



# **Liberia**

## **A Risk Assessment Brief**

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## • HISTORICAL BACKGROUND •

Liberia's relatively stable and democratic First Republic collapsed into anarchy in 1979 following an increase in rice prices. In 1985 Samuel Doe seized control of the country in a military coup, and over the next twelve years Liberia would remain a hotspot for internal political, as well as military factionist movements. Numerous mediated cease-fires repeatedly failed to achieve lasting peace, and new insurgency groups, like the NPFL led by Charles Taylor, spawned as a result of discontent.<sup>1</sup>

In 1997 the UN successfully brokered an armistice with Charles Taylor, elected President in the first internationally recognized free and fair elections since the 1970s. Unfortunately, the situation soon regressed, including military clashes between various Liberian and Sierra Leone rebels, as well as instances of sporadic human rights abuses allegedly perpetrated by Taylor's forces.<sup>2</sup>

Continued flagrant disregard for human rights led the UN Security Council to back sanctions against Taylor's regime in 2001, followed by the European Union's decision to suspend all aid to Liberia. Less than a year later, Taylor declared a state of emergency. Effective central control of the state degenerated into total chaos.<sup>3</sup>

International calls for Taylor to relinquish power increased in early 2003, particularly from the United States, and Taylor fled into exile in Nigeria in August. Taylor's erstwhile GOL faction agreed to mediation with the main rebel groups, LURD and MODEL, which resulted in the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the establishment of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL). A new United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was to provide 15,000 troops as a security guarantee to former businessman Gyude Bryant's new government.<sup>4</sup>

On 7 December 2003 the UN prematurely began disarming ex-combatants, as insufficient ground troops, resources, and inter-organizational coordination forced the early termination and

subsequent deferral of the program to February 2004, with concomitant loss of prestige and trust in the eyes of Liberians.<sup>5</sup> On the civilian side, a Liberian Donors Conference is to be held 5-6 February, with calls for \$500 million to be raised in redevelopment funding.<sup>6</sup> This will be a litmus test of the international resolve to rectify and stabilize the situation in Liberia.

The NTGL must guide Liberia to free and fair elections in October 2005. It will need to contend with factions which have yet to disarm, hundreds of thousands of returning refugees and IDPs, a poor human resource base, and the omnipresent allure of graft, all in the midst of a devastated country. This may be Liberia's last and greatest chance for peace.

### • ACRONYMS •

<b>CPA</b>	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
<b>DDRR</b>	Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, Reintegration
<b>GOL</b>	Government of Liberia
<b>LURD</b>	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally Displaced Persons
<b>MODEL</b>	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
<b>NPFL</b>	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
<b>NTGL</b>	National Transitional Government of Liberia

### • LIBERIA RECENT TIMELINE •

- 1997:** Civil war ends, disarmament program declared success. Taylor wins free and fair elections; National Patriotic Party wins majority.
- 1998:** Fighting resumes; peacekeeping forces leave. Human rights abuses occur.
- 2000:** Major fighting in north.
- 2001:** UN "smart" sanctions against Taylor's government and EU suspends US\$42 million in aid to Liberia.
- 2002:** Liberian refugees flee into Sierra Leone. Taylor declares state of emergency.
- 2003:** International pressure intensifies; U.S. warships drop anchor off Liberian coast.
- 08/03: Taylor flees into exile in Nigeria.
  - 08/03: Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Accra. Gyude Bryant sworn in as interim leader to prepare Liberia for elections in October 2005.
  - 09/03: UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) commences. Some refugees return home.
  - 10/03: Symbolic disarmament of over 12,000 ex-combatants.
  - 12/03: First official UN Disarmament Program poorly planned and executed.
- 2004:** Donors Conference to be held 5-6 February to raise \$500 million in funds to redevelop Liberia.

• KEY INDICATORS •

Indicators	Contributing Factors/Developments
<b>Demographic and Ethnic Stress</b>	<p><b>Positive:</b> Only 3.3 million people with a high but manageable growth rate of 2.4%; Urban/rural split is 50/50 which will be maintained as the population grows.<sup>7</sup></p> <p><b>Negative:</b> Youth bulge is high (43.4%) suggesting potential unrest;<sup>8</sup> 250,000 out of 350,000 refugees expected to return during transition period; 490,000 IDPs need to be reintegrated (shelter, employment);<sup>9</sup> antagonisms exist between 90-95% majority indigenous Liberians and minority Americo-Liberians.<sup>10</sup></p> <p><b>Overall:</b> <i>Manageable natural population growth and distribution, but will require distinct plan to coordinate return of refugees and resettlement of IDPs.</i></p>
<b>Economic Performance</b>	<p><b>Positive:</b> GDP growth likely at 16%-43% for 2004;<sup>11</sup> rich in mineral resources (timber, rubber, iron); UN may lift sanctions on timber exports (50%+ of export revenues);<sup>12</sup> only 10% of arable currently cultivated.<sup>13</sup></p> <p><b>Negative:</b> Liberia's infrastructure (physical and human) has been utterly devastated by the hostilities, so that 85% are unemployed and 80% live below poverty line; external debt in arrears by \$2.5 B (which may be forgiven); lax regulation and endemic corruption; heavy reliance on aid as tax collection minimal.<sup>14</sup></p> <p><b>Overall:</b> <i>GDP growth is positive, but high unemployment a severe destabilizing factor, especially as DDDR programs result in greater need for employment.</i></p>
<b>Governance and Political Instability</b>	<p><b>Positive:</b> Rebel factions have withdrawn calls for Chairman Bryant's removal;<sup>15</sup> rank-and-file and lower-ranking members of rebel groups seem to value peace (LURD lieutenants called leader Sekou Conneh's demand for Bryant's removal 'satanic and childish').<sup>16</sup></p> <p><b>Negative:</b> Fissures have developed between the leadership of the top two rebel groups, LURD and MODEL, and their lower-ranking members; a power struggle is developing between Sekou Conneh and his wife Aicha, with 40 LURD commanders supporting the latter;<sup>17</sup> extremely poor political infrastructure (bureaucracy poorly trained and equipped, nascent civil society); unfamiliarity with rule of law; political/civil rights are not well enforced as Liberia's 3,500 policemen are ill-trained and have not been paid since early 2002;<sup>18</sup> one commercial press, limited television and radio infrastructure, and continuing regulation restrict free press;<sup>19</sup> current transitional government run by former rebels with no formal administrative training; Chairman Bryant has little executive power; 18 political parties have no agenda or policy-making capacity, and do not represent more than the division between indigenous Liberians and Americo-Liberians, with ethnic distrust artificially fabricated but now institutionalized.<sup>20</sup></p> <p><b>Overall:</b> <i>Extremely poor endogenous political capacity, with questionable will on the part of all parties to democratization; however, general optimism may be harnessed as long as security maintained.</i></p>
<b>Human Development</b>	<p><b>Positive:</b> Independent National Commission on Human Rights to address human rights and development (HRD);<sup>21</sup> \$24 M grant by Global Fund will help address 10-12% HIV infection rate and 10% of all deaths caused by malaria;<sup>22</sup> Monrovia relatively well-served by 5 well-stocked hospitals and numerous clinics;<sup>23</sup> water potential excellent with high water table and favourable precipitation rates and climate.<sup>24</sup></p> <p><b>Negative:</b> Liberia ranks 174<sup>th</sup> out of 175 countries on the Human Development Index;<sup>25</sup> 80% of shelter damaged during conflict; education infrastructure abysmal and net enrollment rate lowest in Africa at 46% (ages 5-24), with women at 31%;<sup>26</sup> 78% of pop. illiterate; 25% have access to safe water;<sup>27</sup> only 10% have access to health care, with 242/293 public health facilities looted or closed due to lack of staff/supplies; malnutrition and disease are rampant.<sup>28</sup></p> <p><b>Overall:</b> Operating from negligible base, <i>foreign aid will be required</i> to address Liberia's litany of serious HRD problems, while <i>ossification of the norm of violence</i> needs to be addressed by the <i>new institutions</i>.</p>
<b>Militarization and Violence</b>	<p><b>Positive:</b> UN Disarmament program (07/12/03) resulted in 12,664 combatants disarmed, with further reduction in arms of 70,000 planned for 2004;<sup>29</sup> small army of 8,500 will not strain budget.<sup>30</sup></p> <p><b>Negative:</b> 53,000 ex-combatants remain to be disarmed, with as many as 21,000 children and 2,000 women;<sup>31</sup> violence and abuse still endemic while judicial system poorly trained in rule of law.<sup>32</sup></p> <p><b>Overall:</b> <i>Security provided by UNMIL and general desire to disarm</i> make this a promising indicator, but <i>complete lack of judicial infrastructure</i> and rule of law make <i>redress and settling of disputes problematic</i>.</p>
<b>External Involvement</b>	<p><b>Positive:</b> 10,000 UNMIL soldiers providing security (15,000 by March 2004); Liberia Donors Conference 5-6 February may raise up to \$500M for redevelopment;<sup>33</sup> US, EU and other major stakeholders appear determined to stabilize West Africa;<sup>34</sup> DDDR process well-funded (US has pledged \$200M).<sup>35</sup></p> <p><b>Negative:</b> Continuing instability on borders with Sierra Leone and especially Côte d'Ivoire;<sup>36</sup> current programs underfunded (UNHCR received 71% of requested funds, WFP 97%, but agriculture, health, education and human rights received 14%, 18%, 0%, and 0% respectively);<sup>37</sup> coordination of programs lacking (07/12/03 Disarmament widely deplored), weakening support amongst Liberians.<sup>38</sup></p> <p><b>Overall:</b> <i>Political will needs to be maintained, and greater coordination</i> necessary between organizations, but <i>security has been provided</i> (more so in Monrovia than in the counties), and sound procedures and programs abound.</p>

● MAJOR STAKEHOLDERS ●

Internal Actors	Objectives & Limitations
<b>National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL)</b> Chairman Gyude Bryant	Charged with reconstruction and maintaining political control until 2005 elections. Lack of power vis-à-vis rebels means that success/failure depends heavily upon support of UNMIL. NTGL includes several self-interested politicians/potential spoilers. <sup>39</sup>
<b>Liberians United for Reconciliation &amp; Democracy (LURD)</b> Sekou Damate Conneh	Rebel forces formerly opposed to Taylor, now demanding representation in NTGL. Considered the greatest threat to peace. LURD forces control land in several counties but leadership is internally divided.
<b>Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL)</b> Thomas Yaya Nimley	Rebel forces opposed to Taylor also seeking representation in NTGL. Trained and supported by Cote d'Ivoire. Prepared to fight for Gbagbo if UNMIL disarmament settlement not adequate. <sup>40</sup>
<b>Government of Liberia (GOL)</b> Former President Charles Taylor	Forces formerly loyal to Taylor (now exiled in Nigeria). Appear more willing to give up arms in exchange for UNMIL payoffs than other rebels. <sup>41</sup> Under attack by LURD and MODEL forces.
<b>Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL)</b>	Under Taylor, AFL filled with loyal rebels. Used to crush political opponents and protect the regime. Role of AFL now unclear. UNMIL considering disbanding to prevent incursions into neighbouring countries and reduce internal violence. <sup>42</sup>
<b>Political Parties</b>	Liberia's 18 parties considered to represent no real agenda, only the self-interests of leaders. Parties not trusted by public. Leaders commonly manipulate ethnic differences and associate with armed factions, using politics as an attempt to enrich themselves. <sup>43</sup>
<b>Civil Society</b>	Low level of 'social consciousness' in Liberia. Some religious leaders and civil society activists emerging but many affiliated with political parties.
<b>Private Sector / Business Groups</b>	Majority of business community has fled Liberia and is not expected to return. <sup>44</sup>
External Actors	Objectives & Limitations
<b>United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)</b> UN Special Representative Jacques Paul Klein	Charged with enforcing the ceasefire agreement, overseeing disarmament, and establishing democratic governance before 2005 elections. Poor preparation for disarmament operations resulted in violence in 2003. UNMIL still unable to control borders and prevent the flow of weapons and rebels. Internal divisions in leadership.
<b>Regional Agreements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• African Union (AU)</li> <li>• Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)</li> <li>• Mano River Union (MRU)</li> </ul>	Some have supported various initiatives since 1990 to build peace in Liberia, such as ECOWAS' Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and peacekeepers.
<b>International Community</b>	International donor conference planned for February 2004. France, UK, China, US, and others expected to provide substantial levels of grant assistance for reconstruction projects.
<b>Lending Institutions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Monetary Fund (IMF)</li> <li>• World Bank</li> </ul>	Liberia owes an estimated \$2.1 billion US in external debt (2001). <sup>45</sup>
<b>Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea</b>	Support and training of rebels has contributed to border instabilities and ongoing tension between these countries.

● POSSIBLE SCENARIOS ●

**WORST CASE:** *Liberia remains a failed state, an oily rag waiting for a spark to ignite the region*<sup>46</sup>

• **The rescheduled disarmament of UNMIL<sup>47</sup> repeats the dangerous miscalculations of the previous mission:**

- i. fails to have all appropriate mechanisms in place: eg. insufficient troops on the ground, poor coordination with UN agencies;<sup>48</sup>
- ii. Liberia is unsafe and unsecured, results in chaos and an increased death toll (Liberians and peacekeepers);
- iii. UN mission failure has grave consequences for an already troubled West African region as well as future peacekeeping operations.

- **Deep-rooted affiliation between politicians and armed factions persist:**<sup>49</sup>
  - i. moderate fighter commitment to peace is quashed as politicians continue to jeopardize the peace process for the sake of personal self-interest and patronage;
  - ii. politicians continue to lack both political vision and training in governing Liberia, sabotaging any progressive learning process.
- **Faction leaders of LURD and MODEL continue to block disarmament and preserve their fighting forces:**<sup>50</sup>
  - i. fighters loyal to the former government and Taylor continue to clash with peacekeepers;
  - ii. squabbles over jobs by leaders of the armed factions continue to cause near-paralysis in the transitional government;<sup>51</sup>
  - iii. regional sponsors, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire respectively, appeal to both factions to tackle internal dissent and contribute militarily to nearby interstate conflict, destabilizing the region.<sup>52</sup>
- **Liberians in no way receive/gain local ownership or responsibility for the peace process:**
  - i. National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) remains grasping and unsavory, cannot be trusted to implement peace accords;
  - ii. civil society advocates for peace, reform and rebuilding remain hamstrung<sup>53</sup> and become increasingly dependent on third party monitoring and implementation.
- **Donors fail to register the fact that Liberia's reconstruction requires serious long-term commitments:**<sup>54</sup>
  - i. international confidence in the successful recovery of the country and region wanes;
  - ii. minimum estimates to repair basic Liberian infrastructure are not met, extinguishing any remaining momentum.

**BEST CASE:** *Two-year transition period, January 2004-December 2005, forecasts long-term stability and development*<sup>55</sup>

- **UNMIL learns lesson—adequate troops and coordination secure nation and promote peace:**
  - i. October 2005 election is free and fair;<sup>56</sup>
  - ii. exit strategy is successful as troops pull out of Liberia, with monitoring mechanisms in place.
- **Solid reintegration<sup>57</sup> package peels fighters away from politicians:**
  - i. political spoilers become vulnerable and unable to threaten peace;
  - ii. fighters' expectations of job security and peace process met, breaking chain of command between fighters and faction leaders.
- **NTGL establishes leadership under the auspices of good governance and proper management:**
  - i. vastly improved civil administration results in incorrupt revenue collection and distribution;<sup>58</sup>
  - ii. development and reconstruction of Liberia' interior begins.
- **Transition to local ownership is successful:**<sup>59</sup>
  - i. religious leaders and civil society activists are brought on board to play a greater role.
- **Robust international support:**<sup>60</sup>
  - i. meets both short-term and long-term funding estimates, optimism is high for a secure Liberia and region.

**MOST LIKELY:** *"Security First?"*<sup>61</sup>

- **UNMIL will continue to drive the peace process:**
  - i. troop numbers secure fragile peace in most areas of country,<sup>62</sup> minimal coordination continues;
  - ii. noteworthy short-term disarmament and demobilization;
  - iii. October 2005 elections will be too soon but illustrative of long-term goals.
- **Will of politicians and faction leaders gradually separates into two diverging entities**
- **Fighters grow increasingly impatient for job security and reimbursement but commit to peace agreement**
- **Symbolic nature of the NTGL persists but power devolves slowly:**<sup>63</sup>
  - i. public awareness matures but UN is highly depended on;
  - ii. Liberian self-confidence low until tangible infrastructure results are seen;<sup>64</sup>
  - iii. social and civil advocates group together and create 'self-help' communities at grass-roots level.
- **Donors cognizant that a stable and well governed Liberia is essential to secure peace in West Africa:**<sup>65</sup>
  - i. short-term donor needs met, long-term funds dependent solely on 'success rate';
  - ii. international community is hopeful but realistic of last chance scenario.
- **Long-term stability and security of nation and region unknown but promising:**<sup>66</sup>
  - i. strong-minded, courageous<sup>67</sup> individuals needed to implement "One Team Approach"<sup>68</sup> of long-term strategy.

## End Notes

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- <sup>6</sup> International Crisis Group, Rebuilding Liberia 15.
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- <sup>8</sup> World Factbook.
- <sup>9</sup> United Nations, Joint Needs 38.
- <sup>10</sup> World Factbook.
- <sup>11</sup> United Nations, Joint Needs 38.
- <sup>12</sup> United Nations, Joint Needs 25.
- <sup>13</sup> United Nations, Joint Needs 58.
- <sup>14</sup> United Nations, Joint Needs 38.
- <sup>15</sup> United Nations. Integrated Regional Information Networks. "LIBERIA: Rebels back down on call for Bryant's removal." 27 January 2004. Online: [http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=39163&SelectRegion=West\\_Africa&SelectCountry=LIBERIA](http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=39163&SelectRegion=West_Africa&SelectCountry=LIBERIA)
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- <sup>18</sup> United Nations, Joint Needs 45.
- <sup>19</sup> Reporters sans frontières. Liberia – 2003 Annual Report. Paris: Reporters sans frontières, 2003. Online: [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=6425](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=6425)
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- <sup>22</sup> The Global Fund. Portfolio of Grants in Liberia. Geneva: Geneva Secretariat, 2003. Online: <http://www.theglobalfund.org/search/portfolio.aspx?lang=en&countryID=LBR> , United Nations, Joint Needs 51.
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- <sup>29</sup> United Nations, Joint Needs 22.
- <sup>30</sup> United Nations, Joint Needs 38.
- <sup>31</sup> United Nations, Joint Needs 41.
- <sup>32</sup> United Nations, Joint Needs 45.
- <sup>33</sup> United Nations, Facts and figures.
- <sup>34</sup> Alphonso Toweh, "U.S. warns Liberia rebels not to block peace." ReliefWeb 27 January 2004. Online: <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/480fa8736b88bbc3c12564f6004c8ad5/dde6f3bad894f55d49256e2900025dd2?OpenDocument> .
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- <sup>38</sup> International Crisis Group, Rebuilding Liberia 4.
- <sup>39</sup> International Crisis Group, Rebuilding Liberia 8-12.
- <sup>40</sup> International Crisis Group, Rebuilding Liberia 10.
- <sup>41</sup> International Crisis Group, Rebuilding Liberia 11-12.
- <sup>42</sup> International Crisis Group, Rebuilding Liberia 17.
- <sup>43</sup> International Crisis Group, Rebuilding Liberia 19-21.
- <sup>44</sup> World Factbook.
- <sup>45</sup> Reuters AlertNet, The World Factbook.
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- <sup>48</sup> United Nations, Consolidated Appeals Process 10.
- <sup>49</sup> International Crisis Group, Rebuilding Liberia 8.
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- <sup>63</sup> International Crisis Group, Rebuilding Liberia i-ii.
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