

# 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 •

**CPA** Comprehensive Peace Agreement

**DDRR** Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation,

Reintegration

**GOL** Government of Liberia

**LURD** Liberians United for Reconciliation and

Democracy

**IDPs** Internally Displaced Persons

MODEL Movement for Democracy in Liberia NPFL National Patriotic Front of Liberia

NTGL 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 excombatants.
- 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 •

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# • MAJOR STAKEHOLDERS •

Internal Actors	Objectives & Limitations
National Transitional Government of	Charged with reconstruction and maintaining political control until 2005 elections.
Liberia (NTGL)	Lack of power vis-à-vis rebels means that success/failure depends heavily upon
	support of UNMIL. NTGL includes several self-interested politicians/potential
Chairman Gyude Bryant	spoilers. <sup>39</sup>
Liberians United for Reconciliation	Rebel forces formerly opposed to Taylor, now demanding representation in NTGL.
& Democracy (LURD)	Considered the greatest threat to peace. LURD forces control land in several counties
Sekou Damate Conneh	but leadership is internally divided.
Movement for Democracy in Liberia	Rebel forces opposed to Taylor also seeking representation in NTGL. Trained and
(MODEL)	supported by Cote d'Ivoire. Prepared to fight for Gbagbo if UNMIL disarmament
Thomas Yaya Nimley	settlement not adequate. 40
Government of Liberia (GOL)	Forces formerly loyal to Taylor (now exiled in Nigeria). Appear more willing to give
	up arms in exchange for UNMIL payoffs than other rebels. 41 Under attack by LURD
Former President Charles Taylor	and MODEL forces.
Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL)	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>
Political Parties	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
G: 11 G	themselves. <sup>43</sup>
Civil Society	Low level of 'social consciousness' in Liberia. Some religious leaders and civil
Diana Carta Davis Carra	society activists emerging but many affiliated with political parties.
Private Sector / Business Groups	Majority of business community has fled Liberia and is not expected to return. <sup>44</sup>
External Actors	Objectives & Limitations
United Nations Mission in Liberia	Charged with enforcing the ceasefire agreement, overseeing disarmament, and
(UNMIL)	establishing democratic governance before 2005 elections. Poor preparation for
LINI Cussial Domessantations	disarmament operations resulted in violence in 2003. UNMIL still unable to control
UN Special Representative Jacques Paul Klein	borders and prevent the flow of weapons and rebels. Internal divisions in leadership.
Regional Agreements	Some have supported various initiatives since 1990 to build peace in Liberia, such as
• African Union (AU)	ECOWAS' Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and peacekeepers.
Economic Community of West	Leo with Monitoring Group (Leo Mod) and peacekeepers.
African States (ECOWAS)	
Mano River Union (MRU)	
International Community	International donor conference planned for February 2004. France, UK, China, US,
International Community	and others expected to provide substantial levels of grant assistance for reconstruction
	projects.
<b>Lending Institutions</b>	Liberia owes an estimated \$2.1 billion US in external debt (2001). <sup>45</sup>
• International Monetary Fund (IMF)	Liberia σπου an estimated φ2.1 official σου in external deot (2001).
World Bank	
Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea	Support and training of rebels has contributed to border instabilities and ongoing
Sierra Leone, Cote u Ivon e, Guinea	tension between these countries.
	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

- 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: 49

- 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:54

- 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; 56
- 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: 60

i. meets both short-term and long-term funding estimates, optimism is high for a secure Liberia and region.

# **MOST LIKELY:** "Security First?" 61

#### • 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: 63
  - 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: 65

- 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" of long-term strategy.

#### **End Notes**

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