to interpersonal problems within the junta itself and ethnic tensions within the army that spilled over into Liberian society. Ethnification of
identity became an important factor when mobilizing support for the rebel movements (Utas 2003). However even more central was the social feeling of marginalization that many young Liberians experienced. Many felt stuck in the margins of society and saw mobilization into war as a path to power and even adulthood (ibid., Utas 2008, Christensen, Utas and Vigh 2005). By the end of the Liberian war former rebel soldiers laid down arms and many went through the DDRR process. However despite promises of education, skilled training programs and jobs, few benefited in the long term (see Utas 2005). Quite some ex-combatants went back to their villages, but many others remained in urban centers, migrated to mining areas or took up informal jobs in the plantation economy. Quite often they nurtured feelings of not being reintegrated into post-war society, but rather remarginalized (ibid). It is within this population we find those who are most dependent on former military networks and their MiLCs, often this is not just for making money, but it is at times a question of bare survival.

With the eruption of hostilities in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire in early 2011 – and the launch of recruitment campaigns by pro-Ouattara and Gbagbo forces in Liberia – remarginalized ex-combatants received the opportunity to address their economic grievances by taking to arms. In this process both recruiters and recruits were helped by the presence of old military ties. Not only did such networks provide natural meeting points, but also facilitated the exchange of monetary transactions, or at least promises thereof. The question is, however, why only some of these networks were drawn into the fighting, while others remained passive. In the following, we hope to illuminate this question by comparing the experiences of two different ex-MiLCs; George who became a broker of war and David that became a broker of peace.
GEORGE: REMOBILIZER FOR WAR

George joined the war in 1990 at the age of 19. After he and his mother lost track of the rest of the family during the fighting in Monrovia, he enlisted with AFL. After receiving six weeks of training, he was placed in a unit mainly composed of Krahn soldiers. When United Liberation Movement of Liberia (ULIMO) started making territorial gains in 1992, his unit left AFL for ULIMO as the interim government reconstituted the AFL and started to include old soldiers also from NPFL. Two years later George ended up with the ULIMO-Johnson (ULIMO-J) after ULIMO split into ULIMO-J and ULIMO-Kromah (ULIMO-K) factions. By the end of the first war in 1996, he had been promoted to captain and fought in counties such as Bomi, Bong, Margibi and Montserrado. After disarming in 1996, George supported himself as a carpenter – a trade that he had learned from his father – and from incomes generated from a video-club that he owned in Monrovia. However, in 1999 pressure increased on former ULIMO-J and K commanders, as the first signs of rebel activity appeared in Lofa. George, along with several of his former comrades, were thrown in jail and given the option of either fighting for the regime or being executed; George chose the former. Upon his release, George was incorporated into the Special Unit Lofa Defense Force and was soon promoted to major. After having taken part in several offensives against LURD in Lofa, George advanced to colonel in 2002 and ordered to join the Navy Division, led by Roland Duo, Vice Admiral and second in command. Known as a generous commander – who was willing to share both supplies and loot with his fighters – George’s unit quickly expanded from its initial size of 25 to approximately 60 combatants. At times these numbers swelled to several hundred fighters, as George was frequently asked to lead other units during major military operations. In the final stages of the war, George had – according to himself – become “a very powerful […] and a well-known general”. These words were also reiterated by his former enemies. For instance, an ex-LURD commander who had confronted him in Lofa

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17 If not otherwise indicated, this section is based on interviews with George.
18 Roland Duo was Chief security at the Freeport in Monrovia during the Taylor government (a very lucrative position) but later crossed carpet and became security advisor to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. He is today also a successful business man and estate owner in Monrovia.
described George as “one of Taylor’s most famous generals.”\textsuperscript{19} His status as a general was also recognized by his superiors who paid him a general’s salary even though he was officially only a colonel.

After retreating with his men from Lofa to Monrovia during the end of the war, George disarmed in 2004 and settled with his wife and seven children in his parents’ house in a mid-income area of the capital. To gain an income he re-launched his career as a carpenter and either co-operated with his father or 5-6 of his friends, of which most were his ex-fighters, to get contracts.\textsuperscript{20} For George it was beneficial to collaborate with his former subordinates. Not only did the latter take it upon themselves to find contracts for the group, when they worked together he was not expected to contribute as much as the others. According to George:

\begin{quote}
\textit{[w]hen working with my ex-fighters, like for me I will not work too much […]. My ex-fighters will not give me the chance to work. After every second they will tell me to go and sit down and when the money comes we will share it equally.}
\end{quote}

Due to the seasonal nature of carpentry work in Liberia, George also had a number of additional sources of income; he employed people to drive two MC-taxis that he owned, received a weekly income from his brother who ran his video-club and he sold marijuana. It was not only with ex-fighters that were carpenters that George interacted. In fact, his network included no less than 33 former subordinates, many of which he met on a daily basis.

As the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire unfolded in early 2011, George was given the opportunity to remobilize his former undermen; an offer that he was quick to accept.\textsuperscript{21} Evidence suggests that he was contacted via phone by Benjamin Yeaten – Taylor's chief of staff – who was organizing the recruitment of Liberian ex-combatants from Ivorian territory on behalf of Ouattara.\textsuperscript{22} Even if George did not confine his recruitment to ex-fighters that had fought under him, he did focus most of his efforts on

\begin{footnotes}
\item[19] Interview with ex-LURD commander.
\item[20] George also started doing carpentry training via NCDDR, but did not complete the course since the compensation given was not enough to support his family.
\item[21] Interviews with anonymous NGO-representative and ex-NPFL combatants 1, 2, 3 & 4. It is not clear exactly what kind of benefits George was offered.
\item[22] Interviews with anonymous NGO-representative and George.
\end{footnotes}
the former. By doing so he could benefit from the old chain of command, trust and respect that he enjoyed amongst his ex-combatants. There was, in fact, a general expectation within George’s network that he should contact them if an opportunity to take to arms arrived or as expressed by one of his ex-combatants when asked why he kept in contact with George:

Even though the war is over…but the hard labor in this country…just in case of anything he (George) can debrief us. Even though the war is over, but the hardship sometimes it put tears in my eyes. I sit and wish to have four or five bombs just to throw it to the executive areas, let the country remember […] so just in case of anything he (George) can debrief us.

Sentiments such as these made it relatively easy for George to identify willing recruits; this was particularly true since he regularly visited the ‘hang-out’ – located in one of the city’s ghettos – where many of his undermen met to drink and smoke marijuana and crack. On behalf of his employers, George offered his ex-fighters between 150 and 400 USD upfront to enlist and as much as 1,800 USD once they arrived in Côte d’Ivoire. Such enticements convinced approximately 16-20 members of his ex-combatant network to follow him to Côte d’Ivoire. To transport the group to the border, George was provided with a pick-up truck. After crossing into Côte d’Ivoire, they were incorporated into the opposition militia forces loyal to Ouattara. The Ivorian adventure proved to be a lucrative affair. Not only did George acquire a car and MC-bike that he brought back to Liberia, many ex-fighters carried with them loot ranging from clothes, cash and cameras, to laptops and mobile phones.

23 Interviews with ex-NPFL combatants 4, 5 & 6.
24 Interview with George.
25 Interviews with ex-NPFL combatants 1, 2, 5, 6 & 7.
26 There is evidence that the unit that George eventually commanded in Côte d’Ivoire was composed of over 70 fighters (mostly Liberians but also some Sierra Leoneans) (interview with ex-NPFL combatant 7). It does, however, seem that many of these joined George after he and his ex-fighters left Monrovia.
27 Interviews with ex-NPFL combatants 1 & 7.
28 Interviews with ex-NPFL combatants 4 & 5.
What then caused George to remobilize his ex-combatants and become an agent of war? In the proceeding section, we argue that this outcome was the result of George’s weak position as broker in post-civil war Liberia.

Brokerage in Governing Elites’ Networks

After the end of the Liberian Civil War in 2003, George struggled to establish himself as a broker. His failure to do so was, however, not due to lack of connections to members of the governing elite. Having served in the Navy Division, George was personally acquainted with several senior ex-NPFL generals, such as Duo and James ‘Coco’ Dennis, who had been integrated into the higher echelons of society (Duo had become Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’s security advisor after she became President in 2006 whilst Dennis kept a low profile politically, though still supporting NPP, as a businessman in Monrovia). Thanks to ties such as these George was, for instance, well received when he visited Duo’s house. In addition, George continued to be a member of the NPP, despite Taylor’s fall from power, which guaranteed him at least some access to dignitaries of the party; many of which had successfully retained their leadership positions within post-war Liberia. These relations were, however, not enough to confirm George’s status as a broker. There was, in fact, a conspicuous lack of interest by governing elites in the city to employ his services. When asked whether Liberian elites ever contacted him to reach out to his undermen, George replied:

No, even my former Chief of Staff Roland Duo does not do that. Like for instance, one day (some of) my deputies and I met at the junction and decided to visit the Chief of Staff and luckily we met him there. But he told that he did not have money and he was busy running his campaign, because he wanted to become a representative. The only good thing he did for us was to put us on his jeep and carry us back to the junction.31

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29 Coco Dennis was, just as Duo, amongst Taylor’s inner circle (his pepper bush), and was during the war a Lieutenant General. He is best known to have controlled the area around LAC rubber plantation, but during the Taylor government he made a fortune on logging concessions in Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties.
30 Interviews with George and ex-NPFL combatant 8.
31 Interview with George.
Despite the weak position George had vis-à-vis governing elites, such as Duo, there were still some ex-fighters who assumed that George could use his connections to find employment for them. One ex-combatant stated that the main reason for why he stayed in touch with George was that “big guys” – such as Duo and Dennis – may one day contact George if they wanted him to work for them.\textsuperscript{32} George was, at least partly, guilty of nurturing such expectations, since he had promised to try to find employment for them. These promises did, however, never materialize, somewhat tainting George’s status as a ‘provider’.\textsuperscript{33} Unable to establish himself as a broker for governing elites, there was at least one incident of George facilitating interactions between one of his ex-fighters and another kind of Big Man. For example, through George’s assistance one of his ex-combatants got to know Adolphus Sampson – a senior NPFL commander.\textsuperscript{34} Even if this relationship was valuable for the ex-fighter – who later received rice and money from Sampson – it was not particularly beneficial for George. Instead of funneling the patronage via George – which would have allowed him to take a cut – Sampson gave the money and rice directly to the ex-fighter.\textsuperscript{35} Frustrated about being a marginal figure in Monrovia’s economic and political networks, George decided to leave NPP and join the governing Unity Party (UP) before the 2011 elections. When asked why he switched parties, he bluntly stated that in Liberia we have saying that “[w]here the sun shines, that is where you hang your clothes.”\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{Ex-combatants’ Direct Access to Big Men}

Another indication of George’s weak broker status was his inability to prevent ex-combatant clients from establishing direct contact with different resourceful individuals. Many of his former undermen were, in fact, rather successful in this endeavor. Of the 33 ex-fighters that he interacted with, as many

\textsuperscript{32} Interview with ex-NPFL combatant 8.
\textsuperscript{33} Interviews with ex-NPFL combatants 8 & 9.
\textsuperscript{34} In the Taylor government he was placed in the Navy. After the war he joined the police.
\textsuperscript{35} Interview with ex-NPFL combatant 10.
\textsuperscript{36} Interview with George.
as 23 (70%) had at least one Big Man (both governing and non-governing elites) that could provide assistance in time of need. These were predominantly senior ex-generals – such as Duo, Dennis, Sampson and Chinese Japper\(^\text{37}\) – that had been part of Taylor’s military establishment, but also included one senior former LURD commander. Besides begging favors from ex-military leaders, some of George’s ex-combatants had also established close relations with political dignitaries from the governing UP, as well as opposition parties such as the NPP, Congress for Democratic Changes (CDC) and National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP). Of these, Prince Johnson (NUDP) – ex-leader of the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) – and former Taylor allies such as Cyril Allen (NPP) and Edwin Snowe (UP) – were particularly prominent.

The kind of assistance that these benefactors provided was predominantly money and food, but did also include employment opportunities – in the security, transportation and farming sectors – as well as clothes and medicine. One ex-fighter, for instances, explained that if he wanted to meet Duo or Sampson he could just go to their houses or call them on his phone. Both Duo and Sampson had also helped him on several occasions; while the former had recommended him to different employers, the latter had given him money.\(^\text{38}\) For ex-combatants with such high-profile connections, it was not self-evident that their main loyalties lay with George, or as expressed by the ex-fighter mentioned above: “[i]t is more important to have good relations with them (Duo and Sampson), than with George. They can help or recommend jobs for me”.\(^\text{39}\) Hence, not only did George fail to prevent many of his ex-combatants from gaining direct access to Monrovian elites, several of his former undermen were more successful than him in acquiring resources from the latter.

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\(^{37}\) Chinese Japper was a Brigadier General in the Navy Division. “Japper” denotes him being a clown figure.

\(^{38}\) Interview with Abraham Wessah.

\(^{39}\) Interview with Abraham Wessah.
How did George’s weak broker status affect his decision to remobilize his former undermen for war? Without the backing of governing elites, George had relatively few economic resources to disperse to his ex-fighters. Assistance was confined to advice, small cash donations, medicine, clothes and food, in other words whatever he could afford from his own pocket. Even if this assistance was appreciated, it was seldom enough for his ex-combatants to take the time to go look for him or visit his house to pay homage. In fact, of the 33 ex-fighters in his network, only 14 (approximately 40%) stated that it was more common that they contacted George, than vice versa. Instead many of his ex-combatants preferred to invest their time finding ways to establish direct links to governing elites in Monrovia. It was especially the prospect of receiving employment which made such connections appealing; something which George had been unable to assist them with. Due to his weak standing as a broker, George was therefore often obliged to search for his ex-combatants if he wanted to see them. More often than not, this meant going to their ghetto ‘hang-out’, where he could socialize, drink and smoke with them. The fact that George was dependent on their business – as marijuana customers – also explains why it was often he who initiated contact. For George it was crucial to improve his standing amongst his ex-fighters. If his network continued to wane, George’s chances for social advancement shrunk. In a system based on “wealth in people” (Bledsoe, 1990) – the ability to mobilize clients as voters, laborers and fighters for different elites – George risked becoming an even more marginal Big Man in Liberia’s networked society (Utas 2012). Remobilizing for war was one way to avert such a development. Known as a brave and competent commander, there were expectations amongst his former fighters that he would lead them into battle if the opportunity arose. With little else to offer, going to Côte d’Ivoire – with its prospect of pay and loot – offered the best strategy to pull fledging clients back. For George, this strategy also seems to have paid off. Upon his return to Liberia in 2011 he was employed by the UP to mobilize support amongst ex-combatants in

40 Interviews with ex-NPFL combatants 9, 12, 13, 14 & 15.
41 Interviews with NGO representative 2, George and ex-NPFL combatant 16.
Monrovia during the national elections. In this endeavor the good-will he had built up amongst his ex-fighters by taking them to Côte d'Ivoire, came to good use.

DAVID: RESISTING REMOBILIZATION

David, born in 1966, joined NPFL in 1990 after fleeing to rebel-controlled territory to evade the abuses committed by government soldiers in Monrovia. After receiving military training in Gbarnga he became the head of a Small Boys Unit (SBU), composed of 75 fighters, and promoted to captain; a position that he retained until the end of the first civil war in 1996. By that time the war had taken him to battlefronts in counties such as Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh, Nimba and Sinoe. After Taylor was elected President in 1997, David entered the Special Security Unit (SSU) – Taylor’s Praetorian Guard – and three years later the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), when the former was disbanded. In ATU, David made a quick military career, first becoming major and latter acquiring the rank of colonel. In 2002, as the war with LURD intensified, David was ordered to leave ATU and organize a militia unit under the banner of the Navy Division. At that moment David, according to himself, became “commanding general” leading a fighting force whose size varied between 150 and 200 fighters. As a battalion commander his main task was – during the second war – to repel LURD attacks, particularly in Lofa and Bomi Counties. Generally seen as a brave, competent, but also harsh commander – who was good at recruiting, organizing and rallying fighters – David gained much respect amongst his subordinates. According to one former fighter, David was a “bitter-sweet” commander who would ‘hang-out’ with you one day – offering food, clothes and smokes – and the

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42 Interview with George.
43 If not otherwise indicated, this section is based on interviews with David.
44 Interviews with ex-NPFL combatants 17, 18, 19, 20 & 21.
next day “flog you” severely for misbehaving. Due to his standing as a fierce commander, David is even reputed to have been casted in a propaganda-movie about the war, for the press, in 2003.

After disarming and demobilizing in 2004 David settled down in one of the more affluent areas of Monrovia, living rent-free in the basement of a house in return for keeping an eye on the place. To support himself, and his family of five (not residing with him), David entered the security business, which he already had some experiences of. In fact, during the later stages of the war, David had ‘doubled’, both working as a general and offering protection to the compound of an INGO based in Monrovia. When the transitional government (2003-06) needed staff to guard the Ministry of Public Works, David was therefore offered the job as chief of security. Hoping to found his own security company in the future, he used the reintegration assistance provided to him to study criminal justice at the university. As a supplement to his employment at the ministry, David also engaged in a number of other businesses; he had a taxi-car that one of his ex-fighters drove on his behalf, he let taxi drivers park their cars in his compound during the night for a small sum of money, he helped local businessmen and elites find suitable security personnel for a commission and at times worked as an assistant/body-guard for a NPP senator. David also kept in contact with many of his ex-combatants. In fact, by mid-2011 his informal military network was still composed of 28 ex-fighters; many of which lived in the same community and one in the same house. Some had even moved to the area because David resided there.

With the advent of the crises in neighboring Côte d’Ivoire, David was approached by a senior Ivorian officer in Monrovia. The latter asked David if he was willing to remobilize Liberian ex-fighters on behalf of Gbagbo’s regime. Even though he turned down the offer, David was given 150 USD so that he would not disclose their meeting to the Liberian authorities. David’s reluctance to take the job as an intermediary not only had a profound effect on his ex-fighters’ opportunity to go to Côte

45 Interview with ex-NPFL combatant 22.
46 Interview with ex-NPFL combatant 23.
47 Interview with ex-NPFL combatant 24.
d’Ivoire, but also their willingness. For instance, some of his ex-combatants wanted to become regional mercenaries, but David’s refusal to pass on the offer of enlistment made this impossible.\(^{48}\) However, even when his ex-combatants had access to other recruiters, many hesitated, since they were being asked to remobilize under the leadership of ex-generals that they did not know. One ex-combatant expressed frustration over the fact that even if he wanted to take the job as regional mercenary to earn some money – and was approached by no less than three different Liberian recruiters – he never went Côte d’Ivoire. The reason for this was that the mission would not be headed by David and the latter never asked him.\(^{49}\) In other instances, David actively intervened to hinder his former subordinates from taking to arms; on several occasions ex-fighters came to him for advice about whether they should cross over to Côte d’Ivoire or not. After speaking to David, they decided to refuse such offers.\(^{50}\)

Why then did David choose to be a broker of peace and refuse to remobilize his informal military network? In the following, we hold that this can be explained by David’s strong position as broker within Liberia’s post-war economic and political system.

**Brokerage in Governing Elites’ Networks**

After the end of the war David became an indispensable ally for governing elites seeking to reach out to ex-NPFL combatants in his community. In fact, David had close ties to much of the top brass of NPP. It was, for instance, John Gray – NPP representative and Vice-President of the transitional government – that had secured David’s employment as head of security at the Ministry of Public Works. Furthermore, the house that David was living in, and keeping an eye on, was Cyril Allen’s –

\(^{48}\) Interview with ex-NPFL combatant 25.  
\(^{49}\) Interview with ex-NPFL combatant 26.  
\(^{50}\) Interviews with David and ex-NPFL combatant 27. According to unconfirmed information, one of David’s ex-fighters did go to Côte d’Ivoire. This person was, however, not part of David’s network – as defined in this study – and the authors were unable able to meet with him.
central figure of NPP and economic strongman in Liberia.\textsuperscript{51} Besides these two members of the governing elite, and the NPP-senator that he from time-to-time worked for as assistant/security guard, David was also close to senior NPFL generals, such as Duo, that had their own security companies.\textsuperscript{52}

Due to his good relations with (ex) NPP-cadres within the governing elite, David was able to position himself as a broker; funneling employment, money, scholarships and food to his ex-fighters.\textsuperscript{53} This made him popular amongst many of the latter. Of the patronage that David helped distribute, employment was the most valuable. When asked why he continued to interact with David, one ex-fighter bluntly admitted that “[a] pet does not go far from his boss […] when it comes to jobs and security business in the community, David is the man.” He continued by stating that “[p]eople know that David is a star, a big man, they usually go to him to ask ’[d]o you have a guy’ (somebody that they can employ).” Because David was respected in the community, people trusted him if he recommended them to employ one of his ex-fighters.\textsuperscript{54} Many times, the vacancies that people entrusted David to find suitable candidates for were security jobs;\textsuperscript{55} or as David expressed somewhat braggingly “people are looking for me every day to provide security for others.”\textsuperscript{56} For instance, when David became head of security for the Ministry of Public Works, he brought several of his former subordinates with him. In addition, senior ex-military leaders, like Duo, contacted David when they needed personnel for security contracts.\textsuperscript{57} The kinds of employment opportunities that passed through David were, however, not only security related. The latter did, for example, also refer people, who needed help with practical work such as plumbing or shop-keeping, to his ex-combatants.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{51} Allen was among Taylor’s inner circle/”pepper bush”. He has been on UNs travel ban list, but was upon request by the Liberian government removed in 2012.
\textsuperscript{52} Interviews with David.
\textsuperscript{53} Interview with ex-NPFL combatant 17.
\textsuperscript{54} Interview with ex-NPFL combatant 28.
\textsuperscript{55} Interview with ex-NPFL combatant 29.
\textsuperscript{56} Interview with David.
\textsuperscript{57} Interview with David.
\textsuperscript{58} Interview with ex-NPFL combatants 17 & 30.
Governing elites also made use of David to increase their political standing amongst ex-NPFL fighters by distributing other types of patronage. The previously mentioned NPP-senator did, for example, on several occasions provide scholarships, money and food to David’s ex-fighters. On these occasions David was asked to recommend whom the assistance should be given to.\textsuperscript{59} It was, however, not only members of the opposition that turned to David to mobilize support amongst rank-and-file ex-combatants; several officials close to President Johnson-Sirleaf did the same. One time Duo visited David’s house and gave him 300 USD to distribute to the neighborhood’s ex-combatants. Meanwhile, on another occasion David was asked by Benoni Urey\textsuperscript{60} – former mayor of Careysburg and business tycoon – to hand out rice to the local ex-combatant community.\textsuperscript{61}

\textit{Ex-Combatants’ Direct Access to Big Men}

Besides his ability to convince Monrovia’s governing elite to use his services to distribute patronage, David was also relatively successful in preventing his ex-fighters from attaching themselves to other benefactors. Out of the 28 former undermen in his network, only 11 – or approximately 40\% – had succeeded in developing ties to other Big Men (both governing and non-governing elites). Most of these were senior ex-commanders that had been close to Taylor – such as Adolphus Doloh, Duo and ‘Action Jackson’\textsuperscript{62} – that ex-combatants had relations with during the war. Relations were, however, not confined to ex-military leaders; it also included a number of high-ranking politicians in UP, CDC, NPP and NUDP – such as the UP Chairman Varney Sherman and Prince Johnson (NUDP).

However, even when ex-fighters sought to attach themselves to Big Men through their own efforts,

\textsuperscript{59} Interview with David.
\textsuperscript{60} Urey is a large shareholder of Lonestar telecom one of the largest companies in Liberia. Married into a wealthy family he has one of the largest farms in the country. Urey is currently on the UN travel ban and asset freeze list.
\textsuperscript{61} Interview with ex-NPFL combatant 31.
\textsuperscript{62} Jackson was deputy Chief of Staff in the Strike Force and previously Deputy Minister of Labour during the Taylor government. Now he is surviving from diamond/gold mining in Bomi county.
their affiliation to David was often an asset. One former combatant that became integrated into the networks of the ex-NPFL establishment expressed this in the following manner:

As soon as Siaffa saw me, he recognized me and asked as to what I was doing for the day and where I had been since after the war. When I told him things were difficult for now, he gave me 25 USD to put in my pocket. Later, he began to tell others about me. He told them I was the special assistant to David and also a former strong fighter. He told them how I was a committed person to David from the days of the war, up to the present.

Besides money, Big Men like Siaffa also distributed clothes and food to some of David’s ex-undermen. On occasion they even paid the school fees for the latter’s children and bought them mobile phones. However, even if David could not prevent his former fighters from begging such favors from other Big Men, he was at least able to retain a monopoly on the distribution of the most valuable asset – jobs. In fact, none of David’s ex-fighters indicated that their other Big Men had intervened to directly provide them with employment. Instead elite offers of jobs seem to systematically have gone via David. This underlines how cemented David’s position as a broker was; as does the fact that only one of his ex-combatants ever succeeded in personally receiving assistance from Duo and the NPP senator – the two elites that most frequently used David’s services as a broker. It is therefore not surprising that many of David’s ex-fighters saw him as their main ‘provider’, or as conveyed by one of his former undermen “[h]e (David) is doing everything for me. I can say he is my father because he is doing all for me.”

**Strong Brokerage, Loyal Clients and the Nurturing of Peace**

Why did David’s strong brokerage position not only discourage him from remobilizing his ex-fighters, but also convince him to hinder ex-combatants – who had been approached by other recruiters – from going to Côte d’Ivoire? After the end of the Liberia Civil War, it had become a habit for governing elites in Monrovia to use David’s services to disperse patronage to ex-NPFL.

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63 Siaffa Norman was a lieutenant general in the army division. In the end he was chief of staff for that division. Just as Jackson he is now in Bomi county digging diamonds.
64 Interview with ex-NPFL combatant 24.
65 Interview with ex-NPFL combatant 24.
fighters. Of these benefits, employment opportunities were the most important. In fact, the prospect of receiving a job ensured that there was a steady stream of ex-combatant callers at David’s compound (and not least on his cellphone). For instance, of the 28 members of his network as many as 22 – or approximately 80 % – indicated that it was more common that they contacted David, than the other way around. Even if these visits did not always result in employment, ex-fighters were often able to gain some sort of help from David – small sums of money, used clothes or food – either for free or in return for doing chores. David’s skill as a broker meant that it was often useless for his ex-fighters to circumvent him and try to go directly to governing elites, such as Duo and the NPP senator. Hence, being well-integrated into Monrovia’s economic and political networks – and acquiring a cut in the resources that passed through him – David had little to gain by becoming a broker of war. In fact, by going to Côte d’Ivoire, he risked jeopardizing the position he had attained. Not only did David’s backers lack a vested interest in the outcome of the Ivorian crises, he also risked drawing unwelcomed attention to them if he recruited mercenaries – actions that both the Liberian government and UN tried to check.

Comparative Analysis

Previous research has assumed that it is predominantly economic differences that explain why some ex-MiLCs remobilize their former military networks, while others do not. Based on the post-war experiences of George and David it is, however, questionable whether such assumptions hold. For instance, both George and David struggled to make ends meet and were obliged to engage in a number of activities to support themselves and their families. Even if David was employed by the Ministry of Public Works, he also had a taxi in traffic, let cars park at his compound, found security personnel for local elites and sometimes worked as the right hand of the NPP senator. Meanwhile,

66 Interviews with David and ex-NPFL combatants 25, 32, 33 & 34.
67 See e.g. UN panel of expert reports. Ex-MiLCs interviewed in Ganta (March 2013) points out how they received telephone calls from within inner circles of the government with questions concerning their whereabouts in order to see who was deployed in Côte d’Ivoire or not.
George complemented his earnings from the video-club with incomes generated from his carpentry work, marijuana business and two MC-taxis. In addition, neither ex-commander owned any property and were both dependent on others for housing. Since their economic situations were so similar, economic factors can therefore not help us understand why it was George, and not David, that carried his ex-undermen to Côte d'Ivoire.

What explains the variation in outcomes is instead the two ex-MiLCs’ ability to position themselves as brokers in Monrovia’s post-war networks; while David’s position dampened his urge to fight, George’s drove him to remobilize his men. After disarming, George struggled to establish himself as a broker. Despite being a NPP-cardholder and having ties to the ex-NPFL military establishment – of many which had been integrated into the new government structures – he failed to convince governing elites to employ his services to distribute patronage. This weakness was also reflected by the fact that as many as 70% of his former fighters had at least one other Big Man that they could go to in times of need. Consequently, his ex-combatants had few incentives to keep in touch with him. In fact, only 40% of the former indicated that it was more common that they contacted George, than vice versa. George’s grip on his network was, in other words, abating. Going to Côte d’Ivoire was one way to prevent it from disintegrating further. By doing so he could offer his clients the prospect of pay and loot, fulfill wide-spread expectations that he would lead them to war if the opportunity arose and – by safeguarding his network – ensure that his dream of social advancement lived on.

As opposed to George, David had become a key agent in the game of brokerage. This becomes particularly evident when comparing the two ex-commanders’ relationship with their former chief of staff Duo. Thanks to his close ties to President Johnson-Sirleaf – as the latter’s security advisor – Duo had become the main benefactor for members of the defunct NPFL. For this reason it was natural for both George and Duo to nurture their relationship with him. However, while George was obliged to go to Duo’s house to see him – and came back empty-handed – Duo not only took the
time to personally visit David’s compound, he also gave David cash to dispense to his ex-fighters. The difference could not be more striking. The fact that only 40% of David’s ex-fighters had other benefactors – as compared to 70% for George – gives another indication of how strong his position as a broker was. In addition, none of these Big Men were able to provide jobs to David’s former undermen, something that he could do via his connections. This meant that David did not have to work as hard as George to uphold his network. In fact, as many as 80% of his ex-fighters stated that it was they, rather than David, that initiated contact – compared to George’s 40%. Hence, the steady flow of resources from governing elites meant that David had little interest in remobilizing his network and allowed him to withstand pressures from those ex-fighters who wanted him to take them to the Côte d’Ivoire.

These findings indicate that strong, informal military networks are not necessarily the most dangerous ones. In fact, thanks to the services provided by ex-MiLCs, governing elites can distribute employment, money, food and scholarships – benefits that DDR-programs often fail to provide – to ex-fighters and stabilize post-civil war societies. It may, instead, be waning networks that are the most volatile. Such structures, headed by ex-MiLCs, are often in pursuit of new elites to attach themselves to; either in their home countries or in neighboring ones. In this quest, war may be the most optimal strategy to ensure (re)integration into governing elites’ networks. By going to Côte d’Ivoire to fight, George was, for example, able to improve his standing amongst his former undermen, something which came to good use when mobilizing ex-combatant votes on behalf of UP during the 2011 elections. It may therefore not only be difficult to dismantle informal military structures – as several scholars have highlighted – such actions can even deprive ex-fighters of economic assistance that they are in dire need of. Policies that put too much emphasis on uprooting such structures may therefore cause more harm than good and may, in fact, sow the seeds of renewed violence. This is particularly true when considering that researchers are beginning to question the ability of DDR-programs to reintegrate ex-combatants economically and that economic remarginalization has been
identified as one of the key determinants for why rank-and-file ex-combatants resort to arms (Humphreys & Weinstein 2007; Muggah 2009; Themnér 2011).

A number of questions can, however, be raised concerning these findings. First, what happens when it is the very governing elites that employ the ex-MiLC:s as brokers that want to engage in violence? Does strong brokerage facilitate or inhibit the return to war under such circumstances? If it is the former, can we really conclude that weak brokerage is the strongest determinant of ex-MiLC violence? Put differently, would David have refused to remobilize his ex-fighters if it was Allen, Duo, Grey, Uray or the NPP senator – and not a Gbagbo emissary – that asked him? Ultimately these questions can only be addressed by conducting additional in-depth studies of ex-MiLC:s in other contexts. Even if this is well beyond the scope of this paper, it can, however, be fruitful to at least reflect on these issues. Since both David and his ex-combatants had grown dependent on the assistance provided by governing elites, it is plausible that they would have headed their calls to take to arms. Had they declined, their access to future patronage would have been in jeopardy. Because of the strength of David’s network – and what was at stake – it is likely that his remobilization would have gone quicker and involved more ex-fighters than recruitment efforts conducted by ex-MiLC:s with weaker broker status. However, since governing elites are generally pro-status quo, such appeals are not likely to be made very often. This is not to say that governing elites never have incentives remobilize ex-military networks. Some of these do not have access to the security forces, wherefore they need to ally themselves with alternative security providers if they, for instance, want to stage a coup, or support rebel groups or militias outside the country. In addition, other government elites may want to foster violence clandestinely, which also creates incentives to employ the services of ex-MiLC:s.68 It can, however, be argued that on average weak ex-MiLC brokers should have a broader repertoire of elites that they are willing to fight for. In their quest for elite affiliation they may, for

68 The more recent attacks on villages, military posts and even peacekeepers in Western Côte d’Ivoire may be such a case. There are indications that a key figure was let out of jail in Liberia, just to surface as a commander of the attacks (see Panel of experts 2012).
instance, consider to remobilize their ex-combatants for governing, non-governing and regional elites, while ex-MiLC:s that are strong brokers are only likely to accept requests from the very governing elite they are dependent on. Hence, while the remobilization of weak networks is likely to be more common, the effects may be much more detrimental once strong networks are reactivated.

Second, the causes of war literature has shown that collective identities – such as ethnic, regional or religious ties – play a crucial role in convincing men and women to take to arms; either by generating a sense of belonging that make potential followers identify with military leaders and their goals, or by creating the necessary trust needed when engaging in dangerous and often illicit activities (see e.g. Brown 1996; Collier 2000; Ohlson 2008). Should we, based on this proposition, expect different dynamics when ex-MiLC:s are asked to remobilize their ex-combatant networks on behalf of elites with whom they share a common identity? The mere fact that George went to Côte d’Ivoire, even though no such bonds existed, indicates that such ties are not a prerequisite for ex-MiLC violence.

For instance, George is – just like David – a Bassa; an ethnic group that does not have ethnic brethren in Côte d’Ivoire. He therefore lacked an ‘ethnic stake’ in the outcome of the Ivorian civil war.69 Another reason for why we should not overemphasize the role of collective identities is that other studies have found ex-commanders to be rather willing to take risks. Themnér (2011) and Christensen (2013) have, for example, shown that Sierra Leonean ex-MiLC:s were willing to fight for elites that they did not know or have any bonds to.

CONCLUSIONS
This article has, very much in agreement with Hoffman 2011, shown how ex-combatants in Monrovia are labor for hire and more specifically that their commanders from the war, the ex-MiLC:s typically function as brokers of labor in Big Man networks. Maya Christensen (2013) has recently

69 It is, however, important to note that other Liberian groups – such as the Gio and Krahn – do have ethnic brethren inside Côte d’Ivoire – Guerre (Krahn) and Yacuba (Gio). During the Ivorian crises some Gios and Krahns also crossed over to Côte d’Ivoire to support their ethnic comrades, who tended to back different sides (pro-Ouattara: Yacuba and pro-Gbagbo: Guerre). Some of these Liberian fighters were also ex-commanders and combatants that had previously fought in the two Liberian civil wars.
shown how ex-combatants and others in Freetown who functions as guns-for-hire or predominantly found on what she calls “shaky grounds”. These are typically urban ghettos, where the clientele is more hidden away, anonymous and also often transient. Intensely connected to the illegal economy and they are thus less dangerous for mobilisers to connect with. In addition to this one could argue that the vicinity to the drugs trade also means the access to illegal paths across borders and typically ties to similar actors in other countries. These kind of ties are efficiently used by Big Men intending to mobilize mercenaries.

To add on the knowledge established above this paper has in particular shown the difference in density of former ex-combatants networks centering on ex-MILCs. We have been able to show how weak elite ties typically leads to weak ex-combatant networks and that such low density networks are at greater risk of being remobilized as mercenaries. Ex-MILCs presiding over weak ex-combatant networks are to a larger extent forced into marginal sources of income, for instance the drugs economy, in order to maintain a broker status over their ex-combatants. In a similar vein the remobilization of former soldiers from such shaky grounds, presiding over shaky networks, is a logic outcome of weak elite ties and weak ex-combatant networks. On the other hand we have seen how a stronger network with stronger elite ties also was approached by mobilisers, but to no effect. Opposite to the weak ex-combatant networks both the broker and the ex-combatants had lives and incomes that were up in the open and by breaking away from this they had simply too much too loose as their activities would be scrutinized by the very elites supporting them. (Even the very elite who would utilize such networks risks public critique and would prefer to more clandestinely mobilize shaky grounds networks).