

**LIBERIA:**  
**THE KEY TO ENDING REGIONAL INSTABILITY**

24 April 2002



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## **LIBERIA: THE KEY TO ENDING REGIONAL INSTABILITY**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

While the international community has made great strides in improving the security situation in Sierra Leone, Liberia remains a wellspring for continued conflict stretching across Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. Given the regional ambitions of its president, Charles Taylor, and his continued willingness to use proxy militia fighters in neighbouring states, the hard won peace in Sierra Leone remains in jeopardy.

While the armies of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone have largely remained confined to their national territories, militias such as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) – effectively Liberian President Charles Taylor’s foreign legion – the Sierra Leonean Kamajor “hunter” militias and a range of Liberian dissidents have battled with little regard for national borders.

The remarkable intervention of the international community to end the war in Sierra Leone has helped shift the front line of what is a regional conflict away from the capitals of that country and Guinea to within striking distance of Liberia’s capital, Monrovia. Liberia’s internal situation has been the dynamic that has provided fuel for the broader war, and no peace in the region will be viable until it is dealt with more forcefully.

That situation has returned to the spotlight as a result of the recent gains made by the rebel Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). While limited information is available, the LURD is a serious military force capable of challenging President Taylor’s control over much of Liberia. It has received material support from Guinea and Sierra Leone militias and

the calculated indifference from Great Britain and the U.S. – all increasingly wary of Taylor’s adventurism. However, the LURD is also an organisation in flux, without defined political program or unified leadership.

Open warfare may now be confined to Liberia, but conditions for its spread are ripe. The RUF remain active just across the border from Sierra Leone inside Liberia. President Taylor continues to harbour dissidents bent on invading Guinea. Sierra Leonean “hunter” militia opposed to both Taylor and the RUF are keen to join an advance on Monrovia.

Taylor continues, with Libyan support, to push a grand scheme of political change in West Africa. He has been the key figure in the attempted destabilisation of Guinea and Sierra Leone. His continued violation of UN Security Council resolutions and sanctions and history of using peace agreements to secure tactical military advantage suggest that the current Mano River Union peace process is not the answer to the regional crisis. That process is largely an attempt by President Taylor and his allies to ease LURD pressure, buy time for a counterattack, and produce sanctions on Guinea. It should not divert attention from the primary cause of the crisis: Charles Taylor himself.

Taylor’s rule has fuelled much of this regional instability. Operating under a thin veneer of democracy, his Liberia is an increasingly impoverished cauldron of discontent in which any real challenge to the ruling elite is met with at least intimidation. Many opponents have been driven

out of the country. However, increasing numbers are eager to return home to challenge Taylor's leadership.

With UN sanctions against Liberia due to expire in May unless renewed, the international community faces tough choices. Much of the debate comes down to engagement or containment. Those pressing engagement argue that Taylor should be encouraged to pursue domestic reforms and mend his ways. Advocates of containment counter that he is irredeemable, and argue for weakening his regime through sanctions in the hope that he will eventually be removed from within.

Unfortunately, these seem to be false choices with a potentially high cost for Liberians and the region. Engagement threatens to guarantee Taylor another unfair election victory in 2003 and to risk that the cycle of conflict continues another six years. Containment threatens to produce a protracted civil war or descent into chaos if Taylor is removed without a viable opposition ready to take over.

What is needed is a two-track approach aimed at truly free and fair elections. Both pressure and "principled" engagement should be used to obtain a negotiated solution that ends Liberia's conflict and secures fundamental reforms, including restructuring of the armed forces, return of opposition, and guarantees of freedom of expression and political activity. Taylor must also be pushed to understand that if conditions for free and fair elections are absent at the end of his term next year, the international community will press for power to pass to an impartial interim government, which will rule until necessary reforms have been made.

This type of compromise must be hammered out in a setting which includes all Liberia's principal stakeholders. Success depends on whether the international community can exert enough pressure on the Taylor regime, primarily through sanctions, to make it willing to strike a deal, and on whether the opposition and civil society can unify. Because of the influence it exerts on Taylor, Libyan cooperation with the international effort would be important.

As noted, a peace agreement itself will not bring sustainable change to Liberia. The time before the end of Taylor's term must be used to promote "change from within". Although the opposition is

divided and civil society is weak and largely co-opted by Taylor, there are courageous exceptions that can serve as a foundation. The international community should commit itself to diplomatically encouraging the development of responsible alternatives to Taylor's regime, and give significant financial assistance to civil society to help it serve as a viable alternative. Unless it is willing to address the underpinning of the violence in Liberia, the region can expect mostly more misery, death and destruction. Long-term attention is not always the international community's forte, but the situation in Liberia demands just such an approach.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF NIGERIA, FRANCE, THE UNITED STATES AND UNITED KINGDOM:**

1. Form a "Contact Group" to align positions on Liberia and help create a peace process including all Liberia's principal stakeholders. One or more Contact Group members should take the lead in consulting with the Libyan government.
2. Pressure the LURD, its sponsor Guinea and the Liberian government to negotiate a ceasefire and to convene substantive peace negotiations including civil society and opposition.
3. Demand that the Liberian government implement a program of comprehensive institutional reform, including security sector reform and re-establishment of rule of law to pave the way for free and fair elections.
4. Make clear to President Taylor that if he does not meet conditions for holding free and fair elections by the end of his term, the international community will press for power to pass to an impartial interim government.

### **TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL:**

5. Support the peace process in Liberia, in particular by:
  - (a) maintaining the arms embargo on Liberia until the conflict is fully resolved, and lifting diamond and

travel sanctions only if the Liberian government agrees to an acceptable negotiated solution;

- (b) developing a more vigorous mechanism to monitor the enforcement of sanctions effectively, vigorously pursuing prosecution of key businesspeople assisting the Liberian government in violating those sanctions, and ensuring that the travel ban applies to all these associates; and
- (c) imposing maritime and timber sanctions on Liberia if it does not make acceptable concessions in a negotiated settlement, or if it does not fulfil its commitments in that settlement;

**TO THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL:**

- 6. Ensure the impartiality of staff working at the UN Peace-Building Office in Liberia to avoid a pro-government bias.
- 7. Strengthen the role of the UN Peace-Building Office in Liberia by revamping its human rights component to monitor effectively and report on the security of civil society and opposition groups.
- 8. Instruct the UN Peace-Building Office in Liberia and UN and international humanitarian organisations operating in the region to engage in a limited fashion with the LURD to encourage it to respect the human rights of civilians under international humanitarian law and otherwise to pursue a moderate political agenda.

**TO INTERNATIONAL DONORS:**

- 9. Fund a comprehensive program of institutional reform if the Liberian government agrees to an acceptable negotiated solution.
- 10. Initiate immediately a substantial program for funding independent Liberian civil society and media institutions, focusing on public information, advocacy, civic education and mobilisation, and rural outreach, including support for establishment of independent short wave radio stations in Liberia and surrounding countries and of FM radio antennas throughout Liberia.
- 11. Provide international guarantees and monitoring to ensure the security of vulnerable opposition and activist figures.
- 12. Support opposition leaders and parties in the event they, and international observers, concur that the opportunity for full and free participation in the electoral process has been denied, and refuse to recognise a government resulting from those elections.

**TO CIVIL SOCIETY AND OPPOSITION GROUPS:**

- 13. Convene a forum of opposition parties and civil society groups not co-opted by the Taylor government to develop common positions.

**Freetown/Brussels, 24 April 2002**



## LIBERIA: THE KEY TO ENDING REGIONAL INSTABILITY

### I. INTRODUCTION: CHARLES TAYLOR'S MANO RIVER WAR

When the “Mano River Union” was formed in 1973 between Liberia and Sierra Leone, then expanded in 1980 to include Guinea, it was designed to facilitate regional economic cooperation, transparency and shared ideals.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, almost 30 years later, the Mano River Union has instead become synonymous with the interlocking conflicts that have devastated those countries and continue to undercut hopes for development. In a bid to revitalise cooperation, representatives have been meeting since August 2001 and various peace initiatives have been proposed, but after more than twelve years of cross-border incursions and proxy war, suspicions run deep and cooperation remains elusive.

For the international community, the appalling tragedy of Sierra Leone's conflict – replete with adolescent warriors and use of amputation as a tactic of war – was the most obvious manifestation of the troubles that raged throughout the Mano River region (Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea). Eventually shamed into action, the international community sent a large peace mission into Sierra Leone to bring relief from twelve years of anarchy, brutality and cruel neglect. The well-led and

carefully planned intervention succeeded in stopping the war in Sierra Leone. While the UN played an indispensable role, no single nation deserves more credit than the United Kingdom.

But as the situation in Sierra Leone has improved, it has become painfully evident that the war is not its own, but rather part of a larger conflict that began in Liberia, engulfed Sierra Leone and Guinea, and is now back inside Liberia. While the European Union (EU), UN and regional powers have all officially announced a policy of “a regional approach” to tackling the war, the international community has largely failed to unravel the interconnections and linkages between what is a single conflict – a continuous narrative of gradually intensifying regional fighting driven by power politics.

A useful starting point in understanding the regional nature of the current conflict is the late 1980s, when a corrupt and brutal regime under a young military officer, Samuel Doe, ruled Liberia. President Doe was a key Cold War ally of the United States in the region, and its financial support was vital to keeping him in power. This relationship attracted the hostility of Libyan leader Muammar Ghaddafi, who made Liberia a prime target in his plan to sponsor an Africa-wide wave of insurrections to displace Western influence. Charles Taylor, a Liberian recently escaped from prison in the United States, was one of the first graduates of Libya's elite school of insurrection at Mathaba, and a key instrument of Ghaddafi's designs.

On 24 December 1989 Charles Taylor led his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) forces, backed by Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, in an

<sup>1</sup> The Mano River Union was established in October 1973 under the Mano River Declaration – initially between Liberia's President William Tolbert and Sierra Leone's President Siaka Stevens. Guinea, under Sékou Touré, joined in 1977. The aim was to build an economic and customs alliance and achieve a common market in which goods, services and people would move freely across the region.

invasion of Nimba County, Liberia. The group advanced rapidly but a Taylor rival, Prince Johnson, broke away to form a separate faction. Despite the infighting, both Taylor's and Johnson's factions were poised to take Monrovia by early 1990.<sup>2</sup>

This offensive set off alarm bells in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), including Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Gambia and Sierra Leone, largely because Taylor's rebels included Libyan-trained dissidents from all these countries except Nigeria. France was also believed to be supporting the NPFL. The spectre of Liberia as a permanent regional revolutionary base led to creation of an intervention force, the Monitoring Observer Group (ECOMOG), backed by Guinea, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, that deployed to Liberia's capital in 1990, denying Taylor his victory. In response, Taylor angrily vowed that Sierra Leone, the rear base for ECOMOG, would soon "taste the bitterness of war".<sup>3</sup> The vow was fulfilled and the Mano River War was born.

On 23 March 1991, 100 fighters of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) invaded Sierra Leone.<sup>4</sup> The force included almost 50 Liberian and Burkinabe mercenaries, and was led by Foday Sankoh, another Libyan trainee and a close Taylor associate. The RUF was then, and remains dependent upon and controlled by Taylor.

Though Sierra Leone was fragile, and suffering from endemic corruption, economic decline and large numbers of disaffected youth, the RUF was unable to tap into these grievances to gain popular support. On the contrary, its brutal and parasitic nature quickly unified Sierra Leonean opposition. Sierra Leone and Guinea counterattacked in May 1991, organising Liberian refugees, mainly former Krahn soldiers from the late President Doe's army, into the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO).<sup>5</sup>

ULIMO became Taylor's principal armed opponent on Liberian territory for the ensuing five-year war. Using Guinea and Sierra Leone as a base, it received training, weapons and support from those states, and traded in diamonds and other commodities with them.

The Mano River War raged through Sierra Leone and Liberia until 1995, when ECOMOG, finding Taylor formidable on the battlefield, reached an accommodation in the hope he would curtail support for the RUF. This "accord" was embodied in the Abuja Agreements of 1995 and 1996. Neighbouring states supported the July 1997 election that made Taylor president in a contest that while marginally free and fair was also distorted by corruption and intimidation. Initially, Taylor did seem to reduce support for the RUF, who were pushed back to the Liberian border by a South African mercenary firm, Executive Outcome, hired by Sierra Leone's new president, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah.

Working in conjunction with disgruntled elements of Sierra Leone's own military, led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma and his Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), however, the RUF was able to topple President Kabbah on 25 May 1997. It dominated the new military regime, and took power for the first time in Freetown.

In turn, and demonstrating how interlocked the cycle of violence would become, Kamajor "hunter" militias, who backed deposed President Kabbah, were forced to retreat into Liberia, where they developed close ties with anti-Taylor ULIMO fighters who had backed ex-President Doe.<sup>6</sup>

In response to RUF gains in Sierra Leone, ECOMOG deployed to Freetown. By February 1998, with encouragement of the U.S. and British governments, it drove back both the military regime and the RUF. The U.S. and UK pushed through UN Security Council authorisation after the fact. ECOMOG coordinated with the Kamajor hunter militias and their ULIMO allies, who attacked across the Liberian border.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix C: Liberia's First Civil War, 1989-1997.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1999), p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> For analysis of Sierra Leone's civil war, see ICG Africa Report No. 28, *Sierra Leone: Time for a New Military and Political Strategy*, 11 April 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Doe was captured and assassinated in September 1990 by forces loyal to Prince Yormie Johnson, who also sought the presidency.

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<sup>6</sup> The "Kamajor" hunters are a militia group that developed after 1995 out of the efforts of communities in Southern Sierra Leone, mostly of the Mende tribe, to protect themselves from the RUF and later the army.

By mid-1998 ECOMOG had reached parts of the Liberian border. Its dynamic Nigerian commanding officer, General Maxwell Khobe, was convinced that Taylor continued to play a central role in supporting the RUF. Consequently, he took a direct hand in organising Liberian dissidents operating in Sierra Leone to apply pressure. He sponsored a small incursion into Liberia's Lofa County by a group of dissidents called the Justice Coalition of Liberia (JCL) in August of 1998, and played a key coordinating role in cementing the alliance between Liberian dissidents and the Sierra Leonean Kamajors hunter militias, including chiefs Sam Hinga-Norman and Eddie Massally. This loose coalition would later form the basis of the most militarily powerful rebel group in Liberia today, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD).

However, the RUF soon made a spectacular counter-attack late in 1998, which General Khobe blamed on an influx of weapons, supplies and men from President Taylor. There were also charges that Taylor had somehow befriended or bought off a number of General Khobe's fellow Nigerian officers.<sup>7</sup> Despite an exemplary military record and universal respect, Khobe was removed from command of ECOMOG and placed in charge of the remains of Sierra Leone's army. He died in April 2000 from complications of combat wounds.

By 1999, Charles Taylor was poised to win the Mano River War. The RUF and its military regime allies had taken Sierra Leone's capital Freetown in an orgy of destruction and cruelty. Foday Sankoh was now Sierra Leone's Vice-President, the RUF substantially controlled the country's mineral resources and had received a full criminal amnesty as part of the badly flawed July 1999 Lomé Accord that attempted to end the conflict.<sup>8</sup>

Following the signing of that accord, however, the RUF became increasingly split between commanders loyal to Sankoh, and senior military commanders who remained more directly loyal to

Charles Taylor, including Sam "Mosquito" Bockarie and Dennis "Superman" Mingo. Like many of the disputes in the region, the Taylor-Sankoh split can most likely be traced to control of Sierra Leone's diamond fields. This led to the events of May 2000, in which the Lomé Accord collapsed and the RUF took hostage over 500 UN peacekeepers.

The collapse of peace accord, the attacks on UN peacekeepers and the RUF march on Freetown were the last straw for the international community, and particularly the U.S. and British governments, who began a campaign in May 2000 to turn the tide in the war. The British deployed troops to Freetown, coordinated a counterattack by pro-government forces and stepped up training and supply of the Sierra Leone military.

Taylor's links with the RUF were substantiated and documented by British intelligence services, and he was strongly criticised in a variety of diplomatic settings, culminating in UN Security Council demands that he cease support for the RUF and involvement in its diamond trading. Britain also sought to have EU aid to Liberia cut off. The long Liberian-directed proxy war in Sierra Leone was about to return to Taylor's own doorstep.

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<sup>7</sup> ICG interviews with Liberian dissidents, March 2002.

<sup>8</sup> The roles of Nigeria and the U.S. in forging the accord are controversial, particularly the work of U.S. Presidential Peace Envoy Jesse Jackson, who famously likened Liberian President Taylor to Nelson Mandela. See Ryan Lizza, "Where Angels Fears to Tread", *New Republic*, 13 July 2000 and Steve Coll, "The Other War", *Washington Post Magazine*, 9 January 2000.



## **II. THE RISE OF THE LURD INSURGENCY**

Since the first sketchy news reports in July 2000 and then spring 2001 of guerrilla fighting in Liberia's north-western Lofa County, the LURD has been something of a mystery to the outside world. The group is essentially a loose coalition of anti-Taylor forces, drawing upon a variety of militia factions and refugee groups, increasingly backed by Guinea, with more indirect support from Sierra Leone, the U. S. and Great Britain.

As Liberian dissidents collected in regional capitals and refugee camps during 2000, and groups such as the Justice Coalition of Liberia and the Organisation of Displaced Liberians (ODL) began to mount attacks within Liberia, an effort was undertaken to combine the various anti-Taylor groups into a single force.

Against the backdrop of an unravelling peace process in Sierra Leone, meetings were held in Freetown in February 2000 among the Justice Coalition of Liberia, the Organisation of Displaced Liberians and the Union of Democratic Forces of Liberia (UDL). The latter was an umbrella group comprising the various factions of Liberian dissidents present in Sierra Leone, and brought together by Dr. Laveli Supuwood, a former Liberian Minister of Justice and senior National Patriotic Front of Liberia political figure, who had fallen out with Taylor in 1994. The meetings produced the declaration of a union of these anti-Taylor forces into the LURD, which shortly established liaison with the British military.

Sierra Leone appeared to be a natural base of operations for the LURD. Many fighters were already there, the border is just 120 kilometres from Monrovia, and the group enjoys senior political support in the country. However, despite backing from senior Nigerians, Sierra Leone Army officers and Kamajor militia commanders, President Kabbah was disinclined to allow the LURD to use his country as a prominent staging ground for attacks.

The LURD lobbied hard but unsuccessfully to be permitted to base their activities out of Pujehun and Zimmi on the border. Indeed, when Kabbah was presented with a LURD plan to attack Monrovia from the sea, he leaked it to Charles

Taylor. Kabbah had previously released a letter from the LURD requesting support, allowing Taylor to finger a number of the leaders. In short, it became clear that an invasion could not be organised from Sierra Leone. Gradually the LURD began to shift attention to Guinea, where it had a foothold in border regions and was tolerated – though not yet supported – by the Conté government.

### **A. GUINEA ENTERS THE FRAY**

By July 2000, the LURD invaded Liberia from Guinea.<sup>9</sup> In Sierra Leone, Kamajor hunter militias were mobilising for a similar venture. While the U.S. and Britain have admitted no involvement, the groups involved were in contact with military officers from these countries, and certainly disenchantment with Taylor runs high in both London and Washington. The LURD made some inroads into Lofa County in north-western Liberia but the Kamajor hunter militias never attacked, likely due to opposition from Kabbah.

In September 2000, Charles Taylor counterattacked, boldly widening the war by sending the bulk of the RUF that remained loyal to him into Guinea. The RUF was accompanied by many Liberian fighters, as well as Guinean dissidents sponsored by Taylor, including former Guinean General Zoumanigui who had led a 1996 coup against President Conté. The attack was well targeted, driving straight into the most populous, wealthy regions. One front was on the Liberian border and sought to take the forest region. A second, coming from Kambia in Sierra Leone, went for the capital, Conakry.

At the height of the invasion, the RUF and Guinean dissidents took the cities of Macenta and Guéckédou near the Liberian border, reached the outskirts of Kissidougou, slightly farther north, and got one third of the way to Conakry. President Conté, fearing elements of his army might join Zoumanigui, relied on mobilising LURD forces, and even Sierra Leonean “Donso” hunter militiamen in Guinean refugee camps. Using these as ground troops, and backing them with helicopter

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<sup>9</sup> ICG interviews with LURD leaders in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, February and March 2002, as well as with Sierra Leone army officers and Kamajor commanders on Sierra Leone/Liberia border in February 2002.

gunships and artillery, he pushed the RUF back into Liberia and Sierra Leone by January 2001.

The over 500 LURD fighters in Guinea played a key role in repulsing the Taylor-backed forces, and in many ways, the invasion was an important turning point for the movement. The Guinean Ministry of Defence came to work closely with it, and LURD leaders note that President Conté personally greeted their troops in Conakry as they were sent to fight.<sup>10</sup>

President Conté also moved to return the war back to Liberian soil, supporting the Donsos and the LURD to pursue their enemies deep into Sierra Leone and Liberia. He provided further air and artillery support, and Guinean troops crossed into Sierra Leone. Guinean gun ships bombarded several Sierra Leone and Liberian towns, obliterating Koindu, a major trading centre and RUF base in Sierra Leone town.

The offensive aimed to reach Monrovia and topple Taylor. U.S. support for Guinea's military was increased, and Guinea greatly stepped up supply of the LURD.<sup>11</sup> Kamajor and Donso fighters, freed by the lull in Sierra Leone, travelled via Freetown and Conakry to join the LURD invasion. Kamajor chiefs and senior British military officers jointly visited Guinea's sensitive forest region.<sup>12</sup> The offensive, launched in mid-November 2000, advanced rapidly in Lofa County.

In January 2001 the offensive turned east, driving for the centre of Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia movement, Gbarnga. Its success – killing hundreds of RUF, bringing the Donsos to within a few kilometres of the Kono diamond fields and taking the LURD deep into Lofa County – led Taylor to restart the peace process in Sierra Leone, requesting RUF disarmament and UN deployment in Kambia.

Taylor's new interest in peace was driven by the fact that he was fighting on three fronts – in Liberia, on the Kambian border with Guinea, and

in Kono in Sierra Leone. Trying to eliminate one of these fronts made military sense.

Also in January 2001, the U.S. and British diplomatic offensive in the Security Council resumed. Armed with the report of an UN expert panel demonstrating Taylor's links with the RUF and the trade in conflict diamonds, the U.S. called for sanctions.<sup>13</sup> Frustrated primarily by Taylor's francophone West African allies, including Burkina Faso and Mali, who were supported quietly by France, sanctions were delayed until May 2001 to give Taylor a last chance to comply with UN resolutions. This did not happen but France ensuring that the most damaging sanctions proposed, on timber and maritime registry, were not part of the package imposed in May 2001.

However, the embargo that was put in place significantly raised the price of arms and ammunition for Taylor, since he had to smuggle them into the country.<sup>14</sup> Making the fight against the Guinean-backed insurgency more expensive for him was part of a U.S. strategy to drain the Taylor's finances and weaken his hold on power. A parallel move was to create a Special Court for Sierra Leone to prosecute war crimes. Vigorous American support for this stemmed at least partly from the expectation that it would indict Taylor, thus further isolating him. Agreements for the court were drawn up in the summer 2000, and initial preparatory missions were scheduled for September 2001.<sup>15</sup>

However, the Guinean backed offensive soon stalled as supplies were limited, and the LURD encountered stiff resistance near Gbarnga. Many current LURD fighters also suggest that their troops were not fully up to par at the time, with fighters composed mostly of former Mandingos

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<sup>10</sup> ICG interviews with LURD leaders in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, February and March 2002.

<sup>11</sup> ICG interviews with LURD leaders in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, February and March 2002

<sup>12</sup> ICG interview with senior CDF commander, November 2001.

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<sup>13</sup> Report of the Panel of Experts Appointed Pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000) in relation to Sierra Leone, (S/2000/1195), December 2000.

<sup>14</sup> For how Taylor has flouted the arms embargo, see *Taylor-made: The Pivotal Role of Liberia's Forests in Regional Conflict*, A Report by Global Witness, September 2001 and Report of the Panel of Experts pursuant to Security Council resolution 1343 (2001), paragraph 19, concerning Liberia, (/2001/1015), 26 October 2001.

<sup>15</sup> See UN Resolution 1315, 14 August 2000 and Letter from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council dated 12 January 2001, S/2001/40.

from the ULIMO-K faction.<sup>16</sup> The LURD appeared more disordered and ill-disciplined than it is currently, and civilians report that it committed serious attacks on civilians until at least June 2001.<sup>17</sup> A retreat by LURD during the rainy season left Liberian government forces in control of much of Lofa County by fall 2001.

While the first serious LURD invasion failed in its military objective of taking Gbarnga, it did galvanise increasing support for the group. Many prominent Liberian opposition figures, who had previously dismissed its chances, began approaching the LURD. Most importantly, many fighters from other parts of the region joined.

The ongoing disarmament process in Sierra Leone also stimulated interest as many parties saw the RUF “disarmament” as less an admission of defeat than a tactical retreat from Sierra Leone into Liberia. Various sources indicate that between 600 and 2,000 RUF crossed into Liberia by the end of 2001, with some RUF combatants as far away as Freetown saying they had been offered between U.S.\$300 and U.S.\$500 to fight for Charles Taylor.<sup>18</sup> In response, around 500 Kamajor fighters, many from tribes whose traditional lands span the Sierra Leone-Liberia border, passed through Freetown and Conakry to the Guinea border to join the LURD.<sup>19</sup> These forces were also sent mainly on a contract basis, paid from U.S. \$200 to U.S. \$300 each.

In October 2001, a number of Liberian dissidents who had formerly served in the “Special Forces” of the Sierra Leone Army left Zimmi in the south-east of Sierra Leone to join the LURD in Guinea. Facing opposition from President Kabbah, they had given up on invading from Sierra Leone. LURD forces in Guinea also received reinforcements from Liberians exiled in Côte d’Ivoire. These new fighters shifted the military

balance within the LURD away from the Mandingos, and provided a fresh force of highly motivated and experienced men, who would be the driving force behind the new incursion.<sup>20</sup>

## **B. DRIVING DEEPER INTO LIBERIA**

The LURD began a new major offensive in November 2001. Instead of heading east for Gbarnga, it drove south along the Sierra Leone border, hoping to establish contact with dissident fighters still waiting there. This strategy appeared to work. Voinjama fell in December, as well as Valhun, Foya and, later, Bopulu. Groups of combatants began crossing into Liberia from Sierra Leone in a steady, though small, stream from November onwards.

However, by 25 December 2001 the Liberian army at Kolahun had joined with RUF forces operating out of Sierra Leone and attacked the LURD rear, ambushing convoys and retaking Foya. The LURD was forced to return north to fight the government military leader Roland Duo, who commanded a mix of Liberian, RUF and Guinean rebel troops at Kolahun. But in January 2002, after an angry message from President Conté, President Kabbah deployed his troops to Kailahun to block RUF activities, and the LURD won a victory at Kolahun. By early February 2002, the Liberian army was in disarray, and Duo was recalled to help with defences around the capital. A large LURD contingent remains along the Sierra Leone border, guarding against another RUF invasion from Sierra Leone, and combing the Lofa bush for government forces.<sup>21</sup>

The conclusion of the disarmament process in Sierra Leone has also pushed active elements of the RUF into Liberia. The elusive senior RUF figure Sam “Mosquito” Bockarie was reported in February 2002 to be operating in Lofa County just across the border, rallying RUF combatants.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> ICG interviews with LURD leaders in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, February and March 2002.

<sup>17</sup> ICG interviews with Liberian refugees on the Sierra Leone border, January 2002.

<sup>18</sup> ICG interviews with Kamajor commanders, civil society organisations, NCDDR and UNAMSIL officials between September 2001 and February 2002.

<sup>19</sup> ICG interviews with Kamajor commanders, confirmed by interviews with LURD leaders, Western diplomats, and civil society organizations between November 2001 and February 2002.

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<sup>20</sup> ICG interviews with LURD combatants and leaders, March 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Since January 2002, the Sierra Leone Army has reverted back to using its earlier title of Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Force (RSLAF).

<sup>22</sup> ICG interview with Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Force commander, February 2002.

The war threatened to spill into Sierra Leone on another two occasions in early and late December 2001. Kamajor reconnaissance missions reported that Bockarie was in the southern Liberian border town of Congo with many men. The Sierra Leone government panicked, ordered deployment to the border and authorised constant combat helicopter patrols. The second scare coincided with a crackdown by Kabbah on LURD members in Freetown. It is likely that Taylor was using the invasion threat to force Kabbah to remove the LURD completely from Sierra Leone. Since the temporary arrest of most high level members in Freetown, some have gone underground or shifted to other locations in the region.<sup>23</sup>

While on the Sierra Leone border, the LURD was outflanked by the RUF, elsewhere it continued to advance, capturing large amounts of ammunition and enjoying significant defections from government forces at Totota and Lofa Bridge. Casualties were low and resistance almost nonexistent. In a style of combat common in the Mano River War, strategic positions tended to change hands several times as defenders yielded if outnumbered. The main resistance the LURD faced on previous incursions had been from militia commanders in Lofa like Roland Duo and the Lorma Commander of the Lofa Defence Force, "Farsu". By February 2002 both Duo and Farsu had been defeated, opening up Lofa County to the LURD.

Most importantly, the shift in the character of the LURD away from a Mandingo force, and the lobbying of LURD Vice-Chairman Laveli Supuwood, a prominent Lorma, had succeeded in shifting the loyalty of the Lorma tribe away from Taylor. The remnants of the Lofa Defence Force shifted from Farsu to the LURD, and so opened the way for an advance on Zorzor and south to Gbarnga. Zorzor fell on 28 February 2002, and LURD troops have reached Salay.

In central-southern Lofa, the LURD captured the diamond mines at Fassama. After much internal debate over how mining could split the group, it was decided that no one would be allowed to mine. The 2,000 youths who were already doing so in Fassama were ordered to leave, but were offered

the option of fighting for the dissidents. Many chose to join, swelling LURD's ranks.

Currently, LURD forces control most of Lofa County and an arc of territory that puts them within striking distance of Monrovia, Gbarnga and the Mano River Bridge on the Sierra Leone border. By mid-February 2002 LURD troops were just 44 kilometre from Monrovia, at Klay Junction. The front line of Charles Taylor's Mano River War had come full circle.

The international community may rejoice that war has left Sierra Leone<sup>24</sup>, but it cannot be sure that peace has come there until the wider war ends. The links between Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone are so extensive that peace is truly indivisible. It is unfortunate that it is only this insight that might generate international commitment to Liberia. The people of that country are deserving in their own right of attention. The current conflict in Liberia has not yet reached the scale and brutality seen in Sierra Leone, but as many as 200,000 Liberian war-related deaths from 1990-1996 are evidence that it has the potential. Now is the time for a comprehensive effort to treat the cause of the region's problems.

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<sup>23</sup> ICG interview with LURD leaders and associates of the LURD in Freetown, March 2002.

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<sup>24</sup> For an overview on the situation in Sierra Leone, see ICG Africa report n°35, *Sierra Leone: Managing Uncertainty*, 24 October 2001, and ICG Africa Briefing, *Sierra Leone: Ripe for Elections?*, 19 December 2001.

### III. A PROFILE OF THE LURD

Given the LURD's rather remarkable battlefield gains over the last year, further exploration of its motivation, history, organisation and tactics are warranted. Such an analysis is key to understanding both the political process needed in Liberia and the limits of what military activity can do to end the regional violence.

#### A. ORIGINS

The LURD is a diverse coalition of former factions and political figures from Liberia's civil war, though it also involves some new faces and organisations.<sup>25</sup> It is tied together by a single common aim: to drive Charles Taylor from power.

Many key actors fled Liberia in 1997, convinced that Taylor's election was a fraud perpetrated by ECOMOG and fearing a campaign of retribution and terror. The killings of critics, including former Taylor ally Samuel Dokie, a prominent market woman Nowai Flomo, and Vice-President Enoch Dogolea convinced many that the government was willing to use extra-judicial killings to consolidate control. Moreover, many claim to have faced daily persecution in Monrovia.

A key event in the formation of the LURD was a fire fight between Taylor's forces and former fighters from Roosevelt Johnson's Krahn-based ULIMO-J faction at Camp Johnson in Monrovia on 18 September 1998.<sup>26</sup> The ULIMO-J fighters had gradually built up an increasingly strong presence in that neighbourhood over summer 1998. They claimed that violence and intimidation by government forces had forced them together for protection. Officials in the Liberian government counter that Johnson was consolidating forces to establish an area of control from which to launch a

coup. After some skirmishes between Johnson's men and police, Taylor dispatched the Special Operations Division, a paramilitary unit, to break up the camp. Several Johnson fighters were killed, and a group including Johnson sought protection in the U.S. Embassy, from where they were evacuated to Sierra Leone and Nigeria. Around 600 ULIMO fighters left Liberia in the months following, most for Côte d'Ivoire.

Many Mandingo fighters from Alhaji Kromah's ULIMO-K faction also feared retribution and decided to remain in refugee camps in Guinea.<sup>27</sup> Other Liberians, who had fought with both the Kamajor militia group and the Sierra Leone Army in Sierra Leone's civil war, remained in Sierra Leone. As noted earlier, the late Nigerian ECOMOG General Maxwell Khobe had played a key role in establishing initial links between these dissident groups. Some LURD fighters claim to have been organised by Maxwell Khobe to attack Liberia in August of 1998.

The first Liberian dissident attacks on Liberia may have come as early as August 1998 by the Justice Coalition of Liberia, though the government says that the first attack was in April 1999. The Justice Coalition of Liberia was commanded by a former senior brigade commander of Taylor's own National Patriotic Front of Liberia forces, General Liberty. He had been tasked with guarding Taylor's arms caches during the 1997 elections, but had surrendered to ECOMOG after Taylor murdered his mother in retaliation for Liberty's declaration that he wanted to resign from the National Patriotic Front of Liberia. The Justice Coalition of Liberia attacked Kolahun on 11 August 1998, but was forced into Guinea by the RUF counterattack on ECOMOG forces in late 1998. The Guineans gave the group no help since they feared resumption of the conflict with Liberia.

Another Liberian dissident group based in Guinea, the Organisation of Displaced Liberians, made a brief raid on Liberia on 1 April 1999. It was composed mainly of Mandingo refugees in Guinea, and was headed from the U.S. by a former ULIMO faction led by warlord Alhaji Kromah.<sup>28</sup> The

<sup>25</sup> The following section is based on ICG interviews with refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) on the Sierra Leone border, individuals in Monrovia, senior LURD political leaders in Guinea, LURD commanders and civilians in Lofa County, Western diplomats in Sierra Leone, and Guinean and CDF commanders during November 2001 and March 2002.

<sup>26</sup> The Krahns were the main opponents of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia during the civil war. See Appendix C.

<sup>27</sup> The Mandingos are an ethnic group based mainly in northern Liberia. They were predominantly allied to the Krahns. See Appendix C.

<sup>28</sup> Alhaji Koroma heads the ULIMO faction ULIMO-K. Another faction, ULIMO-J, is headed by Roosevelt

Guinea-based head of the group was William Hanson, a devout catholic and human rights advocate, who had taken up arms in memory of the five American nuns and catholic father he had lived with for years who were murdered by Taylor's troops in October 1992.

The Justice Coalition of Liberia attacked Lofa again in October 1999, striking south from the Guéckédou area of Guinea. It took Kolahun and Foya along the border and held them for 21 days before being forced back into Guinea. This series of relatively low level attacks gave impetus to form the LURD coalition in February of 2000 as discussed above.

## **B. MILITARY STRENGTH AND EVOLVING TACTICS**

Senior LURD leaders remain convinced they have the capacity to take Monrovia militarily. They have encountered only limited resistance from government forces so far and believe many government troops are dispirited and unwilling to die for Taylor. Many within the LURD also feel their large number of well-trained and experienced former Liberian army troops are more capable than those Taylor still has. Some National Patriotic Front of Liberia militias recently remobilised by Taylor appear mainly interested in looting.

The number of LURD combatants is in flux and almost impossible to estimate closely. At any given time a significant percentage of LURD combatants are outside the country resting or visiting families. In addition there is constant change in the composition, as tribes and communities join the cause, and government defections continue. There is sometimes a blurred line between a civilian supporter and a combatant.

LURD commanders uniformly claim around 14,000-15,000 combatants but this likely includes carriers, spies and other unarmed members. Based on the numbers known to travel to Lofa from other parts of the region, however, the figure is probably closer to 2,000-3,000 serious combatants operating in Liberia.

There are many reports that Charles Taylor has been moving arms and supplies into south-eastern Liberia in case he loses Monrovia. Such a fallback, in addition to promising a long war, would also likely widen it. Many LURD fighters and supporters are still in Sierra Leone, and hundreds of fighters from Liberia's first civil war – from Prince Johnson's Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia, George Boley's Liberia Peace Council and Roosevelt Johnson's ULIMO-J – are in refugee camps in Côte d'Ivoire, near the Liberian border. A prolonged war would likely bring an invasion of Liberia from dissidents based in these two countries.

The most recent LURD offensives have also seen evolving battlefield strategies. First, they decided to push south along the Sierra Leone border. Secondly, they now avoid fighting for roads or towns and pursue a strategy of infiltration of south-western Liberia through the thick bush of Southern Lofa, looping around government strongholds and disrupting supply lines. This was how Klay Junction was attacked in early February 2002. The LURD claim between 300 and 500 men were assigned to that mission but the number that actually attacked was likely closer to twenty.

The third innovation is to emphasise political education of the troops. Learning from the RUF's disastrous experience, LURD trainers and political figures have been stressing the necessity to avoid civilian casualties. Troops have been strongly warned against attacking civilians and told to treat surrendering or wounded prisoners humanely.<sup>29</sup> As a result, with the exception of members of the Kissi tribe, who have been targeted because of pro-Taylor and RUF bias, civilians inside Lofa report that the LURD have largely ceased serious human rights violations since June 2001. A provost marshal has been appointed, and a system of civil administration is being set up among local chiefs to allow cases of abuses to be brought before the military leadership. At least one LURD soldier has been executed for abuse, a man who killed a Gbandi woman married to a local chief. LURD spokesmen claim that their strategy of avoiding towns and more pro-government areas like Bong County is driven by a concern to protect civilians.

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Johnson. Most ULIMO-K members are ethnic Krahn, and most ULIMO-J members are ethnic Mandingos.

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<sup>29</sup> ICG interviews with LURD combatants and commanders in Lofa County, Liberia, March 2002.

An increasing food shortage inside Lofa County, generating conflict between civilians and combatants, combined with the constant influx of new fighters, has made it difficult to maintain discipline. Refugees in Sierra Leone report that while LURD fighters treat civilians much better than Liberian government forces, they do loot towns and pressure civilians to carry water and supplies for them.<sup>30</sup> Liberian government forces have spread terror in towns close to the front, telling civilians that LURD uses power saws to cut off limbs. Such tales often rapidly empty towns, which then allows government troops to loot items left behind.

More seriously, refugees also report that Armed Forces of Liberia and RUF forces have committed widespread and systematic rape, killing and torture of civilians.<sup>31</sup> The refugee and internally displaced crisis developing in Lofa is to a large extent the result of such government practices. To counter the propaganda against them, the LURD sometimes force civilians to return to LURD controlled towns to view conditions. Civilians confidentially interviewed by ICG within Lofa County reported that the LURD provided them with small amounts of food and medicine. The group has even facilitated the evacuation to Guinea of supportive tribes, such as happened for 800 Gbandi villagers threatened by government forces. It is clear that LURD efforts to treat enemy combatants humanely has paid off, with many combatants and prisoners switching sides.

### **C. INTERNAL UNITY**

The LURD remains an uneasy coalition of diverse groups whose unity does not extend far beyond the desire to overthrow Taylor. While many intense rivalries have been overcome to form a coalition, the political leadership is still divided by petty conflicts and personal animosities, as individuals jockey for position and control. Some younger and more idealistic members, such as the spokesman,

William Hanson, play a consensus-building role, but almost all senior members harbour presidential ambitions. In recognition of the risk, LURD political leaders have banned themselves from visiting troops at the front. Field combatants appear to enjoy fair unity, and there have been no reports of fighting among units. While some units are more ethnically homogenous, others are a mix of tribal backgrounds. Many fighters are contemptuous of the political in-fighting.<sup>32</sup>

While the organisation does not appear to have close links with former warlords such as Alhaji Kromah or Roosevelt Johnson (and claims to have rejected their requests to join), many senior figures are associated with former factions in the civil war. The current Chairman of the LURD National Executive Council is Sekou Dammate Conneh, a former used car and fuel salesman, as well as finance ministry official from Monrovia, who has never been involved in Liberian politics, or in any armed faction, before. He was chosen largely in deference to his wife, Ayesha Conneh, who rose from humble beginnings as a market woman to the heights of power in 1996, when she had a vision warning President Conté of Guinea of a military coup. Ayesha is now Conte's top spiritual advisor and universally-feared by senior Guinean officials. Conté is highly superstitious and has proved willing to remove cabinet ministers, and murder potential opposition figures, on a Conneh vision.

There are two serious potential splits within the LURD. One would replay the ULIMO-J and ULIMO-K split between ethnic Mandingos and Krahns. The LURD is largely a coalition of these two groups, but as the insurgency has progressed many from other tribes, particularly the Lorma, have joined and diluted Krahn-Mandingo tensions. Sekou and Ayesha Conneh are both Mandingos, but the LURD leadership is ethnically diverse, and the appointment of Prince Seo, a Krahn, as Chief of Staff and military leader in 2001 has also helped to defuse Krahn-Mandingo tensions.

The second potential problem is between the political leadership in Conakry, and the military leadership, in Voinjama, Liberia and headed by Sekou Conneh. Such a split, were it to occur, would have serious implications for the region, since LURD supporters and potential fighters in

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<sup>30</sup> ICG interviews in early February 2002 with over 100 Liberian refugees or Sierra Leonean returnees in Koindu, Daru, Buedu, Zimmi, Dawa and at Mano Bridge. Treatment of civilians will also be profiled in a forthcoming report from Human Rights Watch.

<sup>31</sup> ICG interviews with refugees along Sierra Leone border, confirmed by confidential interviews with international human rights researchers, February and March 2002.

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<sup>32</sup> On this split, see Appendix C.

Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire only recognise the Conakry leadership.

#### D. POLITICAL PROGRAMME

LURD leaders are divided and often confused and inconsistent when asked their political program. Some say their problem is just with Taylor, and they will negotiate when he has resigned and, for example, the vice-president has taken over. Others say Taylor's entire government must go.

All agree on the basic outline of some form of post-Taylor transitional administration, which would put strong emphasis on reintegration needs of combatants, establish a truly national army and lay the groundwork for free and fair elections. The differences come over the form of that administration. The various positions roughly break down into two camps, one supporting an interim presidency to prepare elections, and the other supporting a "Council of State" similar to the attempts made during the civil war.

Some Council of State advocates are willing to support an interim presidency if the president is not a Krahn, Gio or Mandingo but a distinguished and relatively neutral figure chosen out of LURD. Most interim presidency advocates, including Sekou Conneh and Joe Wylie, support that position because they covet the top job. Council of State advocates want the LURD to play an important role in a transitional administration, but admit they could accept a non-LURD, neutral administration.

#### E. GUINEA'S SUPPORT

President Conté has often publicly claimed that he does not support the Liberian dissidents. In fact, his government is the LURD's primary source of direct military and financial support. Basic weaponry, military supplies and food are all supplied at the orders of President Conté, and channelled through Ayesha Conneh and her network of businesses. These were quite limited in the past, but they have been increased as the LURD launched their most recent offensive.<sup>33</sup> LURD wounded are treated free of charge in

Guinean military hospitals and until recently were allowed to recuperate in Kissidougou. Ayesha and Sekou Conneh live in government housing and drive Guinean government vehicles. Ayesha is guarded by Conté's own personal Red Beret guard.<sup>34</sup> Guinean military commanders, from border areas to senior figures in the Ministry of Defence, are strongly supportive.

Guinean support for the LURD is due to a number of factors. First Conté's foreign policy is largely isolationist. The guiding principles are opposition to French interests in Africa (growing out of historical Guinean suspicions of the former colonial power) and assurance of regime stability by whatever means necessary, including supporting neighbours. Since the early 1990s, Guinea has had a strategic relationship with the U.S., which gives substantial military support.<sup>35</sup> The French and Libyan backed popular insurgency of Charles Taylor contradicted both principles, and Guinea was an early strong backer of the 1990 ECOMOG deployment to keep Taylor from Monrovia. Since then, deep animosity and distrust has developed between Conté and Taylor, with Conté at one point vowing that he would never agree to be in the same room with the Liberian president. This animosity led Guinea to actively support the ULIMO faction against Taylor in the Liberian civil war, though the support was ended after Taylor's election in 1997.

Renewed support for Liberian dissidents is based on the profound shock that the invasion of

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<sup>34</sup> ICG interviews with LURD leaders and Western diplomats, March 2002.

<sup>35</sup> The next military program scheduled will be the training and equipping of an 800-man Rapid Reaction Force designed to meet any Liberian border incursion. The project will cost U.S.\$3 million, which implies a significant increase in American military aid. America's interest in Guinea stems in part from its economic involvement, which is extensive. Guinea has the world's second largest reserves of Bauxite, and more diamonds than Sierra Leone and Liberia put together. American firms have the lion's share of the foreign contracts. U.S. officials are keen to point out, however, that they also have significant democracy and human rights promotion programs in the country. They defend their support for Conté while vilifying Taylor by the fact that Guinea has been a stabilising, rather than a destabilising force in the region. They also claim that their efforts to improve Guinean treatment of refugees and to advance other human rights issues have had a significant effect over the last two years.

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<sup>33</sup> Africa Confidential, "Rebels vs. Rebels", p. 5, 22 February 2002, confirmed by confidential ICG interviews with LURD sources in March 2002.



September 2000 by Taylor-backed forces caused. With the exception of a small incursion from Guinea-Bissau in 1970, Guinea had never experienced war within its borders in its post-independence history. Far more than a mere border incursion, the Liberians backed forces tried to take the capital and directly supported General Zuomanigui, a former coup-leader.<sup>36</sup>

In short, the invasion threatened to transform Guinean relative peace into Sierra Leone's anarchy within a few months. When criticised for bringing war to Liberia, Guinean officials are quick to point out that their nightmare scenario unfolded just eighteen months ago, and compare their right of self defence to the U.S. response to terrorism.

It is unclear, however, how far Conté's support for the LURD goes, since his supply and assistance to has been carefully limited.<sup>37</sup> In addition, LURD chairman Sekou Conneh is a Mandingo, an ethnic group which Conté has persecuted in his own country. Lack of trust between the LURD and their Guinean sponsors was illustrated in late 2000, when fighting between them destroyed much of the town of Guéckédou. This ambivalence has prompted some observers to speculate that Conté's support aims merely to create a buffer zone between Guinea and Liberia to prevent another invasion. An additional factor is likely Conté's close association with Ayesha Conneh, since Guinean support for the LURD increased after her husband was made Chairman.

## **F. THE WIDER INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

Aside from some low level contacts with British, French and American military, which ceased around six months ago, the LURD have had little contact with the international community.<sup>38</sup> This is unfortunate, since even the most minimal engagement could greatly influence the group, which is still forming its character, hierarchy and

program. LURD could easily become personalised and radicalised, and as a result, possibly fragment. A few strong and principled messages now from the international community could positively influence its development and save a great deal of effort later, when LURD may be at the peace table. In addition, LURD efforts to protect civilians in operational areas should be welcomed and supported. If not governments then international human rights groups should engage it, monitoring and assisting it to build such protection efforts.

However, this kind of limited, principled engagement should not be mistaken for support for the LURD, either moral or otherwise. It is unclear as yet whether the LURD forces have or will have the power to take Monrovia. But the fractiousness and disunity within the LURD indicates that they cannot be trusted to bring stability to Liberia if they do remove the Taylor government by force. Such success would likely bring on another protracted conflict, in which Taylor forces would exploit divisions within the LURD as they did with opponents during the previous civil war.

The actual and potential pressure exerted by the LURD insurgency might contribute to Taylor's willingness to consider a larger reform program. But such military pressure should not be a substitute for an international policy aimed at developing a more coherent and sustainable solution for the country.

The international community should not forget that the LURD's consent will also be necessary to bring an end to Liberia's new and old war. It cannot be assumed that American leverage over President Conté will be enough to secure LURD agreement, since the dissidents have increasingly been stockpiling supplies within Liberia to make themselves self-sufficient. In addition, Conté is rarely responsive to foreign requests regarding his country's security. The LURD should, therefore, be engaged in a limited manner by the international community.

The Mano River War will not end without a serious commitment from powerful members of the international community, and much will hinge on a better understanding of Liberia's internal political situation.

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<sup>36</sup> The coup attempt took place in February 1996.

<sup>37</sup> LURD leaders report this limitation, and claim to be stockpiling Guinean supplies to develop the capacity for a drive on Monrovia.

<sup>38</sup> ICG interviews with LURD leaders, March 2002. The UN Panel of Experts on Liberia did, however, make contact with some LURD leaders during their mission to the region early in April 2002.

#### IV. LIBERIA'S INTERNAL SITUATION

Liberia is a democracy in name only. President Taylor has effectively used intimidation, patronage and corruption to hold power. Liberia's quasi-democratic status, and the role of both the Economic Community of West Africa and the international community in accepting the election that brought Taylor to power, have only complicated the challenge ahead.

President Taylor was sworn into office on 2 August 1997, after winning a landslide victory – an estimated 83 per cent in a field of thirteen. The closest challenger, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of the Unity Party, polled just 8 per cent. The 19 July elections took place in an atmosphere of intimidation, but domestic and international monitors judged them free and fair.<sup>39</sup> Most outside the Taylor camp say that Liberians voted with their heads, not their hearts, in part because Taylor had openly threatened to return the country to war if not elected. The bitter choice was summarised in the popular campaign song:

He killed my pa,  
He killed my ma,  
I'll vote for him.

Thus, many saw the election perversely as a "referendum for peace".<sup>40</sup> Ordinary people sought to "give Taylor a chance" or at least the benefit of doubt. His victory also received considerable international endorsement. Having fought against him for seven years, several ECOWAS states, notably Nigeria, orchestrated the end of the same intervention force that had been created to prevent Taylor's ascension to power. That body lifted the economic sanctions and arms embargoes it had imposed in May 1993.

It did not take long to see that a devil's bargain had been struck. Taylor immediately announced that as a democratic leader he was not bound by the Abuja Peace Accords, which required him to restructure

the army and facilitate reconciliation. The army was not reformed, and only half-measures aimed at reconciliation with opposition figures were taken. Some were murdered or threatened into leaving the country, and freedom of expression was restricted. Taylor ran the country as a personal fiefdom in much the same way he had organised his occupied territory "Taylorland", during the civil war. The country's resources were systematically divided among supporters, and a cut was taken from the operation of many major businesses, particularly logging firms.

##### A. THE SECURITY SECTOR

Taylor was confronted in 1997 with a national army dangerously opposed to his leadership. Most soldiers were Krahn's recruited by the late President Doe, who held Taylor responsible for their leader's death. The army was also strongly linked to Taylor's chief opponent in the civil war, ULIMO-J, which was also Krahn-based. Tension rose when Taylor retired 2,400 mostly Krahn soldiers, on grounds of old age, in November 1997. Taylor's fears led him to reject the ECOMOG plan to restructure the army to reflect geographical and ethnic balance. Rather than attempt to eliminate partisanship among state security forces, he promoted it by retaining his wartime militia and slowly peeling away the army's strength. By fall 2001, after a final two rounds of retirement released 4,000, the army had almost ceased to exist, replaced by a collection of armed units loyal only to Taylor.

The most prominent of these is the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), an elite force drawn from the National Patriotic Front of Liberia ranks, but predominantly foreign nationals from Burkina Faso and Gambia. The Anti-terrorist Unit embodies Taylor's hunger for complete control over security and is essentially a praetorian guard. Its personnel are well trained and highly disciplined, and receive an unheard of U.S.\$150 per month salary to ensure loyalty. Alongside the Anti-terrorist Unit is the predominantly National Patriotic Front of Liberia Special Security Service (SSS), a protection force that watches over its master, and the Special Operations Division (SOD), a paramilitary unit whose acronym is wryly said by locals to mean "Sons of Devils". Each of these elite units, though given similar responsibilities, is kept separate by Taylor to avoid any chance of cooperation in a coup.

<sup>39</sup> "Final Report on the July 19, 1997 Presidential and Legislative Election in Liberia", Liberian Election Observers Network (LEON), Monrovia, December 1997.

<sup>40</sup> Augustine Toure, "Instability in Liberia and Sierra Leone and the growing menace of political violence", *Liberian Journal of Democracy*, Volume 1, Number 1, December 1999, p. 57.

The elite guards are aided by rag-tag militias and ex-combatants who regularly loot civilians to compensate for the fact that Taylor cannot pay them. They have been responsible for vicious attacks on political opponents and still inspire much fear in Monrovia residents. The net result of lack of security sector reform is that Taylor loyalists are spread right across the security sector, a constant source of intimidation to ordinary Liberians and political foes.

But Taylor has also created a security sector that is dangerously spinning out of control. While continually feeding the ego of his elite Anti-terrorist Unit and Special Security Service forces with vehicles and money, his inability to pay his militia and army has led to severe competition for looting. Ill-discipline among the rank and file is widespread. With guns plentiful and competition over loot, Taylor's ability to control the chaos is in doubt.

Nowhere is this chaos more evident than in the outlying provinces, where a regime similar to 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe holds sway. Local strongmen able to mobilize 200 or more fighters are given pickup trucks and weapons by Taylor and the right to loot and exploit resources in a given area.

The country is carved up among such barons, among whom the Anti-terrorist Unit plays an overarching role. Key figures include Kuku Dennis (a.k.a. General Death), who has timber rights in Nimba County; Oscar Cooper, a businessman with a private army in Sinoe County; Roland Duo, who commands a militia in Lofa and also guards the port at Buchanan for the Oriental Timber Company; and Siafa Norman, who commands a force which technically guards all communications installations but in fact circulates as a quasi-mercenary force for the government. Melvin Sobandi, the Deputy-Minister of Transport, also heads a motley group called the Marines, who are placed in the furthest border areas and whose only standardized equipment appears to be yellow T-shirts reading "Navy Rangers".<sup>41</sup>

The 2002 LURD offensive has greatly strained this chaotic security system. Some militia forces, such

as that led by Kuku Dennis, have been required to abandon their area to join the fight against the LURD. Others, such as the Lofa Defence Force in Lofa County, have abandoned Taylor to join the LURD. Finally and most ominously, Taylor has begun rapid remobilisation of National Patriotic Front of Liberia "veterans" in Monrovia. Groups of mostly young boys are sent into deep bush to engage the LURD, while the Anti-terrorist Unit and other elite units wait at road junctions to shoot those who attempt to return to Monrovia. These militias are major concerns because they are the least disciplined of Taylor's forces, and likely to commit atrocities and even ethnic massacres.

## **B. RECONCILIATION PROCESS**

After his election, Taylor initially showed signs of wanting to produce a reasonable measure of inclusiveness, a promise he made during the campaign and in his inaugural speech on 2 August 1997. He did appoint former political opponents to his cabinet. Tom Woewiyu, a one-time ally and co-founder of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia who defected to form a rival faction in 1994 was made Minister of Labour. Former Justice Minister and member of the All-Liberian Coalition opposition, Jenkins Scott, became Associate Legal Counsel. Armed Forces of Liberia commander, Phillip Karma, was placed at the Ministry of National Security. More significant, however, were the appointments given to Taylor's arch-rivals. Roosevelt Johnson of ULIMO-J became first Minister of Rural Development and then Ambassador to India after he clashed with Taylor. Johnson, however, fell ill and was reportedly given U.S.\$46,000 for medical treatment in the U.S. ULIMO-K's Alhaji Kromah was offered, but did not accept, the non-cabinet post of chairman of the National Reconciliation Commission.

While both appointments were unlikely to heal deep divisions, they were useful signs of reconciliation. Neither, however, offered Taylor a hand in return; Kromah left the country shortly after the election with accusations from Taylor's security forces that he (and Johnson) planned an insurrection.<sup>42</sup> Hunger for power kept Johnson and Kromah vehemently opposed to Taylor's

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<sup>41</sup> ICG interviews with contacts in Monrovia, as well as confidential interviews with Armed Forces of Liberia combatants inside Lofa County, February and March 2002.

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<sup>42</sup> Situation Report in Liberia for period August 1997 - January 1998, Justice and Peace Commission, Monrovia, January 1998, p. 2.

presidency. This was reflected in the 18 September 1998 Camp Johnson incidents, already discussed, following which a number of Taylor's opponents fled the country and were charged with treason, while thirteen Krahn men were imprisoned. This ensured that the intense animosities of the civil war persisted.

In 1999, Taylor charged Kromah and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf with treason, on suspicion that they were supporting dissident attacks.

At the centre of Taylor's problem with his political rivals is a desire for them to recognise his presidency. He seeks legitimacy, especially from political sponsors who were openly or quietly supportive of his war, such as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. But some of these feel betrayed by Taylor's conduct both during the war and afterwards. The disdain held for Taylor by some of his opponents, combined with the stark reality of an uncompromising regime, has made reconciliation largely impossible. As a result, thousands of former fighters and supporters have left Liberia since 1997. Struggling to survive in West African countries where they are mistreated and cannot get jobs, they form a volatile and powerful constituency committed to the regime's overthrow.

### **C. POLITICAL MURDERS AND THREATS**

Taylor's presidency has driven most principled opponents into exile. From 1997 to 2000 political killings and forced departures of rivals or critics testified to the increasingly insecure environment. The death of Samuel Dokie, who supported Taylor's 1989 rebellion against Doe and co-founded the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, typified the gangster style that has marked Taylor's rule.

Dokie broke ranks with Taylor during the civil war to form the Central Revolutionary Council-National Patriotic Front of Liberia, and became a prominent post-war political opponent. In his inaugural address, Taylor vowed that there would be no witch burning, but the gruesome murder of Dokie, his wife, sister and cousin was a rude awakening. The Dokie family was last seen on 29 November 1997 in the custody of the Special Security Service. Their burnt bodies were discovered three days later on a road leading to Monrovia. Taylor

still denies involvement but his own Special Security Service boss, Benjamin Yeaten, has admitted involvement. This episode sent a powerful message to foes that political inclusion was off the agenda.

A second incident was the abduction and mysterious disappearance on 10 July 1998 of Nowai Flomo, a market woman and government critic by nine members of the Special Security Unit presidential guard. Although the police reluctantly detained two of the nine suspects, they were released without trial. President Taylor appeared on his private television to declare that since the corpse had not been found, there was no evidence to prosecute.

A third incident, reminiscent of the Dokie affair, was the death of Vice President Enoch Dogolea in June 1999. During a meeting in Gbargna, he is reported to have told Taylor to withdraw support for the RUF and warned about the situation in the country, which was fostering the LURD's growth. Dogolea was beaten and poisoned. Though Taylor denies involvement, there has been no official investigation or commission of inquiry to look into the death.

Other cases of gangsterism involved threats or attacks on opponents. A number of prominent and high profile public figures were forced to leave in 1999 and 2000. First was the forced departure of prominent human rights lawyer Samuel Kofi Woods in July 1999 after he demanded more scrutiny over the government's handling of the Camp Johnson incidents. Second were the vicious attacks against former Interim President Amos Sawyer and his prominent political protégé, Conmany Wesseh. Wesseh's wife, Medina, herself a protégé of Taylor's key political rival, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was also attacked. The attacks were linked to Wesseh's statement in July 1999 that the government and not the UN Office in Monrovia should pay for the welfare of ex-combatants and Sawyer's statement in November 2000 that the National Patriotic Party had presided over lawlessness. That these attacks were in broad daylight shocked Taylor's opponents. He has sought to maintain plausible deniability by ensuring that those who commit brutal attacks are not directly from the "official" state security force.

The promise of a cessation of political feuds has been a pipe dream in "post-war" Liberia. Taylor's

refusal to reform the security sector has ensured that the war-time environment of political intimidation and violence by armed groups continues, making it difficult for many opposition members to stay. Those who have fled now use Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone as launching pads from which to challenge Taylor – thus further illustrating the tangled regional web of politics and security ties.

#### **D. HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW**

While the list of abuses by the Taylor government is long, it has avoided some excesses that usually characterise brutal authoritarian regimes. Key political opposition figures have much to fear but the government does not systematically repress ordinary citizens. Taylor's authoritarianism defies simple characterisation, since Liberia's political culture, with its strong American influences, is built around strong rhetorical support for basic rights and freedoms. Taylor adheres to those freedoms as long as they do not encroach on his ability to keep power.

The tensions and contradictions in the regime are perhaps most evident with regard to freedom of expression. While some reasonably independent and critical newspapers are allowed, others have been shut, and still others are both threatened and given incentives to moderate their opposition. The government operates with changing rules, sometimes democratic, other times repressive. Mostly it cultivates the impression of chaos to deter people from thinking about issues.<sup>43</sup> Taylor closed media outlets such as the short-wave frequency of Star Radio in 1999 and Catholic Radio Veritas in 2001, but he has given them permission to re-open, though Star Radio will only operate until the 2003 elections.

Taylor is keen to portray his country as one that extols the rule of law. A billboard in Monrovia reads "Liberia is a country of laws not men, let's keep it that way"! It is signed by Taylor, and the message belies less principled reality. Presidential interference, resource constraints, inefficiency and corruption hamper the courts. Citizens' rights to

due process and a fair trial are under constant threat, especially for some ethnic groups. The government continues to discriminate against some ethnic groups and individuals that opposed Taylor in the civil war, particularly Mandingos and Krahn.

#### **E. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS UNDER "LIBERIA INC".**

Little has been done to improve economic or social conditions, and Taylor's confrontational style and vision of a Greater Liberia have alienated the donor community. No aid, except for humanitarian and emergency relief, enters the country. Most people are desperately poor while others rely heavily on remittances from relatives abroad. Within the last year Western Union offices have proliferated to tackle increasing demand for financial assistance.

"The entire intellectual and middle class have voted with their feet leaving the country to be run by brigands", said one civil society leader.<sup>44</sup> For example, in the 1980s there were 400 doctors in the country, but by 2002 only about 30. The ruling political class has not been immune to this brain drain. The same civil society activist argues, "The country is run by group of people who are illiterate and rely on rumours, lies and arrest of detractors".

The poor quality of life in Monrovia is a harsh reality of Taylor's rule. The President's greatest fault is his callous indifference and inability to tackle poverty.<sup>45</sup> People feel they have lost out, and counties such as Nimba and Bong, where Taylor had considerable support, have been particularly disappointed. For example, Bong County, along with Lofa County was a leading site for food production, but little has been done to improve farming conditions and repair war damage. Many say they are barely surviving. Sensing this frustration, Taylor has yet to complete the house he was building in Bong County.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> ICG interview with opposition group members, Monrovia, February 2002.

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<sup>44</sup> ICG interview with civil society group, Freetown, March 2002.

<sup>45</sup> ICG interview with U.S. official, Monrovia, February 2002.

<sup>46</sup> ICG interview with civil society group, Monrovia, February 2002.

Admittedly, Taylor faces a steep task to rebuild the country. When he entered office, he found only U.S.\$17,000 in the treasury, a foreign debt of at least U.S.\$2 billion and a domestic debt of U.S.\$200 million. Infrastructure is widely destroyed. There are no government structures to support a population needing housing, jobs and social services. Unemployment is 85 per cent, and for more than a decade, Liberians have not had running water and electricity; and t.

Liberia's woeful social and economic conditions are, in part, due to the kleptocratic nature of Taylor's government. The system was started in National Patriotic Front of Liberia territory in 1990 and merely extended to Monrovia when Taylor won the presidency. It might be described as appropriating the entire tradable economy into a single firm, with Charles Taylor as Chief Executive Officer and majority shareholder. Industries are parcelled out to the small group of businessmen in Taylor's inner circle – fellow shareholders in "Liberia Inc".

Large shareholders of "Liberia Inc." also include Lebanese businessmen, some of whom have financed the National Patriotic Front of Liberia since its beginning and have full or virtual monopolies on rice and car imports, cocoa, coffee, fuel, cement, beer and printing presses. In addition they have substantial interests in banking, fisheries, textiles and construction. Other key Taylor allies enjoy a large percentage of the timber trade and of profits from the Maritime Registry (Liberia has the world's second largest flag fleet). Cyril Allen, chairman of Taylor's ruling party, is a wealthy half-Nigerian businessman with a large plastics company, who also owns Liberia's Atlantic Wireless Company, handling long distance communications.

In some cases, Taylor takes a personal ownership share, such as in Lonestar Communications, the country's cell phone firm. Mostly, however, he demands an up-front fee for the rights to an industry and then a cut of profits. Each of the inner circle makes money by grossly inflating prices. The price of a gallon of fuel is raised from U.S.\$1 at import to U.S.\$3 on sale. A bag of rice is increased from U.S.\$16 to U.S.\$21. In some cases, part of the increase goes directly to Taylor. For example, he receives U.S. 25 cents for every gallon of fuel sold.

"Liberia Inc." controls much more than the economy. All real economic and political power actually rests with this inner circle, which some Liberians call the "Congo Clique" since most members are from Taylor's own Congo ethnic group. The President can comfortably appoint more than half his official cabinet from opposition parties and various ethnic groups since, financially and otherwise, the government is virtually irrelevant. No money passes through its treasury. All export and import duties go directly to Taylor.

The government has no official budget. Taylor regularly makes U.S.\$100,000 "personal gifts" to government agencies and ministries to be shared among staff. He says he has no personal wealth and that the money is donated by friends abroad. In the time-honoured manner of the patronage state, Taylor accumulates all resources and then generously distributes them back among various recipients, all the while taking care to obtain their gratitude.

This system is almost legalised. The National Patriotic Party government (Taylor's party has 21 of 26 seats in the Senate, and 49 of 64 in the House of Representatives) has passed the Strategic Commodity Act declaring that all "strategic" resources in air, on land, or in the sea are within the right of the President to administer personally. Senior Liberian officials defend "Liberia Inc." with the argument that the economy has always been controlled this way. Worryingly, they say that economic reform is off the agenda in international negotiations, arguing that the monopoly system is "a matter of national security" in order to avoid price fluctuations and shortages of goods.

"Liberia Inc." is also the basis of the security structure. Many of Taylor's barons command semi-private armies with profits they earn from their concession. These militias guard each firm's assets and aid Taylor when requested. Economic reform is, therefore, at the heart of the changes Liberia must make if the vast divide between Taylor's fantasy world of Liberia as a land of laws, and the reality of political power is to be bridged.

Amidst this systemic swindle, the 15 per cent of Liberians with jobs have a 25 per cent income tax deducted from their salary. Some scholars of the Liberian civil war have estimated that Taylor personally earned up to U.S.\$400 million between 1990 and 1997. There are no estimates on how

much wealth he has amassed since coming to power.

## F. DOMESTIC SUPPORT

Taylor does have a certain popularity. But overall, a majority of the population would like to see a leadership change. Loss of faith is apparent in counties that supported him during the civil war, notably Nimba, the birthplace of his revolution. The National Patriotic Party planned on having its bi-annual convention there in December 2001, but locals refused to host the event. The convention was shifted to Bassa County, but residents there tore down the posters. It is likely that supporters of Charles Brumskine, a prominent Bassa Senator who fled the country under duress in 1999 and has declared his candidacy for the presidency, did this. Nevertheless, the protest indicates the levels of frustration in areas that were formerly key bases of support for Taylor.

Internal conditions appear ripe for a rebellion, which the LURD can easily tap into. But the civil population has not yet reached a level of dissatisfaction where it will or can challenge the system. People are traumatised after the seven-year war and the years of stagnation that have followed.

## G. CHANGE FROM WITHIN?

Many policymakers and observers with whom ICG met expressed despair about the lack of real alternative to the Taylor regime. They saw the LURD as illegitimate, the opposition as fractious and self-interested, and civil society as weak and co-opted by the government. However, substantial international engagement can help empower the institutions and stakeholders of Liberia's democracy, and promote change from the bottom up.

### 1. The Opposition

Liberia's opposition parties are almost as disappointing as its government. Fractious and squabbling, they have proved unable to unify around a common agenda or presidential candidate. Weak, tainted and self-interested, many parties and leaders are implicated in Liberia's quagmire, both past and present. Their divisions and weaknesses have only strengthened Taylor's

hold on power. Many civil society leaders bitterly agree with the criticism of a senior Liberian government official: "It is not just strong government that threatens democracy, but weak opposition that threatens democracy".<sup>47</sup>

To be fair, many opposition weaknesses are of Taylor's making. The President has taken care to undermine any efforts at opposition coordination by encouraging government sympathisers to involve themselves in order to scuttle them. He has also been effective at buying off and co-opting some opposition figures. In addition, much opposition weakness comes from the fact that many prominent leaders are out of the country. Dr. Togba-Nah Tipoteh, the economist leader of the Liberian People's Party, is the only prominent opposition leader currently in Monrovia, and he is allowed to remain only as a result of his friendly relationship with the President. Of the thirteen candidates who contested the 1997 election, only two remain in Liberia, Baccus Matthews of the United People's Party and Dr. Tipoteh. Political parties are also starved of resources in Taylor's Liberia, where all wealth is controlled by the ruling party and the president's inner circle.

But the lion's share of the problems are of the opposition's own making and speak to the deep challenge of bringing true democracy to a country that has never known responsible governance. The most pressing challenge is the intensely personalised and mercenary nature of politics, which is organised not around issues, causes or agendas, but rather the elevation to power of individual candidates, supported by networks of people who stand to personally benefit. Lack of principle and ideology mushrooms party numbers and makes it impossible to sustain unity among them, as each leader's first loyalty is to his own presidential aspirations. In 1997 an opposition primary was held to choose a single candidate to confront Taylor. Despite having agreed beforehand to support the winner, the coalition fell apart immediately after the vote.

Another major obstacle to an empowered opposition is the intense distrust and suspicion among key figures. Newer parties accuse older parties of having contributed to the country's

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<sup>47</sup> ICG interview with senior Liberian government official, February 2002.

problems. Many leaders discount one another as tainted by some past association or action, such as having been an early supporter of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia.

One of the most prominent opposition figures is Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a long-time participant in Liberian politics who was finance minister in the Tolbert regime, a former UN diplomat and UNDP Africa Director. She was supported by the West in the 1997 election but missed a chance to be the candidate of a unified opposition and finished second with a disappointingly low vote. While she enjoys broad name recognition in Monrovia, Sirleaf lacks the kind of appeal Taylor generates among rural chiefs. She is also widely criticised among the opposition as an early Taylor supporter, a charge she denies.

Amos Sawyer, Interim President from 1990-1994, is another key figure. An academic, he is the godfather and mentor of much of Liberia's progressive political class. But although he is respected in some circles for impartiality, others see him as irrevocably tainted by his actions in the presidency. Principal among these was urging that ECOMOG not seek Taylor's military defeat. Other rumours hold that Sawyer had inappropriate business dealings as president, though nothing has been substantiated.

Dr. Togba-Nah Tipoteh is also widely respected in progressive circles. With strong records of achievement in working for poverty alleviation and disarmament of combatants, Tipoteh has cultivated a reputation as a grass roots candidate, despite holding a PhD in Economics. The Liberian People's Party leader is also quick to point out that unlike Sawyer and Sirleaf, who have close ties to the Congos, he is a "native" Liberian and, therefore, more appealing across the country. Although a promising candidate, Tipoteh is handicapped by his ambition, and largely discredited by having broken with the opposition coalition when it did not choose him as its leader in 1997. It was largely Tipoteh's defection that destroyed the coalition, although Sirleaf did not participate either.

Sawyer and Sirleaf have recently formed what seems to be a strong alliance, and have jointly conducted shuttle diplomacy in the region to build

opposition to Taylor and promote the idea of an interim government.<sup>48</sup> There are indications that they are in contact with the LURD but do not want to be seen as associated with it. This has caused some resentment among LURD leaders, who feel they are being used by Sawyer and Sirleaf. Tipoteh does not appear likely to form any alliance with his Congo competitors, as he is opposed to interim government, and would be unlikely to accept any coalition position except leader.

The most talked-about contender in Monrovia is Charles Brumskine, a member of the Bassa tribe, former close associate of Taylor's and ex-President *pro tempore* of the Senate. Though in exile since 1999, he recently announced his intention to stand for the presidency. Bizarrely, his once close association with Taylor is widely seen as a point in his favour, as many believe he will have the savvy to outwit Liberia's Machiavellian president.

Empowering Liberia's political opposition will require intense international pressure, first to obtain the return and then to ensure the security of all parties and leaders, particularly to work in rural areas. Taylor's record of brutality allows him to intimidate with the slightest of signals so the security guarantee issue will be particularly important if opposition leaders are to be effective.

The full success of Liberia's potential opposition will depend critically on the ability of its most prominent figures to come together in a coalition united behind a specific and principled agenda for change and a credible candidate.

If they cannot, the hope for politics will be that younger activists will leave these figures behind. There is already the germ of a new political alignment, with the formation of the "New Deal Movement", composed mainly of students, civil society activists and a prominent Liberian academics abroad. Taylor appears genuinely concerned about this movement and has already raided its offices. But it will be a long road if the opposition needs to be completely renovated.

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<sup>48</sup> In January 2002, Sawyer and Sirleaf held a meeting with President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso, Taylor's key regional ally, in the hope of getting support for the democratic process.



## 2. Civil Society

Popular perception outside Liberia is that the independence and effectiveness of civil society has been virtually destroyed by Taylor. It reached its peak in 1994, when civic groups organised an exemplary “stay home for disarmament” with the aim of pressuring armed groups into giving up their guns. Since then, many activists most dangerous to the regime have been driven out, and many that remain have been co-opted. Behind many civil society initiatives that subtly favour Taylor positions is the generous gift of a U.S.\$50,000 Mercedes-Benz to a key civil society leader.<sup>49</sup> Civil society work tends not to pay well anywhere, but in Liberia’s dilapidated and desperately poor economy, Taylor’s money is impossible for some to resist.

Despite this, it is a testament to the ingrained culture of rights and freedoms in Liberia that a principled, activist core of civil society survives, not just in the diaspora, but in Monrovia itself. That core is composed mainly of lawyers, students, and a few journalists. A critical institution at the centre is the Catholic Church in Liberia, led by Bishop Michael Francis, a legendary figure in Liberian politics. He has remained in the country throughout its troubles for over 30 years, accomplishing the extraordinary balancing act of courageously and frequently speaking out critically on political issues, while maintaining a reputation for impartiality and non-partisanship. He presides over the most powerful institution in Liberia aside from the government.

The Catholic Church provides the large majority of the country’s medical services and many of its schools. In most rural areas it is the only provider of such services, and it is the only civil society institution that works throughout the country. The Church’s Justice and Peace Commission is the principal human rights organisation in the country, and its Radio Veritas is a key source of independent journalism. Unlike colleagues in other West African countries, Bishop Francis has been willing to use his leverage on the regime to promote rights and freedoms. When Taylor attempted to shut Radio Veritas down, Bishop Francis compelled him to retreat by threatening to close Catholic services.

Liberia’s principled civil society is small but well-networked and has much promise if it could be empowered by the international community. While the U.S. has legal restrictions barring military aid to Liberia, it can take a more active role in promoting civil society organisations.

The empowerment of civil society is important for more than a critical voice and force to counterbalance the government. The problems facing Liberia go beyond just one man. Taylor is in many ways a creature of his time and place, and thrives in the violent, patronage-based, and corruption-riddled, big-man focused political culture that afflicts the country. These systemic problems pervade every part of Liberian life; a politics of petty personal advancement paralyzes any effort for change. Sustainable improvement of Liberia’s political and social conditions will, therefore, require deep social change, which challenges the mindsets that not only put Taylor in power but render him, still, popular with a section of the country.

The renovation, return and empowerment of the most principled elements of Liberian civil society will require a great deal of insider know how to avoid government manipulation. Donors will need to work on the advice of trusted local voices. However, it also offers one of the best avenues for pursuing constructive change in Liberia. Taylor is an old fighter who is on familiar ground with the LURD insurgency. He will be out of his element if confronted with a popular, broad based movement for change. The key challenges for such a movement would be to stay unified, non-partisan and non-violent. These are daunting, but they have a good chance of being met if they are the conditions of international support.

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<sup>49</sup> ICG interview with civil society group, Monrovia, February 2002.

## V. THE DILEMMA OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Since Charles Taylor came to power in 1997, the international community has wrestled with whether to treat his government as part of the solution or the problem in dealing with regional conflict. After initial calls to “give Taylor a chance”, opinion has increasingly recognised that he plays a very provocative role in fuelling conflict. The UN Security Council will have to make choices again when the sanctions on Liberia expire in May 2002.

From 1997 to 1999 Liberian opposition figures were murdered or threatened into leaving the country, freedom of expression was restricted, the army was not reformed as promised and efforts at genuine reconciliation were half-hearted. Taylor has run the country as a personal fiefdom, and continues to take a cut from the operation of most major businesses.

Yet, it has been Liberia’s foreign policy that has most infuriated others in the region and key members of the international community, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States. Attempts to encourage Taylor to play a responsible role were made almost continuously but he has maintained support for the RUF in Sierra Leone, and the Lomé Accord has become seen by many as a cynical ploy by the RUF and Taylor to take power in Sierra Leone.

Even more damning was the Taylor-backed invasion of Guinea in September 2000 which aimed purely at the destabilisation of that country and acquisition of its rich diamond and mineral resources. That attack was also a direct challenge to the U.S., which had increasingly made Guinea a key regional ally.

The final straw in Taylor’s declining reputation was his repeated failure to comply with Security Council resolutions to withdraw support from the RUF and cease trading in its “conflict diamonds”. His angry denials of both practices angered many U.S. officials, including Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering, who left Monrovia in July 2000 disgusted after a heated exchange with the Taylor.

A UN expert panel appointed to look into Liberia’s compliance with Security Council resolutions issued a strongly critical, well-substantiated report

in December 2000, and by January 2001 the U.S. was urging sanctions in the Security Council. A Liberian response announcing “total disengagement” from the RUF revealed that the government previously had lied about its policy.<sup>50</sup> Despite the pressure of subsequent travel and diamond sanctions, as well as an arms embargo, however, Taylor has maintained his links with the RUF in his country, as well as with one of its leaders, Sam “Mosquito” Bockarie.<sup>51</sup>

However, it must also be acknowledged that international demonisation of the Taylor regime has produced a somewhat skewed view of internal conditions in Liberia. While Taylor's lack of commitment to reconciliation, development and the rule of law are self-evident, he won an overwhelming majority in 1997. He is appreciated in Monrovia for having ended the long war and brought some security and stability to ordinary people. He is widely supported by local rural chiefs for his respect of local traditions and governance, as well as his patronage. He has been initiated into tribal secret societies, and become a senior member (*Dakhpanna*) of those societies. In keeping with West African political practice, he is generous with the money he steals, doling out huge amounts and expensive cars to secure support, silence or at least limit opposition. He typically tries to buy off or befriend opponents before using harsher measures. He is famous for sharing women friends with foes and allies alike.

As President Taylor is a charismatic, stylish leader in the classic “big man” mould, a significant factor given the nature of West African politics. As someone of mixed background, he has managed to bridge the widest divide in Liberian politics, between Americo-Liberians and “natives”, and has appointed a tribally diverse cabinet (even if his inner circle remains almost wholly Americo-Liberian).

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<sup>50</sup> Ninth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission to Sierra Leone, 14 March 2001, S/2001/228, para. 27, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> The presence of Sam Bockarie and the RUF in Liberia was confirmed from a number of sources, including ICG interviews with Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Force border commanders, senior Liberian officials, LURD dissidents, and international journalists in February and March 2002.

In many respects, Taylor has also been able to rationalise his record by pointing to the often equally poor human rights record of his neighbours, including Guinea – an increasingly close U.S. ally. Regime terror is tightly controlled, directed only against figures who betray him or whom he suspects of betrayal, and political opponents or military figures who pose a genuine threat to his power. The latter are always given the chance to leave the country. The ten or so political murders that Taylor has committed since 1997 have all been directed at people formerly in his own camp.

The Liberian president displays enormous duality – gangster and kleptocrat; devout Baptist preacher; regional provocateur; and eloquent and charismatic politician. As a close associate of Taylor notes, “He leads with a bible in one hand and a gun in the other”.<sup>52</sup> This duality helps explain how so many senior Western personalities, including former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, have been caught in Taylor’s spell for a time.<sup>53</sup>

#### A. THE CONTAINMENT STRATEGY

Faced with President Taylor’s efforts to destabilise the region and continuing violation of UN resolutions, the U.S. and British governments appear gradually (and unofficially) to have moved toward a policy of containing Liberia. As one U.S. official described it: “You put Taylor in a box, drain his finances, and wait for somebody to remove him”.

Charles Taylor has accused the Americans and British of supporting the LURD insurgency. Certainly Taylor’s claims that the U.S. and British view the LURD military moves with a “conspiracy of silence” appear plausible.<sup>54</sup> LURD officials

claim that the British and, particularly, the U.S. support their war – at least in principle. They have had contact with mid-level U.S. and British military officers in Freetown and Conakry and more senior U.S. officials in the State Department and Pentagon, who have sent encouraging signals, though this contact has apparently trailed off in recent months.

There have been no U.S. or British statements directly condemning the insurgency or calling for a halt to the fighting.<sup>55</sup> While Taylor has also claimed that the U.S. and UK provide direct military support to the LURD, this is obviously difficult to verify. U.S. military support could easily be channelled through the key U.S. ally in the region, Guinea, making direct support less necessary. As noted, the LURD’s military supplies come almost exclusively from Guinea to which the U.S. gives significant non-lethal military assistance. Certainly there has been no evidence of American pressure on President Conté to discontinue support for the LURD. Guinea’s denial that it supports the insurgents can be disproved by the most casual visit to Macenta or any other border town near Liberia.

However, a strategy based solely on containment or to overthrow Taylor using a LURD proxy has severe limitations and could go badly wrong.

While the LURD has enjoyed recent battlefield success, it will be difficult to defeat the combination of Taylor’s well trained and equipped Anti-terrorist Unit, and his pool of thousands of ragged but battle-hardened National Patriotic Front of Liberia veterans. Using the LURD as a proxy could usher in a new and protracted war. Even if Monrovia is taken, Taylor would likely retreat to the Southeast of the country, and Liberia would be back where it was in 1990. If the LURD launch additional invasions from Côte d’Ivoire and Sierra Leone, Taylor is likely to respond with efforts to destabilise those countries and split the LURD into factions. A grisly re-run of the entire Mano River War could then be in prospect.

Relying on an insurgency to remove an irresponsible government would also beg the

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<sup>52</sup> ICG interview with close Taylor associate, February 2002.

<sup>53</sup> One senior Liberian insider described the scene when Carter first met Taylor, at his rebel capital of Gbarnga. Taylor had donned white robes and was seated, surrounded by kneeling children to whom he was teaching from the Bible. He left the door to the room slightly ajar so that the highly religious Carter, waiting outside, could be impressed. ICG interview with prominent civil society activist, February 2002.

<sup>54</sup> Taylor and several cabinet ministers made these charges on Liberian television and radio on a number of occasions in early February 2002.

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<sup>55</sup> The U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, Bismarck Myrick, issued a statement on 1 March 2002 concerning the need for political and security sector reform, which suggested condemnation of the LURD.

question of whether a better regime is likely to follow. The LURD does not appear prepared to hold together nor to have a coherent and solidly democratic political agenda.

Efforts to apply further pressure through timber sanctions and sanctions on maritime registry, as well as strong international financial support and protection for domestic civil society, may go further toward bringing Taylor to heel than a purely military strategy. War, with all its horrific implications for civilians and combatants, should be a last resort; yet in the Liberian case, it appears to have become virtually the first. It is particularly damning that the U.S. appears willing to allow a domestic insurgency to be a source of pressure and a drain on the finances of the Taylor regime, while at the same time refusing to push for sanctions on Liberia's lucrative maritime registry largely because of pressure from its own business interests.<sup>56</sup>

## B. THE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Those who see the Liberian glass as half full argue that it remains possible to work with Taylor in a process that will encourage public reform and responsibility while easing regional tensions. The United Nations Peace-Building Office in Liberia (UNOL) has been closely associated with this policy of engagement.

UNOL was set up in 1998 to help deliver post-war reconstruction and peace-building assistance, but many claim that the UN role has been compromised by the weak leadership of recently removed country representative, Felix Down-Thomas. Under Down-Thomas, the UN became a leading apologist for the regime while failing to criticise its human rights record.<sup>57</sup>

The European Union (EU) has also leaned more toward engagement than containment, a policy driven primarily by France. The French view is dictated by economics and partly by strategic interests. France continues to import 40 per cent of

Liberia's timber, and stands by its francophone West African allies who still support Taylor.

The EU approach consists of aid, working to diminish or remove sanctions, condemning and diplomatically opposing any armed attempt to remove Taylor, and demanding greater reform and accountability.

This strategy has only recently been formally pursued. In June 2001, pursuant to the Cotonou Agreement, the EU suspended U.S.\$42 million in aid for food and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure because of "worsening conditions".<sup>58</sup> In December 2001, it initiated consultations under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, which allows for no more than 60 days during which to discuss human rights and governance conditions that must be fulfilled in order for a country to remain eligible for EU aid. In that same month the EU demanded that Liberia restore the short wave Catholic Radio Veritas and submit to a financial audit of its public finances, including revenues from the timber industry. Liberia accepted these terms just before expiration of the two-month deadline. If the conditions are indeed met, nearly 200 million Euros in aid will be disbursed to implementing organisations for humanitarian and development work.

### 1. Double Standards In Guinea

Privately, French officials complain that the U.S. and British approach to Liberia is "unprincipled" because they support at the same time the Conté regime in Guinea with its own many governance flaws.

In many ways, political conditions in Liberia and Guinea are similar. President Conté took power in a military coup in 1984 and has preserved many of the practices of the totalitarian regime of Ahmed Sékou Touré, who ruled Guinea from its independence in 1958. Conté's human rights record is in some ways worse than Taylor's, and his regime slightly more oppressive. Like Liberia, no independent media is allowed to reach the countryside, and Mandingos have been systematically targeted as an ethnic group.

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<sup>56</sup> ICG interview with a senior U.S. official, February 2002.

<sup>57</sup> ICG interview with international NGO and civil society groups in Freetown and Monrovia in February and March 2002.

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<sup>58</sup> The Cotonou Agreement, which regulates EU assistance and trade relationships with 77 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, was signed on 23 June 2000.

Guinea encouraged gross human rights abuses against refugees in 2000-2001, and the army has shown blatant disregard for civilians by indiscriminately bombarding towns in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. Public institutions are riddled with corruption, including police and judiciary. Despite much more foreign support and many natural resources, Guinea remains desperately poor, in contrast to its president's wealth.

Conté's democratic legitimacy is even lower than Taylor's, having blatantly rigged presidential elections in 1993 and 1998. The opposition has no right of public assembly, and security forces have gunned down such gatherings and student demonstrations on several occasions. Many opposition leaders, including key critic Alpha Condé, have been imprisoned for speaking out against the regime. Conté held a constitutional referendum on 11 November 2001 to allow him to run for a second term and to extend that term from five to seven years. In a threatening atmosphere and after a low turnout, a 98 per cent vote in favour was announced. His own ruling party recently disowned Conté, but it was an act of little importance: all power is concentrated in the army. Since the 1996 coup attempt, Conté has ensured that almost all its senior officers hail from his own Soussou ethnic group.

Legislative elections (postponed from December 2000 due to the war) are scheduled for June 2002 but may be delayed again because of inability to find a foreign donor willing to finance them. The opposition has threatened a boycott and has delivered a list of 21 conditions that must be met to ensure their participation. In fact, most opposition leaders are simply waiting for Conté's death for political life to resume.

The uncertainty of Conté's succession raises profound uncertainty for Guinea's future. The army holds the power and will likely decide, but Conté has deliberately not groomed a successor. A fight is likely, one that Taylor would be likely to exploit if still in power. These factors make Guinea a clear case for early warning and preventive action. The lessons from Sierra Leone and Liberia's civil wars suggest that the international community will need to keep a

close eye on the political maneuverings in order to maintain regional stability.

## **2. The Risk Of Consolidating Taylor's Power**

At a minimum, the international community should reach a consensus on the fact that Charles Taylor, despite sanctions, has not abided by Security Council demands to cut ties with the RUF. A large number of RUF, under Sam Bockarie, continue to operate in Liberia, near the border with Sierra Leone. There have been indications that as recently as December 2001 Taylor was planning another attack on Guinea. The October 2001 UN Expert Panel on Liberia also showed that the Liberian government continues to violate UN sanctions. Many of these sanctions remain ineffective because there is no sufficient monitoring program on the ground. The Security Council has provided UN staff with no effective means of ensuring proper enforcement or capacity to monitor the most fundamental aspect of the sanctions regime: the proviso that Taylor break with the RUF.

Trusting Taylor now to cooperate with international demands, which, if met, would strike deep into his system of power and patronage, is naive. Such an approach is not a realistic strategy for achieving stability and peace in the region, but rather a short-term tactic for demonstrating outrage without securing meaningful change. The EU's Cotonou process is not enough to encourage Taylor to implement reform where it is needed the most: in security and economics.

Most critically, an international approach built solely around engagement would encourage Taylor to manipulate the next elections to ensure his hold on power. Liberian opposition and civil society alike are united in the opinion that engagement can not be enough to create conditions for truly free and fair elections.<sup>59</sup> Those conditions would need to be far reaching and strike at the heart of the Taylor regime. The Anti-Terrorist Unit must be disbanded and a genuinely national army put in its place, civic education and freedom of the press must be allowed to empower politics in rural areas, and opposition figures must be allowed to return home to function securely. It is impossible to

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<sup>59</sup> ICG interviews with civil society and opposition groups in Monrovia, February 2002.

imagine Taylor willingly creating such conditions, no matter how much aid is promised.

An engagement strategy would not only keep Charles Taylor in power, but solidify that power, since aid would boost his popularity at home, and pressure would be increased on dissidents and foreign powers not to fight him. Taylor's willingness to participate in such engagement is only driven by the sanctions and the LURD insurgency. As soon as these pressures decline, he will be free to pursue his regional ambitions again. Moreover, Taylor would be unlikely to achieve genuine reconciliation with opposition parties and factions after winning elections under unfair conditions, and many would continue the armed struggle against him.

### **C. THE MANO RIVER UNION PEACE PROCESS**

Of all the efforts to resolve Liberia's conflict, the Mano River Union peace process has taken centre stage. Officials at the ministerial and deputy-ministerial level of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia have met fairly regularly since mid-2001, hammering out statements of principle not to sponsor dissidents and working out verification details. The Mano River Union Women's Peace Network Initiative visited all three presidents in late 2001, demanding that they sort out their differences at a summit. Against expectations (given Conté's animosity for Taylor) the summit was held at the invitation of the King of Morocco in Rabat on 27 February 2002. It produced, however, only politically correct rhetoric while the commitments continued to be violated on the ground.

Taylor has been a strong advocate of the process since he is on the defensive in the war and wants to enmesh his opponents in commitments they do not intend to honour. He hopes, with French support, to secure sanctions on Guinea as the gap between Conté's rhetoric and reality is increasingly brought to light. Peace agreements have always been the favoured defensive tactic of Taylor's RUF, who used the time gained to regroup, recover, and attack again.

Before an effective regional process can begin, the root causes of the Liberia problem need to be addressed. Dialogue among all stakeholders in the

process is urgent, but it is critical that it be impartially organised. The Nigerian initiative in the ECOWAS to sponsor a dialogue on 14-15 March 2002, with representatives from the LURD, civil society and the Liberian government, was the wrong step in the right direction. The LURD boycotted, complaining that both the agenda and the invitation list were biased. Their suspicions of the sponsors' motives increased when Executive Secretary Mohammed Ibn Chambas ruled out discussion of an interim government, and condemned the insurgents' use of force. These developments suggest that ECOWAS may not be capable of playing an impartial role in the Liberian crisis<sup>60</sup>. Regional powers should be tapped only within the framework of a solidly impartial international effort, overseen by the UN.

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<sup>60</sup> It is widely known that President Obasanjo of Nigeria has a personal relationship with Charles Taylor's sister. In the personalised politics of West Africa, this kind of factor may have more influence than Western commentators appreciate.

## VI. CONCLUSION

There is no easy solution to the tangled Mano River War but there is also no disengagement option. Unless the international community works now to promote a truly sustainable solution, the dry tinder of poverty, corruption, and communal strife that litters West Africa will continue to drive regional violence.

The Mano River War must end with negotiations that bring free and fair elections to Liberia. This solution must be hammered out in a process that includes all the war's major stakeholders, including the LURD and Liberian opposition and civil society, as well as states. The following section suggests a model of what a negotiated solution might look like, and how the process might be structured.

*The Objective.* There is only one legitimate and effective objective at which international strategy must aim: a completely free and fair election in 2003 or 2004 to let the Liberian people decide their leadership. This election should be monitored by the international community. It is the only way to produce a sustainable change of government. A military victory by either the dissidents (under a containment strategy) or Taylor (under an engagement strategy) would sow the seeds of a self-perpetuating conflict. This objective is not simply a question of preventing electoral fraud. Uncompromising conditions for a genuinely free and fair choice must be met – a mammoth task in any sub-Saharan African country. In Liberia they include fundamental institutional reform:

- ❑ a cease-fire and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of all combatants;
- ❑ complete restructuring of the military and paramilitary services, including disbanding Taylor's private armies and creating professional, non-politicised, and well trained national armed forces;
- ❑ institution of rule of law throughout the country, with reform of the judiciary and police;

- ❑ reinvigoration of key commissions, such as the Human Rights Commission and the Reconciliation Commission;
- ❑ return of opposition members and civil society activists in an atmosphere of relative security and freedom to campaign for peaceful change;
- ❑ an entirely independent and impartial electoral commission;
- ❑ restoration of a free and independent media, particularly short-wave radio, and media access to the countryside;
- ❑ a vigorous and extended program of voter and civic education in rural areas;
- ❑ reform of the economy, to allow greater competition and more responsible management of national resources; and
- ❑ reform of public finances, to allow for accountability.

*What to do about the Leadership.* An objective of free and fair elections is, in some ways, uncontroversial. The key question of any strategy towards Liberia is how to get there. The first step, clearly, is to pressure Taylor and the LURD into a ceasefire and then peace negotiations aimed at agreeing to the conditions stated above.

The core problem with this, however, is that Taylor will probably agree to the conditions but then not fulfil them, ensuring that he wins the election. Most opposition, civil society and certainly LURD figures do not trust him to implement the conditions, or to hold a fair election. They will likely not agree to a negotiated solution that keeps Taylor in power and trusts him to hold the election.

Some suggest, therefore, that Taylor should be pressured to resign and allow an interim government, or allow his vice-president to preside over an interim government of national unity. But it is unlikely that Taylor will be willing to resign before the end of his term. Only intense military pressure by the LURD, combined with tough sanctions and significant incentives for compliance, might persuade Taylor that it is in his best interests to resign. But this strategy, if it

failed, would risk an escalated and possibly protracted war.

One possible answer to this dilemma would be to compel Taylor's agreement that he will only conduct elections if he has met the requisite conditions. Taylor has one year left in his term of office. Elections must be held by October 2003. If, as his enemies expect, Taylor does not meet the high standards for reform by mid-2003, then elections should not be held and power should pass to an impartial interim government, which would rule until necessary reforms were made. The international community should make clear to President Taylor that it will support such an option. The judges of whether the conditions have been met during Taylor's remaining time in office should be the Liberian opposition parties, civil society, and the international community, the other stakeholders in Liberia's peace process. The advantage of this approach is that while it will be almost impossible to pressure Taylor to resign now, it may be possible to gain his agreement to leave office and transfer power to an interim government once his term is up.

*Achieving Change from Within.* A major advantage of this approach is that it allows time for opposition and civil society to return to Liberia and prepare before they face the challenge of building a new regime. These forces are not currently capable of building a sustainable and progressive government to follow Taylor's, but they are as essential to the success of any strategy as is international pressure and support. A coordinated effort by donors to support the development of a non-violent "third force" in civil society will, therefore, be critical over the coming year. But civil society activists or political opponents cannot return without firmer guarantees of their security and monitoring of Taylor's human rights abuses. The UN can improve its image in the eyes of ordinary civilians by giving its Monrovia office more authority to tackle human rights abuses and more financial support, and by ensuring that its head has a strong character to resist Taylor's manipulation.

It is urgent that a civil society and opposition forum be held to define a specific reform agenda. The international community can assist in a number of ways, including by giving financial and moral support and publicly shaming those who spoil unity.

The most important help governments might give to such a group is a commitment to ensure that their own positions in negotiating with the Taylor government are, to as great an extent as possible, responsive to the position taken by this coalition. A common position among the international community, civil society and opposition parties could provide the middle ground to which to bring the government and the insurgents at the peace table.

*Great Power Consensus.* The search for that common position must begin in Paris, London, and Washington, with a way found to bring Tripoli along as well. The deepest underlying currents of the Mano River War are competitions between Libyan and French and U.S. and British agendas for West Africa. A sustainable solution will require the buy-in of all these powers into a common vision for long-term stability in Liberia. The time is ripe to attempt such an international consensus, through the formation of a contact group, which would include the U.S, the UK, France and Nigeria. Of these, France would then be the likeliest choice to serve as a channel to Libya. The U.S. government is currently engaged in a spirited internal debate over its Liberian policy, which could be strongly influenced by a consensus among its allies.

These countries have significant differences about Liberia (and in the case of Libya many other matters as well). There is no assumption that they could easily agree but their discussions on Liberia would be a significant step toward ending the cycle of warfare in West Africa. When and if some alignment of policies is reached, moreover, ideally in serious consultation with Liberian stakeholders, real pressure could then be applied.

There remains the difficult question of which Western or regional power should take the lead in facilitating and underpinning the peace process in Liberia. Nigeria has already begun to play a role in encouraging dialogue. Its efforts should be encouraged but they would be more effective if pursued under UN auspices. However, Nigeria has gradually lost much of its sense of urgency about Liberia since its experience in the civil war. It now seems much less likely to commit major diplomatic, financial or military resources.



The Sierra Leone experience shows that peace is possible with strong international commitment to see a conflict through to a resolution. The task of compelling Taylor's consent, both in peace negotiations and afterwards, will require a powerful actor with much staying power and the ability to stand firm against the Liberian president's inevitable threats and intrigues. The only two powers that could conceivably play this role are the U.S. and UK, though in close coordination with the other major international players.

*A Two-Track Approach.* A combination of pressure and engagement should be used to encourage the Liberian government's willingness to make the necessary concessions in a negotiated solution. Persuading Charles Taylor to agree to any arrangement that could at some point jeopardise his power will be a Herculean task, requiring pressure of all kinds, coupled with attention to his personal fears and interests, and significant incentives.

The international community has a number of means at its disposal to leverage Taylor's consent. Efforts to promote "change from within" and to work for a great power consensus on the Liberian question will create substantial civic and diplomatic pressure on the regime.

But "Liberia Inc.'s" greatest susceptibility to pressure remains financial. This is why sanctions should be renewed and tightened by the Security Council in May 2002. Charles Taylor is slowly being squeezed by the high costs of smuggled arms and ammunition to fight the insurgency. He has not been able to pay his army for months and has been increasingly harassing the business community for ad hoc taxes and payoffs.<sup>61</sup> He also faces diamond sanctions. The threat of additional sanctions on timber and maritime registry, his principal remaining sources of revenue, would greatly weaken his government, as well his personal finances. Additional pressure could also be placed by moving UN enforcement measures to a new level, vigorously pursuing and prosecuting foreign businesspersons who assist Taylor in violating sanctions. This could significantly raise the price tag of sanctions-busting for Taylor since business

associates would demand compensation for the added risk.

The travel ban reportedly has been among the most troublesome sanctions for Taylor's inner circle. This could be widened to cover more members of Taylor's government and their families, and more care could be taken to enforce it. While the decision will be made by an independent prosecutor, Taylor could also eventually be indicted for crimes against humanity by the Special Court being set up in Sierra Leone. He is reportedly extremely worried about the pariah status that such an indictment would confer.

The unfortunate lesson of the Liberian civil war is that Taylor has never agreed to negotiated concessions unless under significant military pressure. This has not changed, and it is primarily the threat posed by the LURD insurgency that has created the incentive for Taylor to conduct serious negotiations now over Liberia's future. The international community must warn Taylor that if he refuses to accept a negotiated solution, little will be done to pressure Guinea or the LURD to agree to a cease-fire. Regardless of whether Taylor moderates his policies or not, however, the arms embargo currently on Liberia must not be lifted under any circumstances. Doing so would be tantamount to assisting Taylor gain a military victory.

If Taylor does agree to an acceptable negotiated solution, however, and implements that solution, the international community must respond with a number of gestures of good faith. Travel and diamond sanctions should be lifted after verified compliance, and substantial aid for development and institutional reform should be given. The LURD should also be pressured into a cease-fire and acceptance of the negotiated solution. If an interim government were to be set up at the end of Taylor's term, international guarantees should be given for his personal security, although not from prosecution by an authorised international tribunal.

**Freetown/Brussels, 24 April 2002**

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<sup>61</sup> ICG interview with logging company owner in Monrovia, February 2002.

## APPENDIX A

### MAP OF LIBERIA, SIERRA LEONE AND GUINEA



## APPENDIX B

### GLOSSARY OF ACROYMNS

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AFL:	Armed Forces of Liberia	NPFL:	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
ATU:	Anti-Terrorist Unit	NPP:	National Patriotic Party
AFRC:	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council	ODL:	Organisation of Displaced Liberians
CRC-NPFL:	Central Revolutionary Council- National Patriotic Front of Liberia	OTC:	Oriental Timber Company
ECOMOG:	Economic Community Monitoring Observer Group	RSLAF:	Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Force
ECOWAS:	Economic Community of West African States	RUF:	Revolutionary United Front
EU:	European Union	SLA:	Sierra Leone Army
INPFL:	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia	SOD:	Special Operations Division
JCL:	Justice Coalition for Liberia	SSS:	Special Security Service
LDF:	Lofa Defence Force	SSU:	Special Security Unit
LPC:	Liberian Peace Council	ULIMO:	United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia
LURD:	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy	UDFL:	Union of Democratic Forces of Liberia
MRU:	Mano River Union	UN:	United Nations
		UNOL:	United Nations Peace-Building Office in Liberia
		UP:	Unity Party

## APPENDIX C

### LIBERIA'S FIRST CIVIL WAR, 1989-1997

The seeds of Liberia's first civil war can be traced back to divisions between the native population and descendants of freed slaves from America and the West Indies who settled in Liberia from the 1800s. Although only constituting 5 per cent of the population, the Americo-Liberian freed slaves, in alliance with Africans liberated from slave ships bound for the Americas (the "Congos"), dominated political, social and economic life. They failed to grant equal treatment, freedom and political inclusion to the native tribes of the interior and monopolised power for 133 years before their last president, William Tolbert, was overthrown on 12 April 1980.

#### A. The Prelude

The immediate antecedents of civil war in Liberia can, however, be found in the excesses of the rule of Samuel Kanyon Doe, a 28-year old Master Sergeant (Staff Sergeant) in the Liberian army, who overthrew the Americo-Liberian dominance. There was popular support for Doe and his People's Redemption Council (PRC) from the majority population of native Liberians since this was first time a native led the country since independence in 1847. But Doe's popularity disappeared rapidly as his rule began to resemble that of his predecessors. Like them, Doe created a governmental system that benefited one ethnic group, in this case the Krahns, who made up only 4 per cent of the population.<sup>62</sup>

Initially Doe surrounded himself with some Americo-Liberian elite, but they soon became his adversaries as he slowly tried to dispense with them. But Doe's biggest mistake was to make himself an enemy of the native people and of young left wing "progressive leaders, who had been important to his rise to power. Some of the latter were from settler families or were natives who had received elite educations. They were members of the Movement of Justice in Africa

(MOJA) and the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL), two groups originally established in the 1970s to pressure the Tolbert government.<sup>63</sup> Some from these groups formed part of his government and competed for his grace and favour, often falling out and betraying one another in an attempt to gain more power. A notable character was Charles Taylor, who had been chairman of the student movement, the Union of Liberian Association in the Americas (ULAA), while studying in the U.S. during the 1970s. Taylor became director of the General Services Agency, a government procurement body, soon after Doe's coup.

As Doe consolidated his power he came to rely less and less on the "progressives". Hence, more than the Americo-Liberian elite, the "progressives" were instrumental in his downfall. Several attempts to remove Doe were foiled during his nine-year rule. The first serious challenge came in 1983 when he announced his ambitions to become a civilian president under a new constitution after pressure to return Liberia to democratic rule. This opened a split between Doe and others of his junta, including Doe's close ally, General Thomas Quiwonkpa, commander of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and a Gio from Nimba County.<sup>64</sup> Quiwonkpa, who was instrumental in Doe's rise to power, feared that Doe's elevation to the presidency would limit his own power and that of

<sup>62</sup> The ethnic groups in Liberia are Bassa, Belle, Dei, Gbandi, Gio, Gola, Grebo, Kpelle, Kissi, Krahns, Kru, Loma, Mandingos, Mano Mende, Sapo, and Vai.

<sup>63</sup> MOJA and PAL preached radical and quasi Marxist ideology, though MOJA was principally a pan-African movement and had branches in Ghana and the Gambia. Both groups were formed by young intellectuals. In the lead up to the 1980 coup, MOJA had established night schools known as the Barrack Union to politicise the army and encourage it to overthrow the Tolbert government. Amos Sawyer, later to be head of the first interim government during the civil war in 1990, ran the classes. See Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1999), pp. 52-53.

<sup>64</sup> There are thirteen counties in Liberia: Bong, Bomi, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Lofa, Margibi, Maryland, Monsterrado (which includes the capital, Monrovia), Nimba, Rivercess, and Sinoe.

the military, but also seal Krahn dominance. Quiwonkpa sensed he was losing power in the PRC when Doe offered him the post of secretary-general, which would have removed him from the army. Quiwonkpa refused and, fearing for his life, went into exile. His close associates and protégés followed him, including Prince Johnson, his military-aide-de-camp, and Charles Taylor. Some who fled to Côte d'Ivoire, including Samuel Dokie, a Mano man from Nimba County who was to become an ally and then an enemy of Charles Taylor during the civil war, led a raid on Nimba on 21 November 1983 that attacked government offices and killed several people. Many of the raiders who had either escaped capture or were pardoned left the country and prepared for the next coup.

Doe's victory following the 15 October 1985 rigged elections sealed the hatred of the natives, in particular the people of Nimba County. Many believed that Jackson F. Doe (no relation to the president) of the Liberian Action Party (LAP) had won. Jackson Doe was the son of a Gio from Nimba, who had been recruited by Quiwonkpa to work in the government. From 1985, after he consolidated his power, President Doe plunged Liberia into violence as he attacked his political opponents. As his legitimacy eroded, Doe depended increasingly on the Krahn and on the Mandingo community, a minority Muslim ethnic group with extensive commercial and trading links in the region.

Disillusionment led Quiwonkpa and others linked to the "progressives", including Joe Wylie (later to become a member of the LURD), to launch a coup on 12 November 1985. Its failure resulted in a brutal campaign of repression against the Gio and Mano peoples in Nimba County, Quiwonkpa's strongest supporters, by Doe's Krahn-dominated Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). The people of Nimba County nursed a deep resentment towards Doe's regime. It was, therefore, not surprising that the civil war was launched on Christmas Eve 1989 in Nimba County and that the core fighters of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebels were mainly Gio and Mano.

## The Christmas Eve War

Charles Taylor is not a Gio, nor is he from Nimba County, but he was a protégé of Quiwonkpa.<sup>65</sup> Taylor is a child of inter-marriage between a native (his mother, a Gola) and a Congo, thus making him "all things to all men".<sup>66</sup> Taylor was able to tap into a largely disaffected national and exiled population to build a strong network of forces in his campaign to challenge Doe and later claim Liberia for himself. Many Liberians beyond Nimba County were dissatisfied with Doe and wanted him removed. Exiled Americo-Liberians living in Côte d'Ivoire saw Taylor as a way back to power following their overthrow in 1980, thinking him practically one of their own. For the people of Nimba County, many also exiled in Côte d'Ivoire, Taylor's campaign allowed them to inflict revenge on the Krahns and Mandingos.

At least 150 fighters trained in Libya and Burkina Faso crossed from Côte d'Ivoire into Nimba County, attacking government officials and Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers. Internal rivalry and splits within the National Patriotic Front of Liberia emerged from the start as some rank and file soldiers from Nimba offered loyalty to their commanders like Prince Johnson rather than Taylor. Johnson left the National Patriotic Front of Liberia to launch the Independent National Patriotic Front (INPFL) as early as January 1990. He captured President Doe and video recorded his murder on 9 September 1990 to show everyone that he and not Taylor was responsible for the end of the regime and therefore successor to the presidency. Further splits surfaced within the National Patriotic Front of Liberia in 1994, when another breakaway group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia Central Revolutionary Council (NPFL-CRC), was formed. Key founders of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, such as Tom Woewiyu, Sam Dokie and Laveli Supuwood (now a member of the LURD) fell out with Taylor over the objectives and direction of the movement.

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<sup>65</sup> Taylor was related by marriage to Quiwonkpa. Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, op. cit., p. 58. Taylor fled to the U.S. in 1983. While there he was accused by the Doe government of embezzling U.S.\$900,000. Taylor was imprisoned pending extradition, but escaped fifteen months later and returned to West Africa.

<sup>66</sup> Mark Huband, *The Liberia Civil War* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), p. xix.

In seven years of fighting other warring factions that emerged were headed by prominent political and military figures who had risen through the ranks of the "progressive movements" and were either closely allied to Doe, for example George Boley and Alhaji Kromah of the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO), or fell out with Taylor. Former fighters from ULIMO are now part of today's LURD insurgency. ULIMO, founded in May 1991, was mainly a merger of Doe loyalists, predominantly from the Krahn-based ethnic group. One of its groups, the Liberian Peace Council (LPC), was headed by George Boley, former advisor to President Doe. A second group, the Liberian United Defence Force, was headed by an ex-functionary in the Doe government, General Albert Karpoh. A third group, the Movement for the Redemption of Liberian Moslems (MRLM), was founded in February 1990 by Doe's former Minister for Information, Alhaji Kromah, in Guinea. A fourth group contained elements of Doe's army who had fled to Sierra Leone. By 1994, however, internal struggles within the movement over the allocation of posts in the Transitional Government led to a spilt and the formation of a mostly Krahn wing, led by Roosevelt Johnson (ULIMO-J), and a predominantly Mandingo faction, under Alhaji Kromah (ULIMO-K).

At the start of the conflict there was an assumption that the United States would intervene in what is often regarded as an American protectorate. The countries had close ties reflected through long established economic, political, military, social and cultural links and the fact that Liberia was long governed by descendants from nineteenth-century American slaves. But the arrival of U.S. Marines on 5 August 1990 was to rescue U.S. nationals and not to intervene directly in the conflict. Many Liberians consider that the U.S. is partly to blame for Liberia's fate by having prolonged Doe's survival during the Cold War. Doe made Liberia strategically useful by hosting U.S. intelligence and satellite networks, the Omega Navigational System, and a VOA relay station. Hence, Washington provided Doe U.S.\$500 million in military and economic assistance while overlooking his brutal leadership. Liberia's misfortune was that its civil war coincided with the end of the Cold War; which overnight cost the country its strategic utility.

As the conflict intensified, the absence of U.S. intervention led to increasing pressure for West African states under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to act. The U.S. encouraged this, and on 25 August 1990, 3,000 troops from the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Observer Group (ECOMOG) landed in Monrovia. The intervention was controversial from the start because various member states (e.g. Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) used Liberia's warring factions to advance their particular or regional economic and political aims. The Liberian crisis exposed old rivalries and differences between French and English-speaking West African states, the consequences which are still being felt in Guinea and Sierra Leone.

The UN, which initially appeared overstretched by other peacekeeping demands, finally stepped in to assist ECOWAS. However, it was not just other commitments but also African reluctance that had prevented the global body from playing an immediate role when conflict broke out. Taylor did, however, make several requests to the UN, primarily to neutralise ECOMOG, and particularly Nigeria. The UN finally intervened when the Security Council passed Resolution 788 in November 1992, following the second assault by the National Patriotic Front of Liberia on Monrovia. The resolution supported an ECOWAS call for an arms embargo on all warring factions and requested that the Secretary-General dispatch a Special Representative to evaluate the situation. The Security Council established an Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) in July 1993. It was to be unarmed, while ECOMOG provided security. This was the first joint peacekeeping mission undertaken by the UN in co-operation with a regional group.

Many atrocities occurred over seven years of fighting. Within weeks the people of Nimba County marked out the Mandingos for their collaboration with the Doe regime, while the Krahn-based Armed Forces of Liberia targeted Gio and Mano supporters of Taylor in and around Monrovia. In many ways, within the wider contest for leadership, the war was about the revenge of one particular native group against another. As the war continued, attacks became more widespread and indiscriminate. For example, a wide range of human rights abuses, including massacres, torture, and kidnapping, took place during the two major

battles for Monrovia, first in 1990 when the National Patriotic Front of Liberia fought against the Armed Forces of Liberia and Prince Johnson's INPFL. The National Patriotic Front of Liberia assault on Monrovia in October 1992, codename "Operation Octopus" in which five American nuns were killed, was marked by treachery as Taylor's forces struck while peace negotiations were taking place. Most people conclude that all sides committed atrocities. In the UN inquiry following the June 1993 Harbel massacre, which claimed the lives of 600 Liberians, mainly displaced men, women, children and elderly, the Armed Forces of Liberia were singled out.<sup>67</sup> In the total course of the conflict, over half the country's population of 2.6 million was displaced, internally or externally. Estimates of deaths, some using different standards (e.g., directly or indirectly related to the fighting), vary from 60,000 to 200,000.<sup>68</sup>

Political assassinations were also frequent on all sides, but predominantly within the National Patriotic Front of Liberia camp as Taylor sought to eliminate potential rivals. Close allies such as Elmer Johnson, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia chief military strategist, and Moses Duopu, secretary-general of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, were ordered executed by Taylor in June 1990. Those more popular than him, such as Jackson Doe and Cooper Teah, a famous battle front commander who was close to Taylor's mentor, Thomas Quiwonkpa, were killed in 1990 and 1992, respectively. Taylor's method of eliminating rivals was sufficient warning of how he would rule once in power.

Nine peace agreements and at least thirteen cease-fire arrangements illustrated the lack of commitment to peace. None involved any real political solutions or dialogue. Taylor negotiated only when he was under pressure. A string of meaningless national and international conferences and three successive interim and transitional governments by April 1996 provided further evidence of how uninterested all sides were in negotiating peace. Liberia was held hostage to competition between power hungry individuals

who had been struggling for the presidency since the 1970s and 1980s.

When the war started, it was a battle between two men for control - Doe and Taylor, but as it continued, it soon became clear that it had become, effectively, a war between Taylor and Nigeria's military leader, President Babangida. From the start of its intervention, ECOMOG was used to pursue Nigeria's objective of preventing Taylor from winning. When the Nigerian-led ECOMOG force blocked Taylor's attempt to take over the capital, he carved out his own fiefdom, calling it the National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly Government (NPRAG), an alternative administration based in Gbarnga, Bong County, from where he controlled half the country and styled himself president. With the exception of the shipping industry, Taylor was able to deny the official Interim Government, set up in 1990, access to most income. The Interim Government controlled the capital and its port. Taylor ran a successful business during the war through commercial links. One example was iron ore mining with the British firm African Mining Consortium Ltd. The Ivorian capital, Abidjan was a meeting point for Taylor's financiers, who traded for weapons, communications facilities and military training.<sup>69</sup>

When ECOMOG troops finally attacked Taylor's administration in Gbarnga in 1994, he realised that his only way to claim the presidency was to negotiate directly with Nigeria. Taylor's fortune was that Babangida was no longer in office. A new leader with fewer personal ties to Liberia, President Sani Abacha, provided Taylor with an opportunity to reach a rapprochement.<sup>70</sup> On 19 August 1995 the leaders of the main warring factions signed a peace agreement (the ninth), the Abuja I Peace Accord, in that Nigerian city.<sup>71</sup> After more than five years of fighting in the bush, Taylor

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<sup>67</sup> The Carter Camp Massacre: Results of an investigation by the panel of inquiry appointed by the Secretary-General into the massacres near Harbel, Liberia, on the night of June 5-6 1993, United Nations, New York, 10 September 1993.

<sup>68</sup> Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, op. cit., p. 316.

<sup>69</sup> Other warring factions, such as ULIMO, traded in diamonds illicitly mined in Sierra Leone.

<sup>70</sup> Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>71</sup> There were nine peace accords in total: the Bamako Cease-fire, November 1990, the Banjul Joint Statement, December 1990, Lomé Agreement, February 1991 the Yamoussoukro I-IV Accords of June-October 1991, the Cotonou Accord, 25 July 1993; the Akosombo Agreement, 12 September 1994; the Accra Clarification, 21 December 1994; the Abuja Accord, 26 August 1995; and the Supplement to the Abuja Accord, 17 August 1996.

finally arrived in Monrovia with the full support of Nigeria.

Under the Abuja Accord, Taylor and other warlords were given a stake in a new Council of State, “in effect a collective presidency in which the principle factions were represented”.<sup>72</sup> The Council system allowed each faction leader to run parts of the state. Ministries were divided up, posts were negotiated, and each leader became a vice-president, thus bringing each warlord closer to his goal of claiming the presidency. What it effectively did was to allow warlords to enter Monrovia and further criminalise an already criminalised state.

But the main warlord, Charles Taylor, did not want to share the state, and he pursued a tactic of collaboration with the aim of destroying or eliminating his rivals from the Council and claiming the presidency. In December 1995, when the final stage of the disarmament process was to end, Taylor struck a deal with his rival, Roosevelt Johnson, for ULIMO-J forces to attack rather than disarm and evacuate the diamonds fields in the west of the country to ECOMOG. Taylor guaranteed Johnson support for this operation. ECOMOG was surprised by Johnson's attack primarily because he had been a key ally to it in the war. During the attack a murder occurred that Taylor used as justification to remove Johnson from the Council. In what is now known as the “6 September 1996 incident”, fighting erupted when the police moved to arrest Johnson on charges of murder. The police were supported by the ULIMO-K and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia.

As fighting continued, National Patriotic Front of Liberia fighters gained the upper hand. With growing concerns that Taylor could take Monrovia militarily, it is alleged that the Nigeria and the U.S. provided other warring factions, including ULIMO-J, with weapons to attack the National Patriotic Front of Liberia. At least 2,000-3,000 people died in the fighting, and Nigeria was embarrassed by Taylor's attempt to foil another peace process that it had created. But once again Nigeria had blocked Taylor's attempt to claim Monrovia and the presidency as his own. Nigeria then bolstered its peacekeeping force, reviewed the mission and attempted another peace deal. Taylor finally came to realise that with Nigeria in

Monrovia, he could not easily overrun the capital. To succeed, he would need Nigeria on his side, so he cooperated on another peace agreement. Thus on 17 August 1996, the Supplement to the Abuja Accord was signed. This provided for a cease-fire to be implemented by 31 August 1996; disarmament and demobilisation to be completed by 31 January 1997; and elections to be held on 30 May 1997, later postponed to 19 July 1997. Charles Taylor went on to win the presidency in a landslide victory, with 83 per cent of the vote, against twelve other candidates.

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<sup>72</sup> Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, op. cit., p. 105.



## APPENDIX D

### CHRONOLOGY<sup>73</sup>

#### Independence

July 1847 Liberia becomes independent.

1943 William Tubman elected president.

1971 Tubman dies and is succeeded by William Tolbert Jr.

March 1973 Formation of the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA).

1978 Formation of Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL).

April 1979 More than 40 people are killed in riots following a proposed increase in the price of rice.

#### Years of instability

April 1980 Master Sergeant Samuel Doe stages military coup. Tolbert and more than twelve of his aides are killed. A People's Redemption Council headed by Doe suspends the constitution and assumes full power.

November 1983 General Thomas Quiwonkpa and close allies, Prince Johnson and Charles Taylor, flee the country. Following their departure, a raid is led into Nimba County by supporters of Thomas Quiwonkpa in an

attempt to overthrow President Doe.

August 1984 Government forces invade the university campus following accusations that individuals, including Amos Sawyer, were involved in attempts to bring down the government.

October 1984 Doe's regime allows return of political parties following pressure from the United States and other creditors.

October 1985 Doe wins rigged presidential elections.

November 1985 Attempted coup fails and leads to reprisals against the Gio and Mano. Quiwonkpa is captured and murdered.

January 1986 Inauguration of Doe Government.

#### Taylor's Uprising

December 1989 National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor begins an uprising against the Doe government.

June 1990 Interfaith Mediation Committee meets on Liberian conflict.

<sup>73</sup> Adapted from "Timeline: Liberia", BBC News, 22 February 2002 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk> and *The Liberian Peace Process, 1990-1996*, Accord Series, No. 1 (London: Conciliation Resources, 1996) and ICG Africa Reports No. 28, *Sierra Leone: Time for a New Military and Political Strategy* (Freetown/Brussels), 11 April 2001.

June 1990	Liberian peace talks in Freetown, Sierra Leone.		Patriotic Front of Liberia resorts to wrecking tactics. INPFL leadership irrevocably split over degree of collaboration with IGNU, ECOMOG and National Patriotic Front of Liberia.
August 1990	Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sends peacekeeping force to Liberia.		
September 1990	President Doe abducted, tortured and killed by Prince Johnson, leader of the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), en route to ECOMOG headquarters in Monrovia.	March 1991	The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone launches attack into Sierra Leone from Liberia with fighters from Liberia and Burkina Faso.
November 1990	Bamako Cease-fire signed between Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), INPFL and National Patriotic Front of Liberia following an extraordinary session of Economic Community of West African States heads of state. Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) formally installed with Amos Sawyer as its president.	May 1991	United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO) is formed in Sierra Leone and Guinea by ex-AFL fighters and Krahn and Mandingo supporters of the late President Doe. ULIMO forces enter western Liberia from Sierra Leone to attack National Patriotic Front of Liberia.
December 1990	Banjul Agreement between the Armed Forces of Liberia, INPFL and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia to convene a national conference in 60 days to reconstitute and consolidate IGNU with representatives from all factions.	June 1991	Reconciliation in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire between Sawyer and Taylor, brokered by President Houphouët-Boigny, with the involvement of the International Negotiations Network (INN) of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter.
January 1991	NPFL establish their National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly Government (NPRAG) in Gbarnga.	September 1991	NPFL agrees to disarm troops, but there are disagreements over weapons control with Interim Government. ECOMOG troops deploy outside Monrovia for the first time and ULIMO gains in western Liberia.
February 1991	Signing of Lomé Agreement, which specifies the modalities for ECOMOG monitoring of cease-fire implementation. Disarmament is deferred until after reconstitution of IGNU.	October 1991	Peace plan signed in Yamoussoukro to begin disarmament process.
March 1991	All-Liberia National Conference fails to take the peace process forward as Taylor's presidential plans are thwarted and National	April 1992	Sierra Leonean government is toppled by under-paid and disgruntled army officers, but RUF insurgency continues.
		May 1992	UN Security Council launches appeal to factions to respect Yamoussoukro Agreement.

- July 1992 ECOWAS gives Charles Taylor 30-day ultimatum to disarm fighters as agreed in Yamoussoukro.
- October 1992 NPFL launches an all-out assault, codenamed Operation Octopus, on Economic Community of West African States forces in Monrovia from the facilities of the Firestone rubber plantation near Harbel. ECOMOG abandons its peace-keeping stance for greater combatant role, rearms the Armed Forces of Liberia and openly supports ULIMO. Both commence heavy bombing of National Patriotic Front of Liberia-held areas. Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter comments publicly on ECOMOG partiality.
- November 1992 UN Security Council imposes mandatory arms embargo on all factions.
- Tentative cease-fire**
- May 1993 ECOWAS finally imposes economic sanctions on National Patriotic Front of Liberia-held areas.
- June 1993 600 civilians, mainly displaced Liberians, are killed in an armed attack on the Firestone plantation near Harbel. A panel of inquiry appointed by the UN Secretary General attributes the attack to units of the Armed Forces of Liberia.
- July 1993 At the invitation of the UN, ECOWAS and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), all the warring factions go to Geneva for peace talks. Geneva Cease-fire is signed between the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, ULIMO and IGNU.
- July 1993 Cotonou Accord is formally signed between the same parties. This accord reschedules disarmament and encampment, and provides for a tripartite Liberia National Transitional Government (LNTG), headed by a five-man Council of State, to replace IGNU once disarmament commences. LNTG leaders are ineligible to contest presidential elections in February 1994.
- September 1993 The Liberia Peace Council (LPC) emerges with support of Armed Forces of Liberia and engages the National Patriotic Front of Liberia around rubber and timber exporting zones in south-eastern Liberia. The United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) is established, the first UN peacekeeping operation undertaken in co-operation with a regional organisation. ECOMOG has primary responsibility for ensuring implementation of the 1993 Cotonou Accord, but UNOMIL is authorised to monitor and verify the cease-fire, the arms embargo, and the encampment, disarmament and demobilisation of combatants.
- September 1994 Akosombo Peace Agreement signed in Ghana under Economic Community of West African States between National Patriotic Front of Liberia, ULIMO and Armed Forces of Liberia. Agreement planned for immediate cease-fire and the setting up of a joint Council of State composed of five members appointed by the three factions and civil society. General elections to take place in October 1995.
- Close allies of Taylor, Samuel Dokie, Laveli Supuwood and Tom Woewiyu, break away

	from National Patriotic Front of Liberia to create Central Revolutionary Council-NPFL (CRC-NPFL).	3,000 people and the destruction of Monrovia.
December 1994	Peace pact signed in Accra (Ghana) by all warring factions. The leaders agree to the establishment of safe havens and buffer zones and holding of elections in November 1995. A cease-fire is called on 28 December 1994. The parties also agree to demobilisation and reintegration programs.	August 1996 Supplement to the Abuja Accords is signed by warring factions, formally known as Abuja II Accords. Agreement also includes provision that ECOMOG forces assist in the restructuring of the national army. Elections were to be held in May 1997.
January 1995	ECOWAS heads of state attend mini summit on the formation of the Liberian Council of State. All Liberian warring factions attending peace talks had accepted, in principle, a proposal by the heads of Ghana, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire to expand the numbers of nominees of the Council of State from five to six in order that the Armed Forces of Liberia and the Coalition forces can be separately represented.	August 1996 ECOWAS peacekeepers initiate disarmament program, clear land mines and reopen roads, allowing refugees to start returning.
		November 1996 The Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF sign the Abidjan Peace Agreement.
		January 1997 Disarmament program is declared a success.
		May 1997 President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone is overthrown in a coup led by junior officers calling itself the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Thousands flee to Liberia. Nigerian forces leave Liberia for Sierra Leone.
August 1995	Peace agreement signed in Abuja (Nigeria). Liberia's main warring factions agree to enforce cease-fire, disarmament and elections within one year. Agree to halting of hostilities and installation of Council of State within fourteen days from when the agreement was signed on 19 August.	July 1997 Presidential and legislative elections are held. Charles Taylor wins a landslide, and his National Patriotic Party wins a majority of seats in the National Assembly. International observers declare the elections free and fair.
April 1996	Factional fighting resumes and spreads to Monrovia. ULIMO-K and National Patriotic Front of Liberia collaborate to capture ULIMO-J leader Roosevelt Johnson after the Transitional Government of Wilton Sankawulo accuses him of murder. The attempt to arrest Johnson sparks 6 April fighting that causes the death of over	
		<b>Precarious peace</b>
		August 1997 Taylor is inaugurated as president of Liberia.
		September 1997 UNOMIL ends its mandate following completion of the DDR process and holding of national elections.

October 1997	In negotiation in Conakry between the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council junta of Sierra Leone and Economic Community of West African States, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council agrees to restore the government of President Kabbah within six months.	April 1999	Rebels calling themselves Justice Coalition of Liberia (JCL), thought to have crossed Guinea, attack the Liberian town of Voinjama, Lofa County.
November 1997	Taylor forces murder his ally-turned-opponent, Samuel Dokie, and his family.	June 1999	Allegations that Taylor's security forces were involved in the death of the Liberian Vice President Enoch Dogolea.
March 1998	President Kabbah is reinstated after Nigerian troops battle with Armed Forces Revolutionary Council and RUF forces in Freetown for over one month.	July 1999	Sierra Leone government and RUF sign Lomé Peace Accord.
September 1998	Clash between Taylor forces and ULIMO-J fighters at Camp Johnson Road. Thirteen Krahn supporters of ULIMO are imprisoned. Other political opponents are charged with treason.	August 1999	The Government of Liberia indicts an opposition leader residing abroad, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, for treason for alleged ties to armed dissidents operating in Lofa County.
November 1998	Former National Patriotic Front of Liberia fighters patrol Liberia's border with Sierra Leone.	October 1999	UN Security Council Resolution 1270 establishes United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).
December 1998	ECOMOG is forced to leave Liberia after embarrassing showdown with President Taylor over his rejection of the Abuja accord provision that made ECOMOG responsible for training a new national army.	October 1999	JCL attack Lofa County again and take Kolahun and Foya along the Sierra Leone border.
<b>Border fighting and internal tension</b>		December 1999	RUF military commander Sam Bockarie and at least 200 of his supporters take refuge in Liberia. President Taylor denies that the Government is training the RUF fighters or that it has been supplying them with arms. He claims that the Economic Community of West African States leadership permitted these arrangements in order to advance the implementation of the Sierra Leone peace process.
January 1999	AFRC/RUF forces re-enter Sierra Leone's capital Freetown by force. They inflict major destruction and widespread atrocities. Ghana and Nigeria accused Liberia of supporting the RUF in Sierra Leone. Britain and the U.S. threaten to suspend international aid to Liberia.	February 2000	Various groups of Liberian dissidents come together in Sierra Leone to form the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD).
		April 2000	Former Nigerian ECOMOG commander and chief of staff of the Sierra Leone Army,

	Maxwell Khobe, dies from battle wounds.		(CEDE) and beat up former interim president Amos Sawyer and the organisation's executive director, Conmany Wesseh. Sawyer and Wesseh leave the country.
May 2000	British forces intervene to salvage Sierra Leone peace process as 500 UN peacekeepers are held hostage. Foday Sankoh, RUF leader, is captured and imprisoned.	December 2000	UN report on Sierra Leone details extensive support for RUF by Charles Taylor government.
May 2000	ECOWAS appoints Charles Taylor to ensure that the RUF complies with the terms of the Lomé peace agreement and frees the UN hostages.	January 2001	LURD invades Lofa County.
June 2000	British government asks European Union to stop aid of U.S.\$42million to Liberia.	January 2001	UN Security Council begins discussion on draft sanction resolution against Liberia.
June 2000	President Taylor is instrumental in release of UN peacekeepers.	February 2001	Charles Taylor announces "policy of disengagement" with the RUF and the departure of Sam Bockarie from Liberia.
July 2000	The U.S. threatens to impose sanctions on Liberia unless it cuts ties with the RUF.	March 2001	UN Security Council adopts Resolution 1343 imposing "smart" sanctions against Charles Taylor's government, but delays for two months following request by France and West African states.
August 2000	UN Security Council passes Resolution 1315 on the establishment of a Special Court to indict those that "bear the greatest responsibility" for serious violations of international humanitarian law, which could include Taylor.	May 2001	UN Security Council Resolution 1343 re-imposes arms embargo to punish Charles Taylor for trading weapons for diamonds with the RUF. The sanctions also include travel ban.
September 2000	Coalition of RUF rebels, Liberian force allied to Charles Taylor and Guinean dissidents launches offensive against rebels in the north. Liberia accuses Guinean troops of shelling border villages. LURD retaliates. Fighting continues into January 2001.	May 2001	The Sierra Leone government and RUF meet again in Abuja, Nigeria to review the Cease-fire agreement signed in November 2001. The RUF agrees to return to the disarmament process.
November 2000	Sierra Leone's government and the RUF agree to a cease-fire and to resume the peace process in Abuja, Nigeria.	June 2001	The European Union suspends U.S.\$42 million in aid to Liberia.
November 2000	Former civil war combatants ransack the offices of the Centre for Democratic Empowerment	August 2001	Foreign ministers and security chiefs of the three Mano River countries begin a series of talks, continuing into September, on border security issues.

November 2001	LURD begins a new offensive. Voinjama falls to it in December, as well as Valhun, Foya and Bopulu.	February 2002	Long awaited meeting between of the Mano River Union Heads of States takes place in Rabat, Morocco. The three presidents agree to work together to end years of cross-border insurgencies, and to promote “peace, understanding and good-neighbourliness”.
December 2001	The Armed Forces of Liberia and RUF launch damaging attack against LURD. Killing of Emmett Ross, Charles Taylor's deputy minister in the Ministry of National Security, during fighting.	March 2002	Charles Taylor releases 21 political prisoners, thirteen of whom were linked to the 18 September 1998 Camp Johnson Road conflict.
December 2001	Senior Gambians, including Gouson Drane (ATU general) and Mohammed Sheriff (personnel director of the ministry of internal affairs), jailed after coup attempt.	March 2002	ECOWAS-sponsored conference on political dialogue with the Government of Liberia, civil society and opposition groups is held in Abuja, Nigeria. The LURD is invited but refuses to come, arguing that the agenda and the invitation list are biased. Its suspicions were raised when Economic Community of West African States Executive Secretary Mohammed Ibn Chambas ruled out discussion of an interim government and condemned the insurgency's use of force.
January 2002	LURD defeats RUF, Armed Forces of Liberia and Guinean dissident troops at Kolahun. By mid-February LURD troops are just 44 km from Monrovia, at Klay Junction.		
January 2002	President Kabbah declares ten-year civil war over in Sierra Leone.		
January 2002	UNHCR reports that up to 8,500 Liberian refugees cross into Sierra Leone.		
February 2002	Charles Taylor declares a state of emergency in Liberia.		

## APPENDIX E

### ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

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The International Crisis Group (ICG) is a private, multinational organisation committed to strengthening the capacity of the international community to anticipate, understand and act to prevent and contain conflict.

ICG's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts, based on the ground in countries at risk of conflict, gather information from a wide range of sources, assess local conditions and produce regular analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers.

ICG's reports are distributed widely to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made generally available at the same time via the organisation's Internet site, [www.crisisweb.org](http://www.crisisweb.org). ICG works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analysis and to generate support for its policy prescriptions. The ICG Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring ICG reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. ICG is chaired by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari; former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans has been President and Chief Executive since January 2000.

ICG's international headquarters are at Brussels, with advocacy offices in Washington DC, New

York and Paris and a media liaison office in London. The organisation currently operates eleven field offices with analysts working in nearly 30 crisis-affected countries and territories and across four continents, including Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone-Liberia-Guinea, Somalia, Sudan and Zimbabwe in Africa; Myanmar, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan in Asia; Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia in Europe; Algeria and most countries in the Middle East; and Colombia in Latin America.

ICG raises funds from governments, charitable foundations, companies and individual donors. The following governments currently provide funding: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, the Republic of China (Taiwan), Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Foundation and private sector donors include The Ansary Foundation, The Atlantic Philanthropies, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, John Merck Fund, Open Society Institute, Ploughshares Fund, Ruben and Elisabeth Rausing Trust, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, and William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

April 2002

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Further information about ICG can be obtained from our website: [www.crisisweb.org](http://www.crisisweb.org)



## APPENDIX F

### ICG REPORTS AND COMMON FILES

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\*Released since January 2000

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