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United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

Case No.: 200701753

MAR 25 2010

I refer to your letter dated March 11, 2007 regarding the release of certain Department of State material under the Freedom of Information Act (Title 5 USC Section 552).

We searched for and reviewed the self study guides that you requested and have determined that all except one of them may be released. They are on the enclosed disc. One of the guides is being released with excisions.

An enclosure provides information on Freedom of Information Act exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made excisions, the applicable exemptions are marked on each document. With respect to material withheld by the Department of State, you have the right to appeal our determination within 60 days. A copy of the appeals procedures is enclosed.

We have now completed the processing of your case. If you have any questions, you may write to the Office of Information Programs and Services, SA-2, Department of State, Washington, DC 20522-8100, or telephone us at (202) 261-8484. Please be sure to refer to the case number shown above in all correspondence about this case.

We hope that the Department has been of service to you in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Margaret P. Grafeld".

for Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures:
As stated.

63934 Federal Register/Vol. 69, No. 212
Rules and Regulations

Subpart F – Appeal Procedures

§171.52 Appeal of denial of access to, declassification of, amendment of, accounting of disclosures of, or challenge to classification of records.

- (a) *Right of administrative appeal.* Except for records that have been reviewed and withheld within the past two years or are the subject of litigation, any requester whose request for access to records, declassification of records, amendment of records, accounting of disclosure of records, or any authorized holder of classified information whose classification challenge has been denied, has a right to appeal the denial to the Department's Appeals Review Panel. This appeal right includes the right to appeal the determination by the Department that no records responsive to an access request exist in Department files. Privacy Act appeals may be made only by the individual to whom the records pertain.
- (b) *Form of appeal.* There is no required form for an appeal. However, it is essential that the appeal contain a clear statement of the decision or determination by the Department being appealed. When possible, the appeal should include argumentation and documentation to support the appeal and to contest the bases for denial cited by the Department. The appeal should be sent to: Chairman, Appeals Review Panel, c/o Appeals Officer, A/GIS/IPS/PP/LC, U.S. Department of State, SA-2, Room 8100, Washington, DC 20522-8100.
- (c) *Time limits.* The appeal should be received within 60 days of the date of receipt by the requester of the Department's denial. The time limit for response to an appeal begins to run on the day that the appeal is received. The time limit (excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal public holidays) for agency decision on an administrative appeal is 20 days under the FOIA (which may be extended for up to an additional 10 days in unusual circumstances) and 30 days under the Privacy Act (which the Panel may extend an additional 30 days for good cause shown). The Panel shall decide mandatory declassification review appeals as promptly as possible.
- (d) *Notification to appellant.* The Chairman of the Appeals Review Panel shall notify the appellant in writing of the Panel's decision on the appeal. When the decision is to uphold the denial, the Chairman shall include in his notification the reasons therefore. The appellant shall be advised that the decision of the Panel represents the final decision of the Department and of the right to seek judicial review of the Panel's decision, when applicable. In mandatory declassification review appeals, the Panel shall advise the requester of the right to appeal the decision to the Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel under §3.5(d) of E.O. 12958.

The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)

FOIA Exemptions

- (b)(1) Withholding specifically authorized under an Executive Order in the interest of national defense or foreign policy, and properly classified. E.O. 12958, as amended, includes the following classification categories:
 - 1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
 - 1.4(b) Foreign government information
 - 1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
 - 1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
 - 1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
 - 1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(h) Information on weapons of mass destruction
- (b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency
- (b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:
 - ARMEX Arms Export Control Act, 22 USC 2778(e)
 - CIA Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g)
 - EXPORT Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 App. USC 2411(c)(1)
 - FSA Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4003 & 4004
 - INA Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f)
 - IRAN Iran Claims Settlement Act, Sec 505, 50 USC 1701, note
- (b)(4) Privileged/confidential trade secrets, commercial or financial information from a person
- (b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product
- (b)(6) Information that would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
- (b)(7) Information compiled for law enforcement purposes that would:
 - (A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
 - (B) deprive a person of a fair trial
 - (C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
 - (D) disclose confidential sources
 - (E) disclose investigation techniques
 - (F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual
- (b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions
- (b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

Other Grounds for Withholding

- NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request, excised with the agreement of the requester

LIBERIA

SELF STUDY GUIDE



**George P. Shultz
National Foreign Affairs
Training Center
School of Professional and Area Studies
Foreign Service Institute
U.S. Department of State**

The **Self Study Guide for Liberia** is intended to provide U.S. Government personnel in the foreign affairs community with an overview of important issues related to Liberian history, geography, politics, economics, culture, religion, media, and international relations. The guide should serve as an introductory self-study resource. The topic is far too complex to be covered in depth using only the text in this guide. The reader is encouraged to explore the questions and issues introduced using the Internet and bibliographic sources provided in the text and in the resource sections. Most of the referenced material can be found on the Internet or in the Foreign Service Institute or Main State Libraries.

The first edition of this guide was prepared by Ambassador Robert E. Gribbin. The views expressed in this guide are those of the author and attributable sources and do not necessarily reflect official policy or positions of the Department of State or the National Foreign Affairs Training Center (NFATC). Staff members of the NFATC made final but minor edits to the draft study submitted by Ambassador Gribbin. All sources used for graphics and extended quotes are public domain, from sites that explicitly say “can be used for non-profit or educational use,” or are from the author’s own materials.

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First Edition
October 2003

Liberia Self Study Guide

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Liberia Time Line

1815 - The American Colonization Society formed in the United States with the objective of resettling freed slaves in Africa.

1822 - USN Captain Stockton secures land at Cape Mesurado; the first settlers arrive.

1847 - Americo-Liberians declare the independent state of Liberia with its capital in Monrovia.

1862 - Liberia recognized by the United States.

1926 - Firestone rubber plantations established.

1943 - President Franklin D. Roosevelt stops by after the Casablanca Conference.

1944 - William Tubman elected President of Liberia.

1971 - William Tolbert replaces Tubman, begins reforms and liberalizations.

1980 - Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe leads a coup d'état that puts native people into power for the first time; Doe's rule deteriorates into corruption and violence.

1985 - Doe wins a rigged election; result endorsed by the international community.

1989 - Charles Taylor leads a Christmas Eve invasion by rebels of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL); Liberia's civil war begins.

1990 - Fighting in Monrovia causes death and destruction; U.S. Embassy evacuated; Doe's murder by rebels videotaped; West African ECOMOG force arrives to restore order.

1992 - Interim Government of Liberia led by Professor Amos Sawyer, backed by ECOMOG controls Monrovia; Taylor reigns over "Greater Liberia."

1995 - Warlords form a council in Monrovia to rule until elections.

1997 - Charles Taylor elected President.

2001 - Taylor and Liberia sanctioned by the United Nations; arms embargo imposed, sale of diamonds banned and leadership travel prohibited.

2002 - Rebels from LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy) expand insurgent activities in the northwest.

2003 - Taylor indicted for war crimes by Sierra Leone's Special Court; LURD and MODEL rebels push Taylor's forces back into Monrovia; Peace talks ensue in Accra; ECOWAS mobilized to insert peacekeepers with U.S. support; Taylor resigns and departs to Nigeria.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Liberia is a land of unrealized dreams and dashed expectations. Almost everything that could have gone wrong there during the last twenty years has. Anarchy and unrestrained violence characterized politics, which concomitantly accompanied a downward economic and social spiral. Public executions on the beach, drug crazed young thugs sporting Mickey Mouse masks terrorizing citizens at road blocks, rampant theft of national resources, corruption, nepotism, abuse of human rights, tribalism, blood diamonds and warlords; are all images of contemporary Liberia. Sadly, the nation today is a shadow of its former self and, even worse, only a vague image of what it might have been. Yet, despite all its pains, Liberia remains a land of hope. The people, both at home and abroad, hope that political violence, tarnished institutions and a collapsed economy can somehow be reversed and that all Liberians – many for the first time – will be able to participate fully in national life. Although hope may give succor to patriots, reality is that the situation is desperate and under current circumstances only likely to improve marginally, if at all.

Why has Liberia stumbled so badly? What factors gave rise to the current crisis? Who is to blame? What needs to be fixed? Is there any real basis for hope? These are among the topics that will be addressed in this study guide. We will look at the country's unique history of founding by freed slaves from America, its "special relationship" with the United States, its fractured ties with neighboring African states, its failing extractive economy and finally its own indigenous revolution against the ruling oligarchy and the subsequent descent into despair. We will look at warlords and discover how they rule through manipulation, intimidation and sheer terror. We will also identify positive elements and strengths in Liberian society that offer encouragement that the underlying resilience of the people might yet prevail.

The Setting

Liberia sits on the underside of the hump of West Africa. It possesses 370 miles of coastline on the Atlantic Ocean. It is well in the tropics and suitably fits the western image of Africa - a wet, lush, jungle-like terrain. Although there are distinctive wet and dry seasons, Monrovia, the capital, receives 180 inches of rain a year. Rainfall tapers off slightly as one moves inland or eastward along the coast to only about 100 inches a year (Washington, in comparison, gets 30 inches). Humidity averages between 70 and 90 percent.

In size the country occupies 43,000 square miles. It is about the size of Tennessee. The coastal plain gives way to an inland plateau broken with hills and valleys that ultimately rises to the small mountains of Guinea highlands whose crests reach 4,000 feet and which form the border with Guinea. Nine rivers, none of which are navigable for any distance, drain directly into the sea. The Mano River in the west forms the boundary with Sierra Leone and the Cavalla River in the east constitutes the border with the Cote

d'Ivoire. Liberia's ports of Monrovia and Buchanan sit at the mouths of the Saint Paul and the Saint John rivers respectively. The nine parallel river valleys each running from northeast to southwest constituted effective barriers to east/west road and rail construction, a situation that prevails today. Roads tend to run upcountry rather than along the coast. Thus travel from Monrovia to Greenville in the southeast or Harper, near the Ivorian border, requires a long interior loop. Liberia's two rail lines, both of which are currently inoperative, were built to export iron ore; one from Bomi Hills to Monrovia and the other from Yekepa on the Guinea border to Buchanan.

Initially all of Liberia was covered in dense forest. Gradually forest gave way to human habitation, first to traditional villages and their surrounding agricultural lands and then to plantations. Food crops include upland rice, cassava, yams, taro, peanuts and various vegetables. Plantation crops include rubber, coffee and cocoa. Much of Liberia today reflects these uses. Over a million acres are devoted to rubber production. Beginning in the last century the forest was also harvested for timber for export. This exploitation turned into a major industry that continues apace. However, small areas are being preserved as national parks in order to protect unique species of plants and animals, including pygmy hippopotamus and chimpanzees.

The People

The population of Liberia is estimated at about 3 million. In addition to the Americo-Liberians, who are descendants of the freed black slaves who colonized the area and who never numbered more than five percent of the population, over a dozen separate ethnic groups reside in Liberia. They include Kpelle, Kissi, Kru, Mandingo, Bassaa, Gio, Krahn, Mano and Mende among others. Although they live in close proximity with one another, affinity or antipathy between tribes is a traditional function of kinship, territory and cultural similarity. Historically some groups have gotten along with each other and contested against others. All groups are fairly distinct and take pride in their language and customs. Tribal identities are an understandable reality in modern African politics, but in Liberia's case have also become the basis for the conflict.

About a quarter of Liberians are Christian and about a quarter are Muslim. The remainder do not profess any world faith, but continue to practice ancestral beliefs. Thus, the role of traditional leaders, both secular and religious, is important. Religious orientation also factors into political differences.

On account of political violence during recent years, the population of Monrovia mushroomed several fold to about half a million. Elsewhere within the country tens of thousands of people are displaced. Neither the city's nor the nation's infrastructure is able to cope effectively with such a surge. Thousands more have fled to neighboring countries. Living conditions have deteriorated nation wide as evidenced by lower school attendance rates and the virtual disappearance of rural health services. The first prerequisite for re-establishment of social services is peace and the second is finding the resources necessary. Most peoples' hopes for the resumption of "normal" life are predicated on achievement of these two objectives.

Issues to consider:

1. What are the initial images you conjure up when thinking about Liberia? Are they ones of poverty and underdevelopment? Traditional culture relatively untouched by the outside world? A staid urban society governed by 19th century American values? Or a land of terror and conflict run by warlords run amok? What else?
2. Geography, which either separates or unites people, plays an important role in shaping a nation's economy and polity. Keep this in mind as we study Liberia. How has the relative isolation – one from another – of Liberia's tribes and their exclusion from the modern economy for over a century contributed to current difficulties?
3. When learning about Liberia, think about blame. Who bears the blame for the tragedy of Liberia?

Web Sites:

www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/li.html Solid statistical information about Liberia.

Bibliography:

Nelson, Harold D., editor. Liberia, a Country Study. Washington: Foreign Area Studies, American University, 1985. [DT 627.A5 1985] Part of the series of USG commissioned country studies, although now out of date, the geographical and historical data remain valid.

Boley, G.E. Saigbe. Liberia: The Rise and Fall of the First Republic. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. [DT631.B65]

Chapter 2

Colonization

Liberia's origins lie in the United States in the early 1800s. Slavery was, of course, prevalent in the South, but the number of freed slaves was slowly growing. The system had no place for them. In fact, they constituted a threat to an orderly society of owners and slaves. Following the establishment of a colony for freed blacks in Sierra Leone in 1786 by British philanthropists and the independence of Haiti in 1804 an idea began to percolate in America to the effect that returning freed Negroes to Africa would solve a number of looming issues. The idea was attractive to different elements of society for different reasons. Many slave owners wanted the freedmen removed from their midst. Other slave owners saw colonization as a humane method to manumit their slaves without antagonizing their neighbors. Racial theorists judged that removal of blacks was the only way to maintain white racial purity. Abolitionists saw colonization as a means of freeing slaves. Christians saw colonization as a mechanism to spread the faith to the heathen of Africa. Freed blacks themselves viewed departure as an opportunity that would by far surpass their plight and poverty in America. Slaves jumped at the chance to be free, even on the condition of departure for Africa. Thus for a variety of reasons, the idea of returning Negroes to Africa found fertile ground in early America.

Back to Africa

In 1816 a group of prominent Virginians led by Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Bushrod Washington, George's nephew, formed the American Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color, later shortened to the American Colonization Society. The society secured a grant of \$100,000 from Congress and sent a team to West Africa to secure land for a colony. Searching east of Sierra Leone, Eppharim Bacon and the Rev. Andrus were not initially successful in negotiating with local chiefs, but in 1821 U.S. Navy Captain Stockton of the *Alligator* (whose wreck in the Florida Keys is a national historical site) compelled Chiefs George and Peter at Cape Mesurado to sign a treaty establishing the desired colony. The first colonists soon named the settlement Monrovia in honor of President James Monroe.

Over the next thirty years thousands of black Americans left for Liberia. Although the American Society for Colonization supervised and governed Liberia, most funding for settlers came from state affiliates since the U.S. Congress refused to grant further funds for the undertaking. Societies in Virginia, Maryland, Mississippi, New York and Pennsylvania subsidized new colonists, who in some instances founded settlements - Harper by Maryland, Greenville by Mississippi - that were independent of Monrovia and not incorporated into Liberia as such for fifty or more years. By 1867 a total of 12,097 persons had been transported to Liberia from America. In addition almost 6,000 Africans seized from slave ships in the Atlantic were also landed at Monrovia. The settlers from America became known as "Americo-Liberians" and those from Atlantic slave ships, "Congos." By the 1980s the term "Congos" was used by indigenous people to refer to both groups.

Life for American settlers in Africa was harsh. Many died from tropical diseases and some from early conflict with local tribesmen. Additionally, the Americo-Liberians had no understanding of tropical agriculture and few ideas of how to build a flourishing society. Coming from several generations in America, they were no longer African by culture. So essentially, they reproduced the society they knew, that of the ante bellum South. Each settler was granted ninety acres upon which to build a dwelling. They introduced plantation agriculture and used “Congos” or local tribesmen for labor. Education, proper dress – they abhorred native nakedness – and firm Christian beliefs became the mainstays of society. Over the years the gulf between the two groups- Americo-Liberian settlers on one hand and native tribes people on the other widened and jelled into a system of exploitation of the latter group by the former. Political, economic and commercial power rested within an oligarchy of settler families and was maintained by family links and social ties, including Masonic lodges. The elite proclaimed a national slogan of “Love of Liberty Brought Us Here,” but they shared no liberty with the native inhabitants. Instead a code of separation was observed. Tribesmen were deemed to be heathen savages suitable only for manual labor and to be kept in line by force of arms.

In early years Liberia was run by white men, ministers of the cloth by training, appointed by the American Colonization Society, but in 1841 Joseph Jenkins Roberts took over management of the territory’s affairs. Since Liberia was not technically a colony of the United States, and besides was operated by Negroes, nearby colonial powers – Britain, France and Germany - and their citizens cast covetous eyes on the region. Encroachments and blatant non-observance of Society authority occurred. However, in 1843 U.S. Secretary of State Upshur informed his British counterpart that the U.S. objected to any “despoiling” of Liberian territory. U.S. Naval squadrons operating in the Atlantic gave substance to the Secretary’s pronouncement and the Europeans kept their distance.

Independence Declared

The lack of territorial sovereignty under the ACS and the continued threat of a British takeover led the Americo-Liberian elite to declare independence in 1847. Joseph Jenkins Roberts became the first president. Ironically Britain recognized Liberia in 1851, but the U.S. – on account of rising tensions that would lead to civil war, especially the desire not to have a Negro ambassador in Washington – did not recognize the new nation of Liberia until 1862.

Liberia’s economy was fragile and the new government was barely able to make ends meet. In 1871 President Royce negotiated a \$500,000 loan from England on terrible terms, then pocketed much of what was borrowed. He was impeached and removed. Then probably murdered. Again in 1906 Liberia was grievously in the red and sought foreign help. U.S. President Taft sent a Commission of Inquiry that indeed found much malfeasance. In what was perhaps the first restructuring conditionality levied upon Africa, the Commission recommended budgetary and financial reforms, a take-over of customs by the U.S. in exchange for a loan, training of an effective police force and the

establishment of a U.S. Navy coaling station in exchange for a loan. Ultimately, the U.S. did not take over customs, but other reforms were partially implemented. Throughout this era Liberia suffered in comparison to her colonial neighbors where France and Britain financed roads, railways and ports, not to mention a few schools and hospitals. Liberia also faced a continual series of native uprisings for which the police – there were no colonial troops available - were inadequate to quell. On at least two such occasions in 1871 and again in 1915, U.S. naval warships arrived with soldiers to re-enforce Monrovia's rule of the hinterlands.

Issues to Consider:

1. We have listed some of the motivations for sending slaves back to Africa, but have skirted the question of was it moral or ethical? While we ought not to make judgments of the previous times based on current mores, what do you think? Do you see similar sorts of issues arising in contemporary immigration issues?

Web sites:

www.prodigy.net/jkess3/History.html is an excellent site that covers Liberia history in a lively and readable fashion, with much emphasis on revealing anecdotes.

www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam002.html contains lots of interesting detail on the American Colonization Society.

www.geocities.com/athens/atrium/3770/ Another good history site.

Bibliography:

Liebenow, J.Gus. Liberia - The Quest for Democracy. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. [DT 631.L53] This is the most comprehensive and best documented history of Liberia from its origins up into the Doe years.

Reef, Catherine. This Our Dark Country: The American Settlers of Liberia. New York: Clarion, 2002. Almost a coffee table book, this volume contains many interesting old photographs.

Chapter 3

The Early Twentieth Century

By the 1920s Liberia's financial situation was again desperate, but this time the private sector came to the rescue. Harvey Firestone, a newly minted American industrial baron, was looking to break the British monopoly on rubber, which came mostly from Malaysia. He scoured the world and decided that Liberia was well suited from soil, climatic and labor perspectives to grow rubber. Also, it was no one's colony, so was politically unencumbered. In exchange for securing a \$5 million loan to the government up front plus annual rents, plus a promise to build a modern port, Firestone obtained a concession of a million acres and a guarantee of 50,000 labors per year. Thenceforth Liberia and Firestone names were forever intertwined.

Firestone proved to be a cash cow for the government and a relatively good citizen to boot, at least under the terms of the day. While it never overpaid its workers, it did provide health services and housing for many of them and schools for their children. And it did progressively better over time.

Forced Labor

The labor crisis that nearly destroyed Liberia had to do with the Spanish island of Fernando Po (part of Equatorial Guinea today). In the 1920s labor was badly needed there for sugar and coffee plantations. For several years since World War I, Americo-Liberian elites including President King, Allen Yancy, who was to become Vice President and Secretary of State Edwin James Barclay had been privately contracting for labor for the island. They began to use the coercive powers of the state to fulfill their quotas. Young men were taken by force and shipped away, never to return. Non-compliant villages were burned and their chiefs beaten. The feared Frontier Forces and government-backed thugs ensured that quotas were met. It was reminiscent of the slave trade. Foreign missionaries as well as conscientious Liberian administrators brought abuses to light and an international scandal ensued.

The outcry brought Liberia to the world's attention. Racist critics reveled in the fact that a black ruled state in Africa – one of only three black run nations in the world – was engaged in slavery. Humanitarians urged a quick end to the abuses and justice for the perpetrators. The League of Nations established a Commission of Inquiry to investigate. (In retrospect the Commission should be viewed as a precedent setting multinational human rights investigation – the precursor of today's *special rapporteurs* empowered by the UN Commission on Human Rights.) The Commission found the facts of the case to be as stated: an abusive forced labor system deprived thousands of young Liberians of their basic rights. But the Commission went much further; it recommended basic policy reforms that, if implemented, would radically change how Liberia dealt with its indigenous citizens. The Commission urged that primary schools be established for the tribes, that the authority of traditional chiefs be re-established, that the civil service be

reorganized on a merit basis and that the government better train and control its police force.

As a result of the investigation President King and Vice President Yancey were forced to resign. However, Edwin James Barclay, formerly the Secretary of State, who too bore some of the responsibility for the labor scandal succeeded them in power. The standard bearer of the True Whig party, Barclay narrowly won election over more reform-minded candidates. Only Americo-Liberian men - at most only one to two percent of the total population – had the right to vote, so the results were certainly not representative of the nation's sentiment, even if that could have been measured. Nonetheless, President Barclay promised to implement the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry. He did squash egregious labor recruitment, but other reforms languished.

In the United States in the 1920s the Pan African movement spearheaded by Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Dubois and others was drawing attention and adherents. Among its precepts was a back-to-Africa call. Americo-Liberians in Monrovia feared an influx of new immigrants so adopted a constitutional amendment that precluded non-Liberian born citizens from holding high office. This amendment, by showing that newcomers would not be welcome, effectively deterred new immigration and preserved the Liberian fiefdom from external challenge.

Up into the 1930s, as Monrovia sought to expand its control of the interior, the government's heavy handed tactics and oppressive demands were resented and rejected by tribesmen, often by force of arms. A series of skirmishes and depredations ensued, some of the most rebellious of which were called the Kru wars. Government forces were ultimately victorious and by the beginning of World War II, all of Liberia was finally under the firm authority of Monrovia.

Tubman's Rise to Power

In the early 1940s, in an attempt to widen the governing circle from a very narrow set of families, President Barclay brought a bright young man named William V.S. Tubman into government. Tubman was from the second or third circle of Americo-Liberians; folks who had mixed more in the multiethnic stew of the growing nation. Tubman was nonetheless a loyal Americo-Liberian, member of the right Church, Masonic Lodge, etc. In 1944, presumably judging that Tubman would be the most easily manipulated of possible candidates, the True Whig old guard ran him for the presidency. Tubman, however, proved to be his own man from the very beginning. He campaigned on a platform of "assimilation and unity." Once elected, he redeemed his promise of a new deal for the native peoples. He delivered new freedoms, the franchise, educational and training opportunities. By creating new counties in the north – Grand Gedeh, Nimba, Bong and Lofa - tribesmen entered the Legislature for the first time as participants. Tubman would later extend voting rights to women.

President Tubman reigned for 32 years. He led Liberia from the doldrums of neglect into a bit role as a World War II and Cold War player. He presided over the nation's destiny when the winds of political liberation and independence swept across Africa. He carefully kept the most radical influences at bay. Personally conservative and always cognizant that his real constituency lay in the oligarchy of Americo-Liberian families, nonetheless, Tubman was enough of a politician to open progressively additional opportunities for tribesmen to participate in national life. Additionally, he had the luck to preside over the epoch when iron ore was found and exploited. Those riches immeasurably enhanced his personal political power as well as national security. A leadership cult grew up around him. Throughout Tubman measured others by one criterion: loyalty. He remained supreme and those retainers whose loyalty never faltered prospered, but woe to those who challenged his leadership. Not that he condoned or used violence to enforce his will, but rather that he controlled political and economic opportunities.

Tubman was bolstered by augmented official American interest. During WWII the USG built the harbor that Firestone had long promised as well as a modern airfield near Harbel, about forty miles from Monrovia. During the cold war years Liberia was a reliable American ally in the confrontation with the Soviet Union in the United Nations as well as in Africa. By the 1960s the U.S. presence in Monrovia expanded to include a large embassy with regional communication and intelligence responsibilities, the VOA transmitter site for Africa and an Omega maritime navigation antenna (still the tallest manmade structure in Africa). American investment via Firestone was augmented by majority ownership of LAMCO, the chief exploiter of iron ore. There is no doubt that ideological and commercial concerns figured most prominently in U.S. policy towards Liberia during this era. Tubman, like counterparts throughout Latin America, was "our" dictator.

Issues to Consider:

1. Think of the irony that Liberia, founded by immigrants from America, effectively rejected further new immigrants in the 1920s. Had the nation's relative isolation and inner focused political system become so selfish that new influences and people were feared?
2. President Tubman was the man for the times. He certainly laid the groundwork for the development of a more modern state and he presided over what were probably Liberia's best years. Yet the seeds of future disasters were inherent in his administration. What were they?

Web Sites:

www.africawithin.com/tour/liberia/hist_gov1.htm A good history site that starts with a photograph of President F.D. Roosevelt.

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Chapter 4

The Extractive Economy

Liberia's economy in the 19th century was chiefly subsistence. Slaving died out about mid-century just as the territory declared its nationhood in 1847. Slavery was an anathema to the settlers from their first days, but it had figured in the activities of the interior tribes. Easy sources of ivory and gold were also depleted. Americo-Liberians replicated economically as well as socially and politically the systems they knew from America. Those systems comprised plantation agriculture and mercantile trade. Crops grown for export included palm oil and over time coffee and cocoa. Camwood and tortoise shell were also collected for export. However, overall the oppressive climate, difficulty of internal movement, the lack of sufficient labor and limited markets conspired to keep Liberia only limping along economically. In contrast to neighboring French and British colonies that towards the end of the 19th century benefited from capital improvements, mainly railways, financed (usually at a loss) by the metropole, Liberia enjoyed no such largess from the United States.

Rubber

World War I brought few benefits to Liberia, but after the war as the industrialized economies took off, the need for raw materials expanded. The American tire company Firestone searched the world for suitable land and climate for rubber production. It chose Liberia for a major operation, imported the right variety of rubber tree from Southeast Asia and began production in 1926. Rubber gave Liberia new economic hope. Although firmly in the hands of the American parent company, revenues from rubber production accrued to the government and provided the wherewithal, for the first time, to improve the national infrastructure. Iron ore deposits were also discovered. Exploitation of them, along with railways to reach them, began after WWII. The war also directed American government attention to Liberia, the result of which was construction of a major airfield, Roberts Field, near Harbel and building the port of Monrovia. Monrovia was not blessed with a good natural harbor, so laying of a vast breakwater to enclose new wharves was necessary. It was hoped that Monrovia might become an important transshipment point for the west coast of Africa.

Rubber and iron became the mainstays of the economy in the fifties, sixties and seventies. Liberia also opened a ship registry that permitted ship owners to use Liberia as a flag of convenience in order to escape onerous taxes or operating conditions – usually mandatory labor regulations - imposed by their home states. Liberia was careful to ensure that ships under its flag met universal safety regulations. Structurally, Liberia's economy was considered to be an enclave economy. That is, those in the enclave of rubber, iron and ships including the government and those dependent on it prospered whereas others – the vast bulk of the population simply were not involved. By and large the wealth of the country was extracted to the benefit of external owners and a small local elite. A merchant class composed of Lebanese and other expatriates expanded their control of daily commerce. The majority of the population engaged in some cash

cropping, but mostly lived subsistence lives growing rice as their chief food. The economic disparity between the haves and the have-nots was great and certainly factored in the social and political cleavages that were to occur.

Poised for Growth or Failure?

By 1960 when most of the rest of Africa became independent, Liberia was functioning well. Per capita income was over \$100, which placed it in the upper ranks of African states. Other minerals were being discovered notably diamonds and gold which along with timber would begin to figure in export statistics. Unlike neighboring states, having experienced no independence euphoria and transfer of power from colonial authorities to indigenous peoples, Liberia also escaped the inflationary cost of new government. Then too, Liberia also did not benefit from injections of foreign assistance linked to newly acquired independence. It just plodded along. However, new ideas about economic and social responsibility permeated even Liberia in the post-independence era and efforts were undertaken to improve social services such as the health and educational systems. As the economy expanded it was necessary to educate and bring into the mainstream children of the indigenous peoples. Obviously, this had been slowly happening for decades, but as those folks matured they too began to think about throwing off the “colonial” yoke of the Americo-Liberians.

Driven by enclave exports, Liberia’s economy expanded slowly in the seventies. Government spending became more ostentatious culminating in a construction binge related to Monrovia’s hosting of the OAU summit in 1979. Under the rubric of economic development, external lenders and donors, especially the United States, helped finance an expanded portfolio of projects – including some straightforward budgetary support. Warning signs were evident that without greater diversification and participation of a greater percentage of the population in modern economic activities that Liberia’s economy could not be sustained.

Issues to Consider:

1. The nations of Africa that harbor vast mineral riches – especially oil in Nigeria, Angola, Congo (Brazzaville) and Gabon, but also including copper and precious metals, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia and Zimbabwe – have not been very successful in investing their wealth for the benefit of their citizens. Liberia too is guilty of non-performance. What common factors do you see in these failures? Corruption? External ownership? Financial naiveté?
2. Is it fair for the west to ask that Africa redistribute national wealth? If so, why? Has that ever been done in the United States?

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Chapter 5

Tolbert to Doe

William Tolbert took over the presidency in 1971 and served until murdered in 1980. Being president was not a revelation for Tolbert; he had served as vice-president for the previous 19 years. He was, nonetheless, more modern and better attuned to the needs of the nation; especially the still poorly represented and poorly regarded native peoples. Tolbert was a mild populist. Although thoroughly Americo-Liberian, he spoke Kpelle and reached out to masses. He equalized salaries, which raised the status of native people. He lowered the voting age to 18 and reined back on the blatant nepotism that characterized settler control. He was aware that the changes that independence wrought in other African states, essentially the empowerment of the people, had not occurred in Liberia. While he sought to be more progressive, he was basically conservative and caught even more in the interlocking web of Americo-Liberian relationships that had defined Liberia's politics for 150 years.

Since the 1960s, not particularly because of either Tubman or Tolbert, but more on account of the simple evolution of society and the economy, a growing number of indigenous people were brought into the governing system. First this happened through education. Settler families had a long tradition of adopting (and fathering) children who with their mixed parentage expanded the settler class. The most elite families sent their children abroad to school, but missionary run and other church schools catered to thousands of others. Before long higher education, accomplished at Episcopal run Cuttington College or at the University of Liberia, was no longer a monopoly of the ruling class. Country sons and a few daughters joined the nation's intellectuals. While most were content to be absorbed into the ruling order, they displayed skepticism about it and many agitated for change. Because overt political opposition was squashed, revolutionary thinkers operated through "movements." Two radical organizations, the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) and the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL), both born in the seventies, grouped reformers and revolutionaries who sought reorientation of the paternalistic system of the True Whig Party, including a more independent foreign policy, i.e. a shift away from lockstep with the U.S. to policies more in line with other African states.

Pressure on the Oligarchy

In addition to increasing political agitation, the seventies also brought a downturn in the economy. The oil shock of 1973 registered as did lowered production of iron ore as the deposit began to play out. Government spending, however, continued apace. Lower revenues and higher outlays were incompatible and the pain was felt – especially for urban dwellers in the wage sector. Tolbert's effort to counter his critics including a less U.S. oriented foreign policy antagonized the U.S., but generated little new local support.

Liberia volunteered to host the Organization of African Unity summit meeting in 1979. In accordance with continental custom this meant an enormous outlay of public

funds for new buildings, villas for chiefs-of-state and public works. Although proud that Africa's spotlight would fall on them, Liberians found the consequences to be devastatingly inflationary. This was manifested in April 1979 when the price of rice, Liberia's staple food, was raised. This was doubly galling because the Tolbert family controlled much of the rice trade. Protest riots occurred on April 14 in Monrovia followed by widespread looting. This event demonstrated the vulnerability of the regime and encouraged opponents to continue to muster support by tapping long-standing grievances. A sense of inevitable change arose, but the Tolbert machine tottered on. Coup rumors were ripe in the days leading up to the first anniversary of the rice riots and, in fact, one did occur.

Revolution

On April 12, 1980 a group of seventeen soldiers, including Master Sergeant Samuel Doe, Sergeant Thomas Quiwonkpa and Sergeant Weh Syen raided the executive mansion where they unexpectedly found President Tolbert (he usually spent the night at his farm). Tolbert was butchered in cold blood. Ten days later, thirteen members of his government were stripped to their underwear, staked to posts on the beach and executed. The days of settler oligarchy were over. The new rulers were tribesmen from the interior. By and large the population rejoiced at the change. Radical intellectuals tooted it as Liberia's genuine revolution and saw in it the coming democratic empowerment of the people. These intellectuals made common cause with their country brothers, whom they saw as the muscle for their political philosophies.

The soldiers, however, did not reciprocate. They tasted power and enjoyed it. Samuel Doe soon emerged as Chairman of the People Redemption Council (PRC). The junta's initially brutality, lack of goals and subsequent internal divisions led to instability. Doe intuitively grasped that a pro-American stance would position him well against rivals Weh Syen and Quiwonkpa. Over the next few years – during the height of the cold war - Doe became ardently pro-American and subsequently reaped the benefits of U.S. support.

Doe also quickly began to play on tribal considerations as a key mechanism to hold and expand power. Some of this orientation to tribalism was ingrained. All country Liberians maintained connections to the village. Even though distant because of government service, migration to the city or contract labor, men were expected to provide projects and patronage to the home folks as they were able. Doe and other members of the PRC gravitated to this tradition and to those they could trust. The political/economic/social struggle was no longer couched in terms of indigenous people collectively versus settler elites, but in terms of tribal contests among the native people for the largest share of the pie. Securing access to be pie became bitter and very violent. Doe assembled a Krahn entourage to protect him. During his ten years in office, Doe had killed or exiled all but a handful of the seventeen who formed the initial PRC junta. He claimed that more than thirty-five assassination plots were aimed at him and that God had intervened on many occasions to save his life. Such claims of invincibility convinced many Liberians that Doe did indeed possess mystical protection.

Political Tribalism

Doe rallied his Krahn tribesman against his enemies, most especially Thomas Quiwonkpa, a Gio tribesman, who having been chased into exile by Doe in 1982 returned in 1983 at the head of an insurgent force. Quiwonkpa's raid against Yekepa town in Nimba County unleashed retaliatory actions by Krahn forces aimed indiscriminately at Gio and Mano ethnic groups. From the perspective of historical hindsight, this marked the beginning of Liberia's civil war that over the next twenty-three years – off and on – would engulf the nation.

A watershed event that alienated the educated elite against Doe occurred in August 1984. While Doe was readying a new constitution that would reauthorize active politics, President of the University of Liberia Amos Sawyer publicly and artfully suggested that Doe resign to facilitate new elections. In response the army cordoned off the University. Sawyer and other faculty members were arrested. In demonstrations that followed, students were beaten, raped and killed. This event caused a irrevocable split as many who had supported Doe or at least been neutral towards him, now turned unabashedly against him.

Doe's record as chief executive was deplorable. He had little notion of how to govern. He readily co-opted the civil service, but the corruption and patronage ingrained in it only became more pronounced with the intrusion of tribalism. A succession of American ambassadors strove to educate Doe in the modalities of both domestic and foreign policy, but aside from confirming his firm adherence to U.S. positions – anti-Soviet, pro-Israeli, anti-Libya – achieved little success. Under the Reagan Administration's view of the world that was enough. Money flowed. Some funds were earmarked for development, but Doe's military, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) received weapons, munitions and other equipment. Those weapons certainly helped put down coups and otherwise sustain operations against a variety of insurgent forces. U.S. aid during the Doe era totaled over \$500 million. However, in addition to economic and military support, the mere fact that the U.S. backed Doe – despite his obvious flaws – intimidated what might have been more legitimate opposition. The culminating affront was the 1985 election, which Doe stole, finally claiming a victory of 50.9 percent. The U.S. endorsed the result.

Following the election in November 1985 Quiwonkpa led a group of insurgents into Monrovia where they briefly held sway to much public jubilation. However, having been tipped off, perhaps by the U.S. embassy, Doe's forces regrouped and overwhelmed the invaders. Quiwonkpa's corpse was mutilated and a retaliatory blood bath against "Gio men" ensued. Thousands were slaughtered. In order to balance the ethnic equation the Doe regime made alliances with the Mandingo people from Liberia's northwest. Like the Americo-Liberians, the Mandingo were mostly migrants. However, they came from the Sahalean region to the north. They were Muslim traders and relatively wealthy. Foremost, they had no vested territory, but were scattered among other people. Both the Krahn and Mandingo saw their alliance as one of opportunity and they combined efforts

against the Gio and others. Even though its economic fortunes declined, its administration corrupt, its popular support minimal and its U.S. backing slipping, the Doe regime retained power through application of violence. There was no immediate threat to Doe, but preparations were being laid.

Charles Taylor seized control of Quiwonkpa's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) in 1985. Taylor himself was an enigmatic figure. Son of settler father and a native mother, Taylor spent the seventies in the U.S. receiving a university education. He returned to Monrovia in 1980 and inveigled from Chairman Doe the position of chief of the General Services Administration, the organization that had responsibility to procure and purchase items for the government of Liberia. It was a lucrative post, but full of intrigue as personalities clamored for lucre. Reading the writing on the wall, Taylor fled only later to be charged by the government with the embezzlement of \$600,000. Taylor was arrested in Massachusetts on that charge at the request of the government of Liberia and held for deportation. He spent 16 months in detention before escaping under murky circumstances in September 1985. Over the next few years, he pitched up in Ghana, where he was twice briefly imprisoned, Cote d'Ivoire, where he touched base with Liberian exiles, Burkina Faso, where he made friends with Blaise Compoare (soon to become president) and Libya, where he oversaw the training of about a hundred NPFL fighters led by Prince Johnson.

Issues to Consider:

1. Was revolution inevitable? Was Doe automatically the leader? President Tolbert tried to ride the cyclone, but his reforms – even if he wanted to do more, he was constrained by the Americo-Liberian oligarchy – were inadequate. Is he to blame? Even if change was pre-ordained, why Doe – the worst choice? Why didn't more reasonable leaders do more? Are they to blame? America gets lots of blame for Doe, but we will look at that in a separate chapter.

2. Tribalism rears its ugly head even uglier during the Doe years. African leaders know that politics is not just about common ideals and goals, it is about identity. Identity in Africa means tribe, particularly as group leaders maneuver to obtain as much of the national pie that they can for themselves and their followers. Tribalism is a key, perhaps the key factor in Liberia's 23 years of civil war.

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Chapter 6

Civil War in Earnest

Charles Taylor's force of about 100 Libyan trained NPFL soldiers crept across the Cote d'Ivoire border on Christmas Eve 1989 to seize the town of Butuno in Nimba County. Although it seems that this was to be part of a multi-phased invasion, only the Butuno event succeeded. Taylor's announced intent – he spoke regularly over the BBC – was to oust Doe and to free the Liberian people from his tyranny. Taylor's political/military genius, if it could be called that, was to couch the civil war in ethnic terms, i.e. a struggle against the Krahn, Doe and all the oppression they had wreaked on the Gio, Mano and other peoples. This call appealed to the citizenry, especially in non-Krahn regions, all of whom had felt Doe induced terror or lack of opportunities as impediments to their lives. Taylor also skillfully marshaled traditional authorities to the NPFL cause. Zoes (religious chiefs), chiefs and elders accepted the necessity for the struggle. Some leaders saw the cause as righteous, others were intimidated by peers and others still were bought off – or a combination of all three motivations. In any case traditional leaders joined the effort and with them came their communities, including youth who were instrumental as fighters.

Throughout the hinterland, the NPFL made progress. Although there was a hard-core base of real soldiers, most of the NPFL troops were a rag tag collection of new recruits with only minimal training. They were, however, fairly well armed because weaponry from Burkina Faso and Libya traced clandestine routes to the front. NPFL fighters were often barely more than children, uneducated and poorly disciplined. They frequently dressed bizarrely in women's attire, wigs or masks believing that such masquerading rendered them more powerful as well as invulnerable to enemy fire. Such fighters employed many talismans and other protections, including cannibalism. Their cruelty was widely reported as they tortured and mutilated victims, disemboweled pregnant women (often betting ahead of time on the sex of the fetus) and killed indiscriminately. The fact that such a force could quickly overrun Liberia said something about them and the fear they inspired, but it also said that the regular army, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) were woefully inept.

Doe's Forces Collapse

If the premise that the AFL ever was a satisfactory military establishment, that occurred prior to Doe's 1980 coup d'état. Since then the AFL was riven with factionalism and violence that characterized Doe's progressive elimination of all opposition, real or imaginary. By late 1989, the AFL was poorly armed (only the elite presidential guard had a full inventory of weapons and ammunition), poorly organized, poorly deployed and poorly led. It was a military best equipped to terrorize innocent civilians – a task that it did well. Thus, the AFL posed little real opposition to the NPFL's steamroll over ninety-five percent of the nation. By July 1990 NPFL troops were poised to attack Monrovia. Libyan-trained elements led by Prince (just a name, not a title) Johnson encircled the city from the west while Taylor's forces approached from the north

and east. Soon the rebels entered the city where fighting intensified. Prince Johnson, who had been operating independently of Taylor, seized Bushrod Island, the port and the western approaches. Taylor's forces, commanded by former U.S. Marine Elmer Johnson, came into Sinkor (the eastern section of Monrovia) from the east. Doe's troops were squeezed back unto capital hill and the executive mansion. Before they left Sinkor, an AFL detachment under Captain Tally Yonbu attacked the 2,000 civilians who had taken refuge in St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Sinkor and in an orgy of death killed about 600 of them.

U.S. Embassy Evacuated

A U.S. Naval squadron with 2,000 marines embarked stood offshore for two months during the carnage in Monrovia, but only evacuated U.S. and third country nations when the strife became too egregious. American diplomats tried to negotiate cease-fires and to arrange a suitable exit for President Doe. Taylor did accept to halt his advance in the expectation that Doe's departure would be arranged. Doe repeatedly agreed to depart, but always reneged on actually doing so. Meanwhile, Prince Johnson broke away from Taylor and declared the establishment of the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). Monrovia settled into three bristling armed camps.

Video Taped Torture

Since the U.S. itself would not intervene, it prevailed upon the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to mount a peacekeeping operation. The resulting force was dubbed Economic Community of West African States Cease Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). The first elements of the largely Nigerian force deployed to Monrovia via sea in early September and set up headquarters, with Prince Johnson's blessing, inside the free port. On September 9, 1990, apparently with the hope of allying with newly arrived ECOMOG chief General Quainoo, President Doe decided to pay a visit to ECOMOG headquarters at the port. ECOMOG soldiers disarmed Doe's security contingent, but were overwhelmed by an INPFL patrol that soon arrived. Prince Johnson gleefully took Doe into custody and had him tortured while being video taped. Doe's ear was cut off and the tape apparently shows Johnson taking a bite out of it. Badly beaten, Doe died within several hours. His mutilated corpse was displayed in the city as clear evidence of his demise.

ECOMOG's mission was to secure the country so that an Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) could be established to stabilize Liberia prior to truly democratic elections. IGNU was created in October 1990 with Professor Amos Sawyer as President. With Doe's death, the dissolution of what remained of the AFL and Prince Johnson's forces well contained in the ECOMOG zone, ECOMOG consolidated security throughout most of Monrovia. The problem was that Taylor never accepted the ECOMOG mission and he roundly rejected the IGNU. Forced from the city, Taylor retreated to "Greater Liberia," i.e. everything but Monrovia, which he governed from Buchanan or Harbel. It was during this exile that Taylor perfected his warlord techniques: quick recourse to violence, use of tribalism, control of zoes and chiefs, fanatical loyalty and, on the

economic side, the system of direct payments to him personally – not to any government - for exploitation of natural resources of rubber, timber and diamonds. With regard to such exploitation, there were plenty of available partners. Long-term Lebanese and Indian merchants, plus a host of unsavory businessmen eagerly competed for favor. Payoffs were cheaper than taxes.

By October 1992 Taylor was ready to try again to seize Monrovia. His attack dubbed “Operation Octopus” caught ECOMOG unprepared and nearly succeeded. Some of Prince Johnson’s IPNFL forces joined the attackers. The city was shelled by mortars and rockets, but ECOMOG troops reinforced by revived AFL soldiers and supported by Nigerian air power regained the initiative and retook lost ground. ECOMOG was emboldened by its success and began a process of gradually expanding its territorial control. Since 1990 the war settled into a pattern of ECOMOG/AFL/IPNFL versus Charles Taylor. ECOMOG, however, had a limited mandate. Its leaders and troops were not enthusiastic about real fighting. They preferred not to confront the enemy, but instead to profit –usually personally – from the circumstances. Before long the West African forces were engaged in a wide variety of questionable activity – protection, arms dealing (to all comers), abuse of humanitarian goods, black market sales and the like.

Elsewhere in Liberia other warlords emerged. Most notable was the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO), which soon split into a Krahn faction led by Roosevelt Johnson and a Mandingo one led by Alhaji Kromah. The two ULIMOs encroached on NPFL turf in the northwest. Along the southeastern coast still another faction, the Liberian Peace Council (LPC) led by George Boley challenged Taylor’s control. Clearly the nation was falling to pieces, but by 1994 the prospects for peace brightened on account of a series of meetings, conferences and regional mediations designed to construct a framework for elections. When Sani Abacha replaced Nigerian President Babangida in 1993, Nigerian animosity towards Taylor (and he towards them) declined. A United Nations observer force (UNOMIL) was created in 1993 to oversee the implementation of the Abuja peace accords (the thirteenth such agreement since 1980).

City Pillaged Again

In mid 1995 Taylor and other warlords came to Monrovia, which was still controlled by ECOMOG, to constitute a Council of State. The city was understandably tense with various warlord contingents moving about and there was much political maneuvering among the politicians. Taylor apparently convinced ULIMO-J leader Johnson to resist ECOMOG disarmament deadlines. This led to a pitched battle at Tubmanburg in December 1995 during which Nigerian forces lost several armored vehicles and artillery pieces. Soon after, seizing on factional unrest and murders in the capital, Taylor declared that his forces would restore peace. Under that rubric and called “Operation Pay Yourself” by the fighters, NPFL troops began to sack and pillage Monrovia. Thousands of innocents and supposed enemies died in the fighting. Humanitarian organization offices, homes and vehicles were looted. U.S. embassy personnel were evacuated again. ECOMOG personnel were unwilling or unable to halt the violence. When it ran its course, the city and much of the countryside was again

under Taylor's sway. Under these circumstances elections took place a year later in July 1997. Taylor's only serious opponent was Ellen Sirleaf Johnson, who while she appealed to intellectuals and remnants of the True Whig constituency, had little attraction for rural voters. In sum, Liberians voted, probably out of fear, for peace. They voted for Taylor, knowing full well that if he did not win, then civil war would surely resume.

The 1997 election brought relief and a sense of normalcy to the beleaguered land, but there was no rush by the international community to reengage to help rebuild the shattered economy. No one trusted Taylor who was widely viewed as a clever, ruthless warlord who had shot his way to power. Humanitarian activities that had been badly set back by "Operation Pay Yourself" slowly resumed, however, and they provided some succor to the severely affected.

Warlord Taylor's Style

Taylor ruled as he had for years through cronies, loyal sycophants, and trusted retainers. He proclaimed his tribal connections by taking the name "Ghankay" that reaffirmed his standing with zoes and chiefs. He used patronage and rewards to keep them in his debt. Whereas Doe had made the Krahn tribe supreme, Taylor's accession marked the rise of the Gio and Mano ethnic groups. Once in the presidency Taylor inherited the national army, the AFL – his long-term enemy. He did not disband the institution, he merely ignored it. Military and police power were vested in his NPFL militia, especially the Anti-Terrorist Unit composed of the most brutal loyal fighters. There are no Constitutional provisions for private armies so technically the ATU and other security elements of the NPFL operated outside the realm of law.

Liberia's once competent civil service was in shambles. Political patronage and graft rather than merit had become the criteria for survival. Institutions of government including Parliament and the courts were also driven by selfish and political considerations. Civil society too was in disarray. However, the bar and journalist associations continued to struggle valiantly to keep an independent voice, but critics were regularly silenced by intimidation, imprisonment or assassination. Church leaders had throughout the decades of civil war tried to provide a moral compass for the nation and they kept to that worthwhile goal, but they too were conditioned not to be unduly strident, especially when criticizing anyone with power.

While government revenues rebounded slightly with relative peace, collection mechanisms had become corrupted and much of the economy operated outside the formal sector. Taylor continued the practice of having exploiters of timber and diamonds settle with him directly rather than via government agencies. The regular stream of revenue from Liberia's ship registry, at the insistence of the international community, was audited and devoted purely to legitimate national obligations, similarly with payments for rubber exports. Despite such income, the government is for practical purposes bankrupt and without any recourse to legitimate international financing.

External Adventures

Taylor's involvement in Sierra Leone's civil war has come back to haunt him. Taylor met Foday Sankoh, the leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Libya in 1989 and provided him with support during Sierra Leone's civil war beginning in 1991. Additionally, Taylor marketed diamonds secured from Sierra Leone's diamond fields. He then provided weaponry and munitions that permitted the brutal civil war in neighboring Sierra Leone to flourish. Taylor permitted RUF rebels to use Liberian territory and provided them refuge when their fortunes waned. For these activities Taylor was sanctioned by the UN Security Council in May 2001. Accused of trafficking in blood diamonds he was branded an international pariah and prohibited from international travel. The Security Council also imposed an arms embargo on Liberia designed to curb Taylor's disruptive activities in the sub-region. In addition in May 2003, Taylor was formally indicted for war crimes by the Sierra Leone tribunal. Obviously this is embarrassing to Taylor, but it also has ramifications for Liberia in that it poisons all international dealings with the nation.

In 2002 another Liberian organization, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) emerged to challenge Taylor's rule. LURD is the lineal descendent of ULIMO-K and counts Alhaji Kromah among its leaders. LURD engaged in insurgent tactics in Liberia's northwest where it controls territory and extended its reach to Monrovia's outer suburbs. In 2003 MODEL (Movement for Democracy in Liberia) yet another warlord type organization manifested itself in the southeast. By mid-year the two fighting groups were converging on Monrovia, displacing citizens and causing expatriate evacuations. Charles Taylor felt the pressure. As is the pattern, a series of regional peace talks have outlined proposals for peaceful settlement of conflict, including a key provision that Taylor step down as president before the end of the year.

Issues to Consider:

1. We told the story of Liberia's civil wars in terms of personalities because history is obviously recorded in that fashion, yet the Does and Taylors of Liberia are sadly not unique. Other warlords have played in the saga and new ones- Sekou Conneh of LURD, for example – are waiting in the wings. There are no guarantees that the next one will be an improvement. The question then becomes how to break the cycle?
2. Along with war, Liberia has also given diplomacy a poor reputation. It took thirteen agreements before the Abuja Accords finally led to the 1997 elections. The 2003 all party peace talks in Accra mediated by former Nigerian President General Abubakar began in mid-June and continued into August. Truly, every group wanted to win at the table what could not be won on the ground. Traditional political parties and exiles, neither of whom were involved directly in the fighting, combined forces to outmaneuver the less sophisticated (and less desirable) warlord delegations, but since the fighters fight, they must be satisfied with any agreement if it is to have a chance of success.

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Chapter 7

Economic Downslide

The economic downturn coincided with political change. By the 1980s iron exploitation was no longer profitable and exports began to fall. Rubber production leveled off. Master Sergeant Doe who took over via coup d'état in 1979 offered little in the way of confidence to economic players and nothing to potential investors. It soon became evident that Doe had no economic plans, but rather intended to milk the nation's resources for his and his Krahn tribesmen's benefit. Some of the educated economic and political elites began to exit – they were only the first in a long-running brain drain that has siphoned many of Liberia's most capable citizens into exile.

Doe's misrule and mismanagement of the economy – despite U.S. Cold War motivated efforts to prop it up – drove the economy downward. Iron ore production stopped and then civil conflict brought much rubber collection activities to a halt as well. From 1990 just after Charles Taylor's invasion, civil strife that led to the partition of Liberia into zones controlled by various warlords, meant that the economy stalled. Easily exploited items such as diamonds and timber became the mainstays of Taylor's military machine. With Taylor's election to the presidency in 1997, the return of relative peace permitted resumption of Firestone's production and export activities. Life in most rural areas returned to normal – except the northwest that has experienced insurgent warfare organized by the LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy).

Liberia's economy today is stalled at a low level (GDP per capita \$170). The prospects for respectable growth in the short term are non-existent and dim over the longer haul. Rubber production is expected to decrease as producing trees age and few seedlings are planted. By definition timber resources are finite and trees are being harvested without provisions for re-planting. Gold and diamonds are mined as artisanal products, and while industrial production hopes are high, the reality of that is years into the future; similarly for hopes for petroleum riches offshore. Liberia's manufacturing sector plus its once thriving commercial sector were badly damaged by war, pillage and neglect. Liberia's infrastructure has crumbled. There is no electricity or water in Monrovia. Roads nationwide are in a dismal state of repair.

Taylor's approach to economics has been essentially to look after himself first. He discovered in his warlord days he could reap the profits from exports as if he were the government. Consequently, he sold timber on the "gray" market to Taiwan and France. He cornered the diamond trade, first from Liberia and subsequently from Sierra Leone. He used the proceeds from these operations to buy arms and to pay his troops. Once in government he did not re-orient these economic arrangements so that the government of Liberia might properly tax, control and manage national resources. As a result, President Taylor has done well, but the state is bankrupt.

No Aid for Tyrants

International assistance is small. Western donors and the UN family copy the U.S. in providing mostly humanitarian aid and channeling that through NGOs. No donor or IFI has any major project underway or in the planning state. The World Bank and IMF have halted programs. Capping off international concerns is the UN sanctions regime currently in place. Although carefully targeted at impeding arms transfers, outlawing blood diamonds and embarrassing senior personnel by prohibiting travel, sanctions also send a strong “hands-off” message to the world.

Not surprisingly in light of the economic turmoil, government revenues have shrunk, while spending, especially on defense, has risen. The resulting deficit is ignored. It is essentially financed over the short term by non-payment of obligations – salaries, debts, etc. because Liberia has little recourse to legitimate international borrowing. Of course the financial crisis makes the government vulnerable and renders the overall crisis more severe. Other than squeezing the orange harder - and pocketing most of what leaks out – the government has no clear idea of how to escape from the downward spiral.

Issues to Consider:

1. Most of the Americo-Liberians, and virtually all of the elite, have left Liberia for refuge and greener pastures in the U.S., Europe or elsewhere in West Africa. This brain drain has robbed Liberia of its most able people. What are the consequences of this loss? Will Liberia be able to rebuild without them? Should they be urged to return if peace is restored?
2. Sanctions are imposed usually in order to achieve a political objective, in Liberia’s case to express distain with and to punish Charles Taylor for destabilizing Sierra Leone. On the other hand, sanctions are often said to have a deleterious impact on innocent civilians. Are innocents directly harmed by sanctions on Liberia? Indirectly?

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www.newafrica.com Follow the “economy” link to Liberia.

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See the discussion of nepotism, corruption and the lack of accountability.

Chapter 8

Culture, Society and Witchcraft

What was it about Liberian society that permitted the culture of violence to flourish? Clearly there were elements conducive to the rise of warlords, but were they aberrations or more deeply rooted in everyday life?

Historically tribalism as thought of in current political science, that is an overarching identity that groups people together on the basis of culture, language and custom in order to pursue political goals, did not exist in Liberia. Rather many hundreds or more individual villages were governed by elders, sometimes chiefs. Although the people of the hinterlands displayed characteristics that have come to define tribes, especially languages, they themselves were not much aware of those factors. Instead they defined themselves by lineage, clan and village. Inter-ethnic competition was the rule rather than rivalry with distant strangers. In general terms the people of the east – nowadays the Krahn, Grebo, Kru and Sapo (largely defined by language) lived village by village without wider political links and without much hierarchical rule, even within the villages. Age group sets tended to have responsibility for specific functions. Other tribal groups – the Bassa, Kappelle, Manno and Gio – displayed greater hierarchical organization, particularly on the religious side. With them secret initiation societies, the Poro, for men, and the Sande, for women were directed by traditional religious leaders called Zoes. Actually the societies were only secret from those who were not yet initiated or from the other gender. They were not selective. All boys and girls participated. At the age of puberty they went off to special bush camps where they learned more of the traditions and beliefs of their ethnic group. Initiations involved some hardship and some physical trials. Masks, which manifested various spirits, especially the powerful spirit of the forest were intrinsic to the process. A hundred years ago bush school took several years, but in more modern times it is a function of months. Upon return from the bush camps, the youths were deemed to be adults entitled to full rights, marriage for example, in society.

The Spirit World

In general indigenous Liberians believe in two worlds: a spirit world of unseen forces and the outward visible world of everyday life. They judge that influences move back and forth between the planes and that there are always explanations for events. Nothing just happens. The mystery is to try to determine why or to try to influence outcomes. Spirits on their own, especially the major spirit of the forest – called the bush devil by Christian missionaries - are not necessarily intrinsically good or evil, but can have favorable or unfavorable consequences depending on the circumstances. Thus, spirits are to be warily considered, properly placated and respected. Even the onslaught of world religions of Christianity and Islam that promulgate monotheistic views are not incompatible with traditional beliefs. In fact, many Liberians have a foot in both camps. They go to church or mosque, but still respect the old ways.

Offerings or sacrifices are methods of placating the spirits or of assuring a better outcome. The ultimate sacrifice is human. In war or conflict when killing occurred, the victor could take on the power of his enemy by ingesting part of his body, his heart or his liver, and thus his spirit. This aspect of traditional beliefs appears to have been rarely practiced, but the idea was always there. However, when civil warfare raged from 1990 onwards, many fighters, especially their leaders who sought to solidify control of their troops, reportedly engaged in the practice. An even more clandestine practice, that of ritual killing, is also regularly reported in Liberia. In some areas – especially in the southeast - this has meant the abduction of children for this purpose, but during the heyday of violence witchdoctors, called “heartmen” are reportedly to have scrutinized potential victims prior to ripping their living hearts from their bodies. He who commissioned the deed then consumed such hearts in whole or part. Again the power of the dead was transferred to the living, but also this was a mighty means of intimidating inferiors by enhancing one’s reputation. Obviously the climate of violence, which so reduced the value of life was conducive to the commercialization of ritual killing via the heartmen.

Tradition or Aberration?

During the civil war several elements from traditional culture could be readily discerned among the contesting armies. First was the utilization of youths. Liberia was not the first conflict zone where child soldiers held sway, but it was certainly among the most notorious. Charles Taylor claimed that his “Small Boy Units” were composed of war orphans who joined his forces in order to have “family.” There is undoubtedly an element of truth in that, but child soldiers were loyal, fearless and unlikely to challenge the leadership. Consequently, they were good front line fodder. Youth were available not just because they were orphans, but also because traditional village controls were dissolving. Many elders interviewed about the phenomena of child soldiers lamented that children no longer respected the old ways. They were correct; things began to fall apart generations ago when youths were dragooned into forced labor on rubber plantations. Education, migration to the towns and cities and a growing taste for modern consumer products added to the disillusionment with village life and the erosion of age-old strictures. The civil war provided opportunities for youths to see a wider world. The incentive for most was not the war itself or the political goals of its leaders, but the adventure and the prospects for personal gain via roadblocks, intimidation, looting or payment after victory. Since traditional warfare was for plunder – mostly for women and livestock – this motivation was understood. Although perhaps over several hundred thousand Liberians served at one time or another in this or that warlord’s army, most were half-hearted part-time soldiers who came and went. Often the bulk of these ranks did so with the blessing of their elders who were more susceptible to the political, i.e. appeals to tribalism, or other blandishments offered by the warlords. Many of the fighters, however, became disillusioned by the violence and sought to return to regular lives. Sadly many others were caught up in it and subsequently lost any sense of morality or ethics that they might have earlier imbibed.

In 1990 international reporting from Liberia made mention of the bizarre dress of rebel irregulars. Youths dressed in wedding gowns, rubber Mickey Mouse masks, or sporting outlandish wigs waved their AK-47s in journalists' faces. Others appeared with faces painted white. Rather than aberrations, such masquerading and masking grew very much from the culture of the spirit world. When so decked out, the individual was protected from having to assume responsibilities for his actions and also from devious actions of others. As the decade wore on, the ruthless and brutal children shifted more to Ray Bans, tennis shoes, fatigues and other accouterments from American popular culture. They were enamored of the violence displayed in inner city Hollywood movies and in the Kung Fu exports from Asia.

Warlord Charles Taylor was adept at securing the support of traditional leaders. The independent or loosely associated villages that existed prior to the 19th century arrival of freed slaves, gradually came under the authority of the settler government based at Monrovia. Often times this submission was coercive and maintained by force of arms, but by the mid-twentieth century Monrovia's control was reality. Rule was effected both by sending administrators from the capital, but also by patronage appointments of locals to positions of power. Even though the native peoples were largely excluded from national politics, they had ample scope to connive and inveigle at their local level. The chief opportunity there was via a nominated position. Chiefs had the responsibility of collecting taxes, including the hated hut tax, but also were expressly permitted to withhold a percentage of revenues as salary and for local purposes. Many such persons ingratiated themselves with True Whig administrations and became rich in the process.

During his presidency Doe did not solidify ties with rural leaders, but instead antagonized them, especially the non-Krahn. Taylor, in turn, played his anti-Krahn card well and solidified the support of the tribal chiefs and religious leaders. They, in turn, were instrumental in delivering the up-country vote to Taylor in the 1997 election.

Issues to Consider:

1. Violence has plagued Liberia for a generation. A whole generation has grown up knowing only sporadic war, internal displacement, food shortages, disrupted schooling, and roadblocks run by arrogant youths. Many have been afflicted by rape, abuse and death. When a culture of violence has wormed its way so deeply into a national psyche, can the society be healed? Similarly can those who have only practiced violence as a way of life- child soldiers and other fighters who have binged on drugs and alcohol to sustain atrocities and conflict – be reformed? If so, what will this take?

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<http://www.rnw.nl/en/liberia/> A summary of the child soldier problem.

www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,3604,982083,00.html A news report of child soldiers in action.

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Chapter 9

The Modern Order: Religion and Civil Society

Modern religion is a force to be reckoned with in contemporary Liberia. Remember that spreading the Gospel was a key motivating factor in the establishment of the colony. Not only were the settlers imbued with Christian virtues as a necessity for civilized life, they insisted that the church, clothes and an education was the only path by which natives could aspire to join their ranks. American and some European missionaries arrived to ensure the adherence to the faith by the settlers, but also to spread the word to the heathens. They achieved good success. Many thousand natives soon professed the cross and began to profit from the educational and health services provided by the missionaries. More than anything else, Christianity provided the path by which native peoples became assimilated into settler culture.

Even though the barbarism of the civil war was an affront to Christian doctrine, the churches soldiered on attempting to use their good offices to militate conflict. While this had little demonstrable effect on the course of the war, churches undoubtedly provided solace to its many victims. Mainline American Protestant denominations Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians and Lutheran plus the Roman Catholic Church are widespread and were the mainstays of the settler community. They are increasingly joined by Evangelical congregations that appeal to more recent converts, especially those seeking redemption after the war. Charles Taylor, for example, is a professed born again Christian.

With the collapse of government and government services nationwide, the people rely even more on churches as the purveyors of education and health care. To their credit churches have stepped forward to do what they can.

Islam

Islam too spread readily in Liberia throughout the last century. Mandingo traders brought the Koran with them when migrating south. People in small communities throughout the nation, but especially in the northwest have subsequently adopted Islam. Sadly, religious and political cleavages tend to follow the same divisions. Many LURD adherents, for example, are Mandingo and thus Muslim. The extent to which religion becomes a political issue in a post-Taylor Liberia remains to be seen.

Masons

In addition to Christianity, a mainstay of Americo-Liberian society was membership in the Masonic Lodge. Such memberships provided the ruling elite expanded connections and relationships within their controlling oligarchy. In fact, Masonic identity ironically substituted for the tribal identity that the Americo-Liberians had long lost and avidly distained. There is little evidence of a vibrant Masonic system in Liberia today,

but the ruins of Africa's largest Masonic shrine brood over Mamba Point hill as a relic to this bygone era.

Civil Society

In contemporary Liberia the associations of civil society loom importantly in national life. Trade unions, women's groups, bar associations, journalists' associations, regional groups, human rights activists, market ladies, football clubs and benevolent associations have sprung up by the hundreds. Obviously they fill needs in society for cooperative undertakings to focus on legitimate issues such as violence against women or children's rights, but such groups also offer employment opportunities enhanced by the possibility of obtaining external grants. In a like fashion, hundreds of store-front churches cater to the spiritual needs of their congregations. Like the established churches, many such religious groups have successfully linked up to overseas sources of support. Finally, political parties compliment the constellation of active local organizations. Seventeen parties, for example, were represented at the Accra peace talks. Several of the parties are large with national constituencies, but others are small linked only to prominent personalities. As with other organizations, political parties also seek to establish links with overseas partners for training, equipment, conferences and travel.

In the aftermath of civil war competent civil administration and the rule of law have evaporated, in their stead are corruption and nepotism. Infrastructure has collapsed and the economy has failed. Poverty is overwhelming. Disease is rampant. The political system has degenerated into ethnic strife and warlord gangs have the run of the streets. Truly Liberia is a failed state. The challenge for Liberians and for the international community is to create from this rubbish a system conducive to security, peace and a long slow climb towards prosperity. The alternative is a vortex of violence and anarchy that will destabilize the entire West African region and provide a base of operations for malefactors of all sorts – criminals, terrorists, hoodlums, opportunists and their ilk.

Issues to Consider:

1. Modern religions, that is Christianity and Islam, preach accommodation and understanding. However, the savagery that has been unleashed in Liberia seems to carry atavistic roots incompatible with the thesis of "love thy neighbors." While we can explain actions in terms of traditional beliefs, such explanations do not justify such violence. Who is to blame here?
2. Coping, making do, and finding a bright side in the face of despair is a skill that many Liberians have elevated to an art. Yet it is still a dog eat dog existence. Part of the rehabilitation of Liberia will require optimism, but also an ability to incorporate personal concerns into a quest for the greater good. Will the people be up to that challenge?

Web sites:

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Chapter 10

Regional and International Considerations

As noted previously in the 19th Century Liberia was coveted by European colonial powers that were held at bay by the United States. Nonetheless, surrounding territories became either French (Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea) or British (Sierra Leone) colonies. Liberia was a black ruled republic, but as we have noted, not an African ruled state. Thus, Liberia had little natural appeal to the early generations of African nationalists. Liberia was firmly in the lock of the conservative True Whig Party whose American slave descendants frowned upon any challenges to the system. Additionally, perhaps fearing for its own standing with the U.S. and European powers, Liberia made no effort to reach out to these budding continental politicians. Consequently, leaders like Kwame Nkrumah from Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Nnamdi Azikwe of Nigeria found no support or succor for their independence efforts in West Africa's only black-ruled state. So when independence did sweep across the region in 1960, Liberia was largely irrelevant to the process. In fact, Liberia's indigenous people had to wait another twenty years prior to realizing their majority role in the nation's political affairs. However, Liberia did stand firm from the very beginning in opposition to apartheid in South Africa. And during the Cold War era of the early sixties was a voice of moderation suggesting to new African states that the western model of capitalism and democracy ought not to be discarded out of hand. In this same vein Liberia played a constructive role in the founding of the Organization of African Unity.

Cold War Policies

By the 1970s, however, most of Africa saw Tolbert as a dinosaur, but in accordance with the OAU principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations were not inclined to any action. Nonetheless, African leaders were startled and embarrassed by the brutal murder of Tolbert and the public executions of his ministers. Consequently, they largely ostracized President Doe seeing in him the worst example of pathetic inept leadership. President Houphouet Boigny of the neighboring Ivory Coast was especially irritated with Doe's actions because his adopted child's husband (Tolbert's nephew) was killed in the takeover. The cold war stakes for Doe were won by the U.S., but by the nineteen eighties, the Soviet Union was not interested in new African clients. Libya, however, was and saw anti-Doe plots as a useful means to challenge America and Israel (which trained Doe's elite presidential guard). Thus, Libya opened its military/political camps to anti-Doe elements. Most prominent among them were Charles Taylor's NPFL troops. Other radical minded leaders, especially Blaise Compaore who killed incumbent President Thomas Sankara and took over in Burkina Faso, also was a stalwart Taylor supporter. He became the mechanism by which Libyan financed arms were funneled to the NPFL. Cote d'Ivoire too, influenced by Houphouet's disdain for Doe permitted weapons clandestinely to transit its territory. Finally, France, which was always aware of relative Francophone versus Anglophone influences in West Africa, was quietly supportive of anti-Doe moves. On the other hand, Doe established a solid relationship with President Babangida of Nigeria that solidified his Anglophone

credentials. Thus the stage was well set for lots of international intrigue when the Liberian civil war began in 1990.

As the Cold War waned, by 1989 the U.S. was distancing itself from President Doe, but not inclined to play any king-making role. Then, as previously, the U.S. opted for constitutional change via elections. Taylor was relatively unknown, but what was known – a Libyan backed escaped criminal – did not recommended him. When Taylor proved so able in the first months of the war, the U.S. and Nigerian counter weight to him was ECOMOG and the Interim Government of National Unity led by Amos Sawyer. ECOMOG was created to impose the constitutional solution, but the force itself soon became part of the problem. By 1992 the civil war had become a stand off between ECOMOG, i.e. Nigeria, and Taylor. That stalemate was not to be broken until Sani Abacha became Nigeria's president in 1993.

Destabilizing Neighbors

Meanwhile Taylor too was sowing a bit of regional dissension. He transshipped weapons and munitions to the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) of Sierra Leone beginning in 1991 both in recompense for diamonds that he marketed for them, but also so as to create a diversion for ECOMOG and a little payback for Nigeria. On account of Sierra Leone's civil war, tens of thousands of refugees sought safety in Liberia. They were (and are) housed in refugee camps that are often adjacent to camps for Liberia's tens of thousands of internally displaced persons. However, to the east and north, tens of thousands of Liberians ethnic Krahn and Mandingos crossed to the Cote d'Ivoire or Guinea respectively to find safety from NPFL thugs. As the tables have turned again in the region in 2003, those tribesmen have become the forces for LURD and MODEL.

Liberia is also apparently involved in the crisis in Cote d'Ivoire. Houphouet was replaced constitutionally by Henri Bedie who was then ousted in a coup by Robert Guei (from the area of his nation near the Liberian border, General Guei had ethnic ties to the Gio people who are key Taylor supporters). Guei, in turn was replaced by Laurent Gbagbo in a 2000 election. In late 2002 northern Ivoirian troops mutinied and subsequently took control of half of their country. The mutineers had support from Burkina Faso and certainly numbered in their ranks some Liberian soldiers-of-fortune. In 2003, however, a second rebel group arose in Cote d'Ivoire with links to the late General Guei, who was killed in Abidjan during the outbreak of fighting in September 2002. It is presumed that Taylor provided clandestine support to those rebels.

UN Sanctions

On account of his activities to support the RUF, the Sierra Leone rebel group that became infamous for severing the limbs of innocents, the United Nations Security Council levied sanctions against President Taylor and his key cadre of NPFL supporters. They were singled out by name and forbidden to travel internationally. The sale of diamonds, many of which were smuggled out of Sierra Leone for the purchase of arms, was banned and an arms embargo imposed. However, the Council declined to prohibit

the export of Liberian timber (most exports are to Taiwan and France), the sanction that many believed would irreparably cripple the NPFL regime. In May of 2003, the Sierra Leone Tribunal indicted Taylor for war crimes. This combination of censures indeed intensified the pressure on Taylor to step down.

Issues to Consider:

1. The Liberian crisis does not operate in a vacuum. There are many cross border tribal and political links and consequent much clandestine maneuvering. Indeed there is often a bit more to any situation than meets the eye. Warlords inside Liberia receive support from neighboring states and in turn support allies there. Motivating factors include greed, tribalism, world politics and even ideology. How do these factors ensure that the cycle of violence continues?

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Chapter 11

Liberia in 2003

The current crisis began building anew in early 2003. Essentially, it arises from discontent with Charles Taylor as manifested militarily by the organization Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and later on by MODEL (pronounced “Mo-dell” – Movement for Democracy in Liberia.) Each of the two groups is the lineal descendant of a previous warlord/tribal groups. LURD has a Mandingo orientation that comes from ULIMO-K of the earlier civil war and MODEL groups many Krahns who were previously aligned with Master Sergeant Doe. Their respective tribal orientations are reflected in their territory. LURD moved towards Monrovia from the northwest and MODEL from the southeast. Each group in turn also enlisted external support; LURD from Guinea and MODEL from the Cote d’Ivoire. Such support has to be viewed as “payback” from those states to Taylor who constantly maneuvered against them.

By late April the insurgents had taken great swaths of territory and were pushing hard on the capital. Taylor’s theretofore vaunted Anti-Terrorist Unit and the Armed Forces of Liberia offered little resistance as they fell back on Monrovia. The Special Court in Sierra Leone indicted Taylor for war crimes in May. Even though he was in Accra, Ghana when the announcement was made, he was permitted to return to Liberia unimpeded. However, the pressure on him to leave office intensified considerably, both from within because opponents recognized his vulnerability and supporters saw the writing on the wall. From without, West African chiefs-of-state collectively advised him to resign. Taylor indicated that he might step down for the good of the nation. That admission coupled with his considerably weaker position – both militarily and politically – kicked off a double track process designed to oust him from office.

Attack on Monrovia

First LURD and MODEL redoubled their efforts to seize Monrovia by force in order to install themselves in power. By July LURD pushed into the western suburbs of the city, crossed the Po River, occupied Bushrod Island and the Freeport. The Government of Liberia forces resisted these incursions. Fighting between the two was fierce, particularly at the bridges across the St. Paul and Mesurado Rivers to downtown Monrovia. Despite LURD use of mortars - virtually all rounds from those guns fell indiscriminately on civilian targets, including within the U.S. Embassy compound – it was not successful in entering the central city. Similarly, LURD moves to encircle Monrovia and cut the road to Gbarnga were not successful.

In the course of this fighting thousands of persons – mostly non-combatants – were killed or injured. Bullets bounced indiscriminately around and mortar shells – preponderantly from LURD positions - rained down from the sky. The city was already swollen to over a million; about 600,000 of them internally displaced people from the long series of wars. With LURD’s capture of the Freeport and the food supplies there – both commercial and for relief purposes – the price of food tripled. Similarly, warfare

cut the daily flow of foodstuffs from surrounding farms to city markets. During the same period the half-working water supply system for the city was irreparably damaged. International relief personnel evacuated and their good works with victims of war – food, health services, etc. – halted. Monrovia's medical infrastructure that was already near the point of collapse due to neglect and shortage of personnel was further strained by the carnage and overwhelmed by disease. Dozens of dead bodies rotted where they fell or in makeshift morgues. Cases of cholera were reported. Citizens cowered in their homes, sought refuge in churches, stadiums, and the U.S. embassy's Greystone housing compounds, but nowhere were there guaranteed protection from violence.

Meanwhile MODEL had consolidated its control of the far southeast, but in order to improve its bargaining position in late July, Model forces captured the key port of Buchanan. Taylor's forces (like Doe's before him), probably several thousand fighters at the most, were squeezed from both sides into Monrovia. None of the combatant forces displayed much flair for battle or organized warfare, although all of them were competent killers, raiders and looters. Both LURD attacks and Taylor's responses seemed to be driven by ammunition supplies. Whatever side had the goods went on the offensive.

Peace Talks

The second track of the effort to oust Taylor was political. The three combatant groups –LURD, MODEL and GOL (government of Liberia) – joined by civil society and political party representatives convened in Accra under the aegis of ECOWAS to sign a cease-fire and to organize an orderly transition to a post Taylor era. ECOWAS mediator Nigerian General Abubakar led the delegates to an early acceptance of a cease-fire, which was continuously broken by the fighters, and a long thrashing through of political arrangements through which all parties would share power as Liberia evolved to a truly democratic state. Although the general framework was a government along the lines of the existing constitution, the all-consuming details would determine the nexus of power. The rebel delegates especially did not wish to give up at the conference table what they might win on the ground. The GOL, i.e. Taylor's cohorts, sought to protect their influence and the others maneuvered for personal and political places in the new raiment.

ECOWAS Action

The anguish of Liberia as it slid yet again into the maw of violence and despair was felt in the region and indeed around the globe. Liberia's neighbors through their collective organization ECOWAS decided to act. With the blessing, encouragement and support of the United States, European nations and the United Nations, ECOWAS mounted a peacekeeping force dubbed ECOMIL. Deployment of the first Nigerian units of that force began on August 4. Ghanaian, Malian and Senegalese troops would later join. ECOMIL's objectives were to occupy Roberts Field airport and the Freeport, supervise the cease-fire – which the belligerents agreed to honor once the force was in place - and protect the initial transition government. Charles Taylor vowed that he would resign as president on August 11.

The United States indicated that it would actively support ECOMIL and indeed American interest helped convince ECOWAS to move ahead. However, long unanswered was the question of whether American combat troops would actually participate in the effort on Liberian soil. President Bush cautioned in July that Taylor's departure was a necessary condition. By early August a U.S. Naval task force was offshore. Elsewhere in the region, U.S. military personnel and contractors helped plan, prepare, train, equip and transport ECOMIL forces.

On August 11, under the stern eyes of ECOWAS Chairman President Kufuor of Ghana and other African leaders, Taylor did resign. Vice President Moses Blah was sworn in as president and will serve until the transition government takes over. Taylor departed that same afternoon for Nigeria. Taylor's departure led immediately to the U.S. Naval Task force popping up on the horizon. U.S. aircraft dominated the skies and 200 Marines arrived ashore. They helped secure Roberts Field Airport; embedded liaison teams within ECOMIL units, and helped assess the state of the port. Meanwhile, the ECOMIL force continued to grow as a second Nigerian battalion arrived and a mixed Ghanaian, Senegalese, Malian battalion followed. The joy of Taylor's departure coupled with hard negotiating on the ground by U.S. Ambassador John Blaney and the ECOMIL commander succeeded in agreement for LURD forces to withdraw from the Free Port on Bushrod Island.

Taylor's departure also energized the peace talks in Accra. Mediator Abubakar and President Kufuor facilitated a final peace agreement that was signed by all parties on August 18. The agreement provided for a transition government to be installed on October 14 led by persons not associated with the belligerents. Businessman Gyude Bryant was chosen Chairman Wesley Johnson Vice Chairman. Warring parties, however, were allocated various cabinet positions and seats in Parliament. By late August 2003, plans were advancing to blue hat ECOMIL on October 1 and place it under UN control.

As this Self Study Guide goes to press in early October 2003, the situation in long-tortured Liberia remains tense and fluid, with its future far from certain. We have seen the August 18, 2003 Comprehensive Peace Accord, the deployment of ECOMIL forces, the September authorization of a UN peacekeeping operation (via UNSCR 1509), and the departure of the U.S. military presence as of October 1. In spite of these events, low-intensity fighting between rebel and government forces, particularly involving irregulars (militias) of the parties to the conflict, continues to flare up in various parts of the countryside.

The "Love of Liberty" may have brought freed American slaves to the West African coast in 1822, with Americo-Liberians declaring in 1847 the independent state of Liberia with its capital in Monrovia. It remains to be seen, however, just when the many fine and decent Liberians of today, scores now huddled in fear amongst the rocky outcroppings and disease-ridden squalor of Monrovia, will again be able to experience the peace, security, and happiness which are so overdue in their bleeding country.

Issues to Consider:

1. The International community responded very slowly to the crisis and much blame for inaction or failure to move ahead more quickly was assigned to the U.S. The U.S. in turn moved hesitantly, preferring that ECOWAS, under-funded, under-equipped and poorly prepared for real peacekeeping duties, step to the fore. African leaders picked up the ball and have pressed ahead, ever hopeful that the U.S. will join more fully in the execution of the operation. What are the policy merits of greater involvement? Both for Liberia itself and for U.S. relations elsewhere in Africa? What are the relative merits of less involvement?

Web sites:

www.allafrica.com for the latest news.
www.washingtonpost.com for the Washington view.

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