by Max Ahmadu Sesay

Bringing Peace To Liberia

On Christmas Eve in 1989, a few hundred armed fighters calling themselves the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) attacked border posts around the village of Butuo in Nimba County, north-eastern Liberia. These attacks, which launched a campaign to oust the dictatorship of President Samuel Doe, effectively triggered a war that has brought the almost complete destruction of Africa's oldest republic.

Once war broke out, it quickly spread to other parts of the country due largely to the brutal counter-insurgency strategy of the national army, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). By mid-1990, the NPFL, under Charles Taylor, had seized control of most of the country and had besieged the capital, Monrovia. The gruesome fighting in the city led to the massacre of civilians and attacks on foreign embassies which provoked an outcry from the

international community. The most widely publicised cases were the attack by AFL soldiers on the United Nations compound on 30 May 1990, and their subsequent massacre of over 600 civilians at St. Peter's Lutheran Church on 30 July.

By September 1990, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had sent in its Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to halt the carnage. However, the ceasefire signed in November broke down comprehensively in October 1992, when Taylor's fighters again attacked Monrovia and the peacekeeping force responded with heavy bombing raids. Events moved rapidly after this point, leading to the proliferation of armed factions, continued warfare, a string of national and international conferences and the signing of more peace agreements. By 1996, three successive interim governments had been installed with the help of the international community. Over

Members of the 'Wrecking Crew', a group of street fighters loyal to the NPFL, riding through the streets of Monrovia in April 1996 with their 15 year-old 'Commander'

a dozen peace accords have been acceded to by the various parties to the conflict, but none have established a lasting cessation of hostilities. Elections scheduled for August 1996, like many before them, have been postponed for at least nine months.

Roots of the Conflict

Explanations for the outbreak of conflict in Liberia have mostly focused on the domestic socio-economic and political environment of the 1980s. The People's Redemption Council (PRC), headed by the almost untutored Master-Sergeant Samuel Doe, seized power in a bloody coup d'etat in April 1980 and promised a complete revolution of Liberian society. Initially seeking advice from civilian politicians and academics, Doe quickly learnt the cunning, deceit and realpolitik that had been the hallmarks of Liberian politics for decades. Having done so, he disavowed his original ideals and set himself on an inexorable path of self-destruction.

The reign of Doe was characterized by sustained levels of political violence, dramatic economic decline precipitated by widespread corruption, a lack of progress in political reform, and purges of real and imagined enemies. During 1980-87, GNP declined at an estimated average rate of 2.1% per annum, while GNP per head declined by an annual average of 5.2% (*Europa Africa Yearbook*, 1996). By 1988, Liberia's foreign debt stood at $1.4 billion and domestic debt at $507 million (Pereira-Lunghu, 1995). Capital flight and a weakened revenue position pushed the

government to unwittingly embark on the printing of 'fiat money' to finance the fiscal deficit. Politically, the regime's brutality was demonstrated by the persistent haste with which those implicated in anti-government plots were eliminated. The tone was set early on, when 15 prominent politicians of the Tolbert government (1971-80) were publicly executed on a beach in Monrovia immediately following the coup.

Very soon, Doe came to trust no-one. Consequently, he adopted a policy of appointing members of his Krahn ethnic group to the top jobs in the bureaucracy, the public services, and the officer corps in the army and security forces. Though the poorly educated Krahn made up only four per cent of Liberia's pre-war population, Doe's policies dramatically increased their national profile and as late as 1995, at least eight out of 11 top positions in the AFL were Krahn (Nelson, 1984; Liebenow, 1987; Africa Watch, 1989; Sawyer, 1992). In 1985, rigged elections secured Doe the presidency at the head of a new 'civilian' government. In the aftermath of these elections, the President viciously suppressed an attempted military coup led by his former ally, Thomas Quiwonkpa. This action immediately raised alarm about a genocide against the Gio and Mano of Nimba County, home and power base of Quiwonkpa. Taylor, who was related by marriage to Quiwonkpa, benefitted from the alienation of the Nimba population as the Gio and Mano became willing recruits of the NPFL in 1990.

The primary confrontation at the start of the war was thus between the Krahn-

'Doe's policies dramatically increased the national profile of the Krahn'

dominated army, supported by the Mandingo who had helped prop up Doe's regime, and a rebel force backed by the Gio and Mano. Within a short period, the war degenerated from a calculated conflict for control of the state to a horrendous slaughter waged along ethnic lines (Berkeley, 1992; Ruiz, 1992).

Liberia's unresolved past

Looking beyond its immediate triggers, the Liberian conflict can be seen as the brutal culmination of the country's 'unresolved past'. The history of Liberia pre-1980 is literally the story of the arrival and success of freed North American slaves, resettled by the American Colonisation Society (ACS) along the present-day Monrovia coast in the mid 1900s. For almost a century and half, these 'Americo-Liberians' dominated the political, social and economic life of Liberia, in alliance with Africans liberated from slave ships bound for the Americas (the 'Congos').

They were able to achieve this through the institutions they created, such as the churches, judiciary, business associations, and other clubs and societies, notably the Grand Lodge of Freemasons. Their community was small in size, close-knit and culturally coherent, which was enhanced by intermarriages and by participation in the True Whig Party (TWP). The TWP, the Americo-Liberians' ultimate source of wealth, status and employment, governed Liberia for over a century.

Under the rule of the settlers, indigenous Liberians were treated as second-class citizens. Although comprising over 95% of

the population, they were consistently excluded from the decision-making processes that affected their lives. This situation was improved to some extent during the rule of William Tubman (1947-71), in which the property rights qualifications which had disenfranchised the masses were removed (Clapham, 1976; 1978; Lowenkopf, 1976; Justice and Peace Commission, 1994). The government of William Tolbert (1971-80) continued to pursue integrationist policies, unifying the coastal settlements and indigenous hinterland, broadening participation in government and instituting an 'Open Door' policy that eventually brought a measure of development to the interior. These reforms were long overdue however and they soon gave vent to a deep well of resentment which erupted into full-scale violence in early 1980.

Thus while the civil war was sparked off by the excesses of the Doe regime, its roots run deep in Liberian history. The civil war can perhaps be seen as just one link in a long chain of events by which an exclusionary political establishment might one day be replaced with a more democratic order (Nelson, 1993). This, together with economic hardship, explains the popular euphoria that greeted both the 1980 coup and the NPFL invasion in 1989.

The Costs of War

The Liberian conflict is a striking example of contemporary warfare, involving the use of irregular armies and guerrilla tactics. Fighters use mostly light weapons, lack air cover and are bloodthirsty and unprofessional. Superstitious practices abound with masked fighters often clad in pyjamas, dressed as women and adorned with 'juju' (black magic) which is supposed to render them invisible, invincible or

bullet-proof (Riley, 1993). There have been several large-scale massacres, allegations of cannibalism, cases of pregnant women disembowelled, and ethnocidal killings carried out by all parties (Ellis, 1995; Africa Watch, 1990; 1991). The rape and sexual abuse of women and girls has also been widespread.

Among the many flagrant human rights violations, abuse of children has been especially common. Various estimates put the total number of Liberian soldiers below the age of 15 at around 6,000, approximately 10 per cent of all fighters. It is further estimated that around 20 per cent of the militias are between the ages of 15 and 17 (Human Rights Watch, 1994). Child soldiers have engaged in various forms of imitative violence inculcated from routine exposure to brutality, reinforced by repeated showings of 'Rambo' and 'Kung Fu' videos, and further facilitated by the regular abuse of drugs (Richards, 1995). The World Health Organisation (WHO) reported in 1994 that nearly two thirds of high school students in Liberia had seen someone killed, tortured or raped and that 77 per cent had lost a close relative. Trauma on this scale leaves deep scars on a country's collective psyche. It is this high human cost of the war that many see as the greatest challenge for the healing process of the twenty-first century (Sesay, 1996b).

While the factions have exploited Liberia's natural resources throughout the war, the long-term decline of the formal economy has intensified rapidly, further undermining state revenues. This collapse of state and economy has both reflected and reinforced a comprehensive destruction of Liberian infrastructure. Basic amenities such as electricity, water supply and medical services have broken down and many Liberians have come to

depend on international relief for their subsistence. Because the official export sector has been dormant, foreign exchange has also become scarce, its availability depending crucially on expatriates such as ECOMOG, the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) and relief workers. The security situation has further affected transhipment activity, as insurance rates for ships docking in Monrovia have risen dramatically. Those ships that have managed to dock have often had to depart without cargo. In short, Monrovia's traditional attraction as a 'free port' has been hit hard.

A final devastating impact of the war has been the massive displacement of Liberia's population. In early 1995, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) put the figures at over 850,000 refugees across West Africa (471,100 in Guinea, 360,000 in Cote d'Ivoire, 16,000 in Sierra Leone, 14,000 in Ghana and 4,200 in Nigeria), with over a million internally displaced and 150,000 dead. While these figures are very rough estimates, it is clear that the displaced represent a significant majority of Liberia's 2.6 million pre-war population. Moreover, the process of displacement is continuous and ongoing, with the recent bloodshed in Monrovia providing fresh impetus (UNHCR, 1995; Ruiz, 1992).

Conflict Dynamics

Factional proliferation

As the Liberian conflict has progressed, the number of warring factions has grown from two to as many as eight. On occasion, factions have splintered due to internal tensions arising from a complex mix of strategic differences and personality clashes. Prince Yormie Johnson, for

example, broke from the NPFL in 1990 due to profound personal differences with Taylor. The official position of his Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) was that the split had emerged from arguments over the ultimate goals of the rebel movement. Johnson's propaganda slogan was the 'gun that liberates should not rule' (Johnson, 1991), a direct challenge to Taylor's openly expressed presidential ambitions. Internal dissent within the NPFL resurfaced in 1994, when another breakaway group, the NPFL Central Revolutionary Council (NPFL-CRC), was formed. The leaders, mostly founders of the parent organisation, such as Tom Woewiyu, Sam Dokie and Lavell Supuwood, voiced

> *'All of Liberia's current ethnic feuds started at the top and spread downwards. To a great extent, all have been manufactured by people hungry for power, using violence as a means of political recruitment.'*
>
> *- Stephen Ellis, Afrikastudiecentrum, Leiden, Netherlands, 1995*

concern over its lack of direction and vision, and about Taylor's abandonment of his supposed ideals.

Part of the explanation for the proliferation of factions also lies in the ethnic divisions that characterise the conflict. Ethnic identification in Liberia has always been significant but in recent years, it has become increasingly so as faction leaders have manipulated it to aid recruitment and mobilisation. The United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) was formed in Sierra Leone in 1991, comprising mostly Mandingo and Krahn refugees, many of whom had served in the AFL. Because of their national and

regional connections, ULIMO initially had the support of the AFL, the Sierra Leonean military government, and of key figures in the ECOMOG hierarchy. Its initial aims were to prevent Taylor from attaining power through the use of force and to protect the shared political interests of the Krahn, the Mandingo and their regional sponsors. By 1994 however, a split had occurred over the allocation of ULIMO posts in the Transitional Government. This led to the formation of a mostly Krahn wing led by Roosevelt Johnson (ULIMO-J) and a predominantly Mandingo faction under the leadership of Alhaji Kromah (ULIMO-K).

Later in the war, other factions emerged to defend ethnic and local interests, though often at the behest of the larger armed groups. The Lofa Defence Force (LDF), was one such faction, formed with NPFL co-operation to resist ULIMO aggression in Lofa County. The Bong Defence Force (BDF) was another, which had links with ULIMO-K. However, the most powerful of these new factions was the Liberia Peace Council (LPC), which emerged in October 1993 and is led by Dr. George Boley. The LPC, formed with the collaboration of top-level AFL and ECOMOG personnel, served mainly to protect Krahn interests, as the Mandingos in ULIMO were unwilling 'to spill blood to liberate Grand Gedeh (the county where most of the Krahn live)' from NPFL control (Human Rights Watch/Africa, 1994).

The spoils

Pre-war Liberia was an unusually rentier state, with most of its income coming from maritime services and from foreign exploitation of rubber, agricultural, forestry and mineral resources. Through their control of most of the country in the early years of the war, the NPFL denied the official government in Monrovia access to most of this income apart from that derived from shipping. In doing so, they undermined what remained of the pre-war state and, in its place, built their 'National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly Government' (NPRAG).

This alternative administration followed the logic of both Doe and the Americo-Liberians, 'privatising' Liberia's resources and remaining accountable to no one (Reno, 1995). According to allegations of corruption among civilian transitional leaders, the official wartime regimes in Monrovia were also not entirely averse to pursuing such a logic. The enduring ambition of most of the faction leaders is to succeed the transitional regimes into the presidential palace. Assuming peace is secured, such an ascendancy would guarantee total command of Liberia's resources and the amassing of wealth on a grand scale.

In the meantime however, faction leaders and their 'strongmen' have been engaged in an accumulation of personal wealth which itself forms a crucial dynamic of the conflict. There has been ruthless exploitation of Liberia's forestry, mineral and other natural resources for the purposes of self-enrichment and for the financing and arming of private militias.

'Greater Liberia', the countryside beyond Monrovia controlled for a long time by the NPFL, was practically run as a business. Some of Taylor's commercial links, especially in the early years of the war, were with the British and French firms involved in iron ore mining in the region. African Mining Consortium Ltd., a British firm, was reported to have paid him $10 million a month for permission to transport ore on an existing railroad.

French firms were also heavily involved in timber exports from the NPFL, largely through Cote d'Ivoire. In more recent years, smaller private firms have been willing to offer Taylor weapons, communications facilities and military training in return for access to timber that larger competitors were unwilling or unable to exploit. Diamonds illicitly mined in Sierra Leone, estimated at $100 million a year, have also found their way into the hands of various NPFL and ULIMO strongmen.

Even ECOMOG became involved in illicit business dealings after the capture of Buchanan from the NPFL in 1993. According to one source, 'they have concentrated on stripping the country of fixed assets - railroad stock, mining equipment, public utilities - and selling them abroad'. The LPC, with the backing of some Nigerian ECOMOG soldiers, operates a rubber plantation firm that exported about 3,000 tons of rubber through Buchanan in 1994, netting an estimated $1.5 million (Reno, 1993; 1996). These are the resources that have helped fuel the war and have made disarmament difficult.

'From 1990 to 1994, Liberia's diamond exports averaged 300 million dollars annually. During the same period, timber exports averaged 53 million dollars a year, and rubber exports 27 million dollars a year. Iron ore exported from 1990 to 1993 averaged almost 41 million dollars. Even taking into account the inevitable smuggling of some of these commodities, especially diamonds, discounts for trafficking in illegal products, and bribes to officials ... the sums of money available to faction leaders are still substantial.'

- William Twaddell, US State Department official, report to the Africa Sub-Committee of the House of Representatives, June 1996

Regional machinations

Given the large flows of refugees, the competitive jockeying between West African regional powers and the fact that economic activity and ethnic identification frequently blur national boundaries, it was always spurious to view the Liberian war as a purely internal matter. Indeed, in its very earliest days, the NPFL was a multinational force, composed of exiled dissidents from across the region who threatened to export Taylor's 'revolution' to neighbouring states once success had been achieved in Liberia. What also became public knowledge early on was that the NPFL had received support from Libya, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire. Libya had provided weapons, military training and oil, Burkina Faso had contributed men and training facilities, while Cote d'Ivoire was the major conduit for supplies and reinforcements.

In 1991, the war spilled into Sierra Leone where NPFL-backed rebels in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) launched an anti-government insurrection. By this time, the swift manner in which the NPFL had over-run Liberia and the possibility of a domino effect had already helped spur a forceful regional intervention in the crisis. This intervention, spearheaded by ECOMOG, was largely the initiative of the nervous anglophone powers.

International Responses

Especially through the early months, the regional politics of the Liberian conflict helped shape the nature of external responses. For instance, Taylor's Libyan connections significantly damaged his profile in Washington while his Ivorian links increased his standing with the

French. However, international responses must also be understood against the backdrop of the dramatic global events in and around 1989. The end of the Cold War occasioned a shift in the West's strategic interests and with it, a decline of interest in sub-Saharan Africa. Marginalisation of Africa in the so-called 'new world order' meant that Liberia's conflict can be said to have occurred at inauspicious times. The contemporaneous crisis in the Persian Gulf also helped determine that the external intervention which did occur was either too little or too late (Riley, 1993).

United States' response

Due to its unique history, pre-war Liberia had long enjoyed the friendship and beneficence of the United States. Because of this history, the presence of a large US military and intelligence network in the country, and its close links with Israel, Liberia attracted substantial US aid between 1980 and 1988, amounting to around $500 million. By the outbreak of the war however, the special bond between the US and Liberia had weakened substantially. This was partly due to US exasperation at Doe's authoritarianism, ineptitude and corruption, but mostly reflected the shifting strategic priorities of the incipient post-Cold War era. As the war erupted, it soon became clear that the US would not intervene to secure its former protege. This came as both a surprise and an utter disappointment to most Liberians (Keppel, 1986).

There have been allegations of various forms of covert US involvement in the Liberian conflict. US Rangers, along with Israelis, are reported to have actively engaged with Taylor's forces in the early stages of the war while later on, it has been suggested that the US shared military intelligence with the NPFL. However, both the Bush and Clinton administrations have officially taken the view that the conflict is largely an internal matter that requires an African solution. While individual statesmen, such as Jesse Jackson, Herman Cohen and former President Jimmy Carter have made sincere, if unsuccessful, attempts to mediate in the conflict, the most dramatic US response to date has been the rapid evacuation of its citizens and other expatriates from Monrovia. This occurred at the outbreak of war in the city in 1990, and again following the renewed fighting of April 1996.

While the US has remained highly wary of direct involvement, it has been of assistance in other respects. It has contributed an average US$10 million a year to ECOMOG, and has pledged an additional $30 million in 1996. It has also disbursed around US$440 million in relief aid, largely through the UN and international NGOs, and has pledged an additional US$75 million for post-war reconstruction (*West Africa*, 6/11/95). In the wake of the April 1996 debacle, the Clinton administration has come under increasing pressure from the US-based Friends of Liberia (FOL), from the Black Caucus and other lobby groups to adopt a more proactive policy on Liberia. This co-incided with the setting up the US-led International Contact Group on Liberia (ICGL), involving a range of donor countries concerned with bringing peace to Liberia, and with a slight raising of the US profile in ECOWAS negotiations.

Role of the United Nations

The United Nations, which appeared to have regained potency after the end of the

Cold War, was constrained from embarking on direct intervention in Liberia largely due to the burgeoning demands of its existing peacekeeping operations. However, lack of resources does not fully account for the UN's initial inaction. The fact is that for more than a year from the start of the fighting, African countries frustrated every attempt of the UN Security Council to meet and discuss the crisis. Cote d'Ivoire was particularly resistant to discussions, while Zaire and Ethiopia were also obstructive, reluctant to allow a precedent for intervention that in time might be applicable to them (Wippman, 1993).

The UN's first significant intervention came three years into the conflict, when the Security Council passed Resolution 788 in November 1992 following the NPFL's second major assault on Monrovia. This resolution supported the arms embargo imposed by ECOWAS on the warring factions and opened the way for what has since been a small but significant UN presence. During UN-assisted talks which culminated in the signing of the Cotonou Accord in July 1993, a technical team recommended the establishment of a UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL). Since its deployment in late 1993, UNOMIL's mandate has been renewed several times, despite threats of withdrawal as late as 1996. Always headed by a Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), first Trevor

'Quite frankly, I think the issue of Liberia could have been taken care of a much longer time ago, if we had enjoyed a little bit more assistance from the UN as well as the western community.'

- Jerry Rawlings, President of Ghana, May 1996

Gordon-Somers and then Anthony Nyakyi, the principal objective of the mission has been to monitor and assist ECOMOG in the process of encampment, disarmament and demobilisation. While it was originally mandated to employ around 400 observers, UNOMIL was at full strength for just nine months during 1994. Since 43 of its number were detained and terrorised by NPFL fighters in September of that year, it has operated at around quarter strength. Deployment outside Monrovia has been partial and sporadic.

The Organisation of African Unity and Liberia

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was alarmed by the scale of the humanitarian crisis in Liberia in 1990, but lacked both the will and capacity to intervene (Aning, 1994). Therefore, like the UN, it ignored charges from within West Africa that the ECOMOG intervention lacked legality, arguing that the principle of non-interference enshrined in its charter does not excuse indifference to such magnitudes of disaster. In time, the OAU nominated an 'Eminent Person' for Liberia to help in the search for peace. This representative, the former Zimbabwean President Reverend Canaan Banana, has played a significant role in the diplomatic efforts from the Cotonou Accord onwards. He also facilitated troop contributions to ECOMOG from two non-ECOWAS countries, Uganda and Tanzania. However, troops from these countries pulled out of Liberia in the summer of 1995, after just 18 months service, due to international reluctance to sustain their costs. On the whole, the role of the OAU in the peace process has been marginal, symbolic and limited to support for ECOWAS and UN initiatives.

Humanitarian responses

In the early months of the war, the security situation in Liberia largely prevented international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) from providing food and shelter to the displaced and starving. By late 1990 however, ECOMOG intervention had allowed for some international organisations, together with a sizeable number of Liberian NGOs, to engage in humanitarian relief assistance in Monrovia. By 1992, local and international NGOs had expanded beyond the capital and were operating in at least nine of Liberia's 13 counties, most of which were under the control of the NPFL. By 1995, the number of operational INGOs had increased from four to 18, while the humanitarian efforts of the UN involved no less than nine separate agencies. Following widespread looting and arson in April 1996, most aid workers withdrew from Liberia. Since then, foreign humanitarian agencies have operated a co-ordinated policy of performing only 'limited, life-saving' operations in protest at factional harassment.

Humanitarian activities have included the building of shelters and latrines, the digging of wells and the provision of food and clothing to indigent Liberians both within the country and in the region's

> '*S*ome NGOs and UN-related agencies ... have been too readily prepared to play by rules set by warring factions in order to reach target groups, and in so doing, have reached an accommodation which has unwittingly assisted in sustaining warring factions and continuing the war.'
>
> *- Amos Sawyer, President of Liberia's Interim Government of National Unity (1990-94), July 1996*

refugee settlements. Such activities have played a great role in protecting lives, stabilising explosive situations, giving succour to traumatised populations, and facilitating post-war reconstruction. However, they have also had a number of negative consequences. They have helped institutionalise dependency, caused notable ecological damage, and have sometimes provided resources and legitimacy to armed factions. Humanitarian agencies have also been criticised for engaging only in relief activity, rather than rehabilitation and development.

ECOMOG and Peacekeeping

As the international community failed to take rapid and meaningful steps to contain the carnage in Liberia, responsibility for direct intervention fell on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In May 1990, ECOWAS convened a Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) which soon assumed the primary role in the peace process. By the end of August, the SMC had established and deployed ECOMOG and organised a national conference which duly elected the civilian Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) headed by the academic-politician, Amos Sawyer.

Originally, ECOMOG was intended to monitor a ceasefire which had yet to be signed by the NPFL at the time of deployment. However, they soon adopted a peace enforcement posture after the execution of Doe in September 1990, repelling the NPFL and securing Monrovia for the IGNU accession. Although ECOWAS protocols on non-aggression and mutual defence seemed to provide the legal basis for ECOMOG intervention in Liberia, it was nonetheless an

unprecedented initiative. ECOMOG was the first example in the world of a 'regional' peacekeeping force sent in to oversee the resolution of an internal armed conflict.

Rationale for intervention

The arrival of ECOMOG in Liberia is partly explained by ECOWAS' stated concern at the scale of the humanitarian disaster and the possibility of fighting spilling over Liberia's borders diffusing weapons and instability throughout West Africa. However, regional political dynamics are also revealing in understanding the rationale behind the ECOMOG initiative.

The West African states that formed the original ECOMOG were all governed by leaders that came to power through military coups d'etat, headed single-party governments, or demonstrated a tendency to hold on to power perpetually. They were President Dawda Jawara of The Gambia, Ghana's Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, General Lansana Conte of Guinea, Nigeria's General Ibrahim Babangida and Major-General Joseph Momoh of Sierra Leone. As a civilian-led movement, the NPFL had mobilised adequate human resources and military materiel to effectively topple a government. This aroused fears of a regional domino effect which spurred the 'unholy alliance' of reactionary rulers (Sesay, 1995) to resist the forces of change embodied in the NPFL. They did this forcefully, immediately collaborating with the AFL and the INPFL to prevent Taylor from taking Monrovia.

The initial deployment of ECOMOG also brought into focus the sharp rivalries between the region's anglophone and francophone countries. President Tolbert (1971-80) had established strong links between the Liberian state and the francophone axis dominated by Cote d'Ivoire. By executing Tolbert and members of his family and inner circle, Doe broke these ties spectacularly, and subsequently forged a close alliance with Babangida's Nigeria. With Ivorian and Burkinabe backing, the NPFL incursion threatened to shift the balance of power back in favour of the francophones. Considering this, ECOMOG can be seen partly as an Nigerian/anglophone attempt to defend its regional profile.

The SMC was certainly dominated by the anglophones and ECOMOG, opposed by Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, reflected this. From the outset, the force has been guided largely by the Nigerians, who have provided around 70% of its human, financial (estimated at $4 billion since 1990) and military resources. Togo and Mali, both members of the SMC, initially refused to send troops to Liberia, and the only francophone country involved at this stage was Guinea, which bore the brunt of Liberia's refugee problem. Later in the conflict, Senegal, Mali, Tanzania and Uganda did deploy troops after successive internationally-sanctioned bids to dilute Nigerian dominance. However, only the Malians have maintained a sustained presence. The Senegalese quickly pulled out when six of their soldiers were killed by the NPFL.

Peacekeeping 'success'

It is generally believed that the success of military peacekeeping relies on an attitude of impartiality, on trained and experienced multinational troops and on a commitment to use force only in self-defence. Also essential are adequate and reliable sources of finance, a clear and practicable mandate and the continued

support of the UN Security Council, the only body that can effectively authorize such an intervention. The consent of all, and an invitation from at least one of the warring parties is also desirable.

At the time of deployment, it is questionable whether ECOMOG conformed with any of these principles. Firstly, its peace-keeping mandate was clearly problematic in August 1990 when there was no comprehensive ceasefire to monitor. Second, it is unclear whether ECOMOG deployment was invited by any of the warring groups, although it is certain that the AFL and INPFL later welcomed the initiative. Third, intervention was undertaken despite some awareness of the huge financial outlays to be incurred by the participating countries and the hostile domestic reaction these were bound to provoke (Sesay, 1996a). Fourthly, ECOWAS lacked a standing force that was trained and experienced in peacekeeping and, unlike the UN, could not appeal to member states who did have such capacity. Fifth, although later resolutions did support ECOMOG, the initial deployment of the force had no Security Council approval.

Moreover, in view of the composition of ECOMOG and the variety of regional and political interests at play, its ability to remain neutral was hotly debated from the outset. Immediately after its deployment, ECOMOG efforts to secure Monrovia involved collaboration with warring factions against the NPFL. Things came to a head in October 1992 when Nigerian Alpha jets strafed NPFL positions around the capital, and bombed the rebels out of Buchanan right back to their headquarters in Gbarnga. Reports from this time also confirm that ECOMOG supplied ULIMO with weapons, other forms of military materiel and financial resources in return for intelligence on the Liberian terrain and NPFL movements. Events such as these spurred US ex-President Jimmy Carter to remark in 1993 that ECOMOG had ceased to be neutral and had become a combatant in the conflict. Such comments quickly became a propaganda tool for Taylor who had been calling for a neutral UN force to replace ECOMOG. Taylor's protestations were accommodated to some degree in the Cotonou Accord which provided for the expansion of ECOMOG and the establishment of UNOMIL in December 1993.

ECOMOG composition for anti-NPFL 'peace enforcement' (1992-93) and 'impartial' peace-keeping activities either side of the July 1993 Cotonou Accord

Country	No of troops	% of total Feb 93	No of troops	% of total June 94	% of officers
Nigeria	9,000	75%	7,931	68%	57%
Ghana	1,500	13%	1,121	10%	9%
Uganda	-	-	784	7%	7%
Tanzania	-	-	774	7%	5%
Sierra Leone	700	6%	364	3%	2%
Guinea	600	5%	580	5%	18%
Gambia	150	1%	10	-	-
Mali	6	-	10	-	-
TOTAL	11,956	100	11,574	100	100

To its great credit, ECOMOG has generally managed to provide a semblance of order in Monrovia. At least until April 1996, the capital consistently accommodated a functioning 'civil society', including independent media, church and human rights groups. Moreover, as intra-ECOWAS agendas have converged, as the international community has been drawn into the peace process and as diplomacy has sought to accommodate the major factions, the force has assumed a broad authority which was absent at its deployment.

However, despite its considerable military and peace-keeping successes, ECOMOG's professionalism and neutrality have consistently been questioned. The force also remains seriously under-resourced, notwithstanding substantial new pledges of international support.

The Diplomatic Peace Process

ECOMOG peacekeeping has been paralleled and complemented by a vigorous, if sporadic, diplomatic peace process. This process has involved peace talks in several capitals across the region, as well as in Europe. Within and outside Liberia, national conferences have also been convened by Liberian civilian leaders. It is these conferences, with the active support of ECOWAS, the UN, US and OAU, that have produced interim civilian leaders. These have included Dr. Amos

'ECOMOG troops have been heavily involved since the day they arrived in ripping off Liberians, in looting goods, in dealing in contraband.'

- US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns, 1996

Sawyer, head of IGNU from 1990 to 1994, Professor David Kpomakpor, chair of the Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG) between March 1994 to August 1995, and Professor Wilton Sankawulo, chair of the LNTG from September 1995 until August 1996. While variously involved in ECOWAS diplomacy, these provisional governments have not been able to exert significant autonomous political authority. The writ of IGNU scarcely extended beyond the outskirts of the capital and its basic security was determined largely by ECOMOG. On the other hand, the LNTG has not yet been able to function as an effective unified administration.

Early efforts

In May 1990, before fighting had reached Monrovia, peace efforts were being co-ordinated by the Liberian Inter-Faith Mediation Committee (IFMC). In June, this committee convened week-long talks between Doe's government and the NPFL at the US embassy in Freetown, Sierra Leone. These early meetings foundered due to palpable intransigence on the part of the two main parties. Having reduced the writ of the government to the capital alone, a buoyant Taylor was poised to accept a political solution, but demanded as a pre-condition Doe's unconditional resignation. Cocooned in the Executive Mansion, Doe for his part refused to step down. This standoff culminated in an NPFL boycott of the talks and an escalation of hostilities. In August 1990, the SMC adopted IFMC proposals as the ECOWAS peace plan and proceeded, without NPFL approval, to deploy ECOMOG and install IGNU.

While ECOMOG's forceful intervention militarised the search for peace in Liberia,

the diplomatic option was never abandoned. With the support of the UN, OAU and the US, ECOWAS got the warring parties to sign a range of agreements as a prelude to conducting elections. The most significant of the earlier accords were the Bamako Ceasefire Agreement (November 1990), the Yamoussoukro I Accord (June 1991) and the Yamoussoukro IV Accord (October 1991). The first and the second of these brought the NPFL back to the negotiating table after periods of absence, while the third established comprehensive modalities for encampment, demobilisation and elections.

The collapse of these early accords is explained largely by the ambivalent commitment to a negotiated solution exhibited by all parties. While a signatory to all the accords, Taylor was not averse to employing the breathing space occasioned by peace negotiations to rearm and relaunch his military operations. Similarly the AFL, supported by elements within ECOMOG, collaborated in the formation of ULIMO in the belief that, together, they might defeat the NPFL militarily. It was only a series of factors, including the high cost of ECOMOG 'peace enforcement', Nigeria's deteriorating domestic situation, the NPFL's commercial and territorial losses, and the death of Ivorian President Houphouet-Boigny, which united ECOWAS behind the diplomatic process and softened the confrontational approach of all parties.

Fresh impetus

The Yamoussoukro IV accord collapsed after the NPFL launched its second bid to capture Monrovia in October 1992. After this, the peace process lay dormant for several months before renewed ECOWAS

and UN negotiations engineered the Cotonou Accord of July 1993.

The most comprehensive of all the Liberian accords, Cotonou formed the basis for subsequent agreements in Akosombo, Accra and Abuja. It provided for the expansion of ECOMOG, the formation of UNOMIL, and a range of mechanisms for observing and monitoring ceasefires. It also set out mechanisms for the encampment, disarmament and demobilisation of combatants, stipulated procedures for conducting general elections and provided for the establishment of the LNTG and an executive Council of State involving representatives of the key factions. (Alao, 1994; Mackinlay and Alao, 1994). However, despite the installation of the first LNTG in March 1994, inter- and intra- factional disputes continued concerning the allocation of government posts. Moreover, despite significant deployment of peace-keepers outside Monrovia, new factions continued to emerge and existing ones continued to defend their territorial and commercial interests. Numerous ceasefire violations ensued, stalling and halting meaningful disarmament.

In August 1994 Ghana's President, Jerry Rawlings, took over the ECOWAS chair. His determination to resolve the conflict gave fresh momentum to the peace process which by then was effectively stalled. He spoke of the growing costs and political unpopularity of the ECOMOG operation, warning the factions that unless they showed credible commitment to ending the conflict, ECOWAS troops would be withdrawn. Rawlings' initiative soon produced the Akosombo Accord and the Accra Clarification, both of which reaffirmed and developed the principles of the Cotonou Accord, drawing the factions closer to the heart of the LNTG.

However, the signing of the Akosombo agreement coincided with the convening of the civilian Liberia National Conference (LNC) which made new proposals for disarmament and the demilitarisation of Liberian politics. The Akosombo and Accra agreements were rejected by the LNC, and by individual religious groups, human rights agencies and political parties. All these groups perceived the agreements as legitimising criminality and effectively partitioning the country between the armed factions. Nigeria was also suspicious of the new developments, perceiving a degree of Ghanaian/NPFL collaboration which was sidelining them in the peace process. Regardless of their intended aims, the Akosombo and Accra Accords failed to halt the factional wrangling over government posts, nor did they significantly stem the violence in the provinces.

The early accords suffered from a terminal lack of commitment from all parties

The Abuja Accord

With the help of international non-governmental organisations, Rawlings eventually secured a rapprochement between Taylor and the new Nigerian government of General Sani Abacha. This helped lay the groundwork for the signing of the Abuja Accord on 19 August 1995.

One significant departure from previous agreements was that the Abuja Accord brought the leaders of the major warring factions into government as members of the six-man Council of State which headed LNTG II. The council, installed on 1st September 1995, was chaired by Professor Wilton Sankawulo, an English literature lecturer from the University of Liberia. The equal vice-chairmen were the faction leaders Charles Taylor, Alhaji Kromah (ULIMO-K) and Dr. George Boley (LPC-Coalition), and two civilian representatives. The civilians were Oscar Quiah, representing the LNC, and Chief Tamba Tailor, an octogenarian traditional leader nominated by ULIMO-K and the NPFL. Another change from earlier agreements was that the Abuja Accord permitted the leaders of the warring factions to contest the presidential elections scheduled for August 1996. Its only condition on presidential candidates was that they resign their LNTG positions three months before standing.

The Abuja Accord raised great hopes in Liberia and its announcement led to wild excitement in the capital. This euphoria was heightened by Taylor's announcement through various local and international media that he was returning from Nigeria to tell his fighters that they should lay down their arms. Taylor himself was greeted by jubilant crowds when, for the first time since the outbreak of the war, he entered Monrovia on 31 August 1995.

Like previous agreements, however, the Abuja Accord was flawed in its conception. Pundits in Monrovia expressed alarm that it permitted faction leaders to enter Monrovia with their militias and artillery intact. They also voiced reservations concerning the composition of the Council of State. On the one hand, there was widespread scepticism concerning the authority and political acumen of Sankawulo and Tamba Tailor, both of whom had been appointed under pressure from the NPFL. On the other, doubts were raised as to whether Boley could

Liberia National Transitional Government
September 1995

Council of State:

Prof. Wilton Sankawulo	Chairman
Dr. George Boley (LPC)	Vice Chairman
Charles Taylor (NPFL)	Vice Chairman
Alhaji Kromah (ULIMO-K)	Vice-Chairman
Oscar Quiah (LNC)	Vice-Chairman
Chief Tamba Tailor	Vice-Chairman

Cabinet:

Momulu Sirleaf (NPFL), Foreign Affairs
Lansana Kromah (ULIMO-K), Finance
Francis Garlawolo (NPFL), Justice
Varlee Keita (ULIMO-K), Public Works
Losseni Kamara (ULIMO-K), Commerce and Industries
Moses Bah (LPC), Education
Dr. Roland Massaquoi (NPFL), Agriculture
Victoria Refell (NPFL), Information
Alfred Kollie (LPC), Post and Telecommunications
Francois Massaquoi (LDF), Youth and Sports
Jenkins Dunbar (NPFL), Lands, Mines and Energy
Nanjohn Suah (NPFL), Internal Affairs
Tom Woewiyu (CRC-NPFL), Labour
Dr. Vamba Kanneh (ULIMO-K), Health
Lt. Gen Hezekiah Bowen (AFL), Defence
Monie R. Captan (LPC), Presidential Affairs
Bai M. Gbala (LPC), Minister without portfolio
Dr. Armah Youlo (LPC), Transport
Francis M. Carbah (LDF), Planning & Economic Affairs
Roosevelt Johnson (ULIMO-J), Rural Development

adequately represent the combined interests of the LPC, ULIMO-J, NPFL-CRC and LDF, the so-called 'coalition' of factions which had emerged since the Cotonou accord. Considering the idea was to co-opt all leaders with the potential to wreck the peace, the exclusion of ULIMO-J commander Roosevelt Johnson was particularly puzzling.

In addition, major criticism was also levelled at the broad policy of assigning key executive positions to the various armed factions. This led to appointments to government positions and the public services based on factional and ethnic affiliation, a phenomenon which had fuelled the war in the first place. The local press and religious groups have especially argued that such appointments will serve only the narrow interests of the faction leaders, and not the purposes of national reconciliation.

In view of the weaknesses in the Abuja Accord, it is not surprising that fighting erupted, this time in the capital, in April 1996. In the months preceding the resumption of hostilities, the Council of State had been deeply divided by differences over interpretations of fundamental issues in the peace process. As feared, Sankawulo had proved broadly incapable of asserting his authority over his fellow council-men, creating the public impression that 'there is more than one government' in Monrovia (*West Africa*, 19/2/96).

In effect, the council had come to be dominated by the faction leaders, with Taylor and Kromah increasingly allied and the former gradually claiming de facto chairmanship. On 29 January 1996, Taylor celebrated his birthday with pomp, pageantry and long speeches. Those who attended eventually dispersed and began to talk of Taylor as 'the leader' (*Africa Confidential*, 16/2/96). He subsequently suggested changing the name of the LNTG by dropping the word 'transitional', made calls for ECOMOG to be brought under LNTG control, and canvassed support for these proposals from the diplomatic community. Prior to that, Taylor had cracked down on the independent press and on Krahn dissidents with the help of the NPFL-controlled police force.

Civic Peacemaking

A glaring omission in most analyses of the Liberian war is the role played by unarmed civic agencies in promoting and critiquing the peace process. The focus on factional, state and international actors has led to the marginalisation of these efforts which deserve a place in the history books.

The Inter-Faith Mediation Committee

Among civic groups, the most influential in the peace process has been the Inter-Faith Mediation Committee (IFMC). This organisation, comprising prominent Christian and Muslim leaders, convened the first consultations between the representatives of Doe, Taylor and the AFL in June 1990. Two months later, their proposals were adopted and articulated as the original ECOWAS peace plan. Ever since this early involvement, the IFMC has been pivotal in bringing parties together, in organising conferences at home and abroad, and in helping to set agendas for these meetings. It was also represented in many of the peace negotiations across West Africa and has been a leading critic of the flaws in the accords. In March 1995 and February 1996, the IFMC led successful 'sit-home' strikes in protest at agreements they felt rewarded the leaders of warring factions. The second of these led to the formation of the Civic Disarmament Campaign (CDC) for which the Committee serves as an umbrella organisation for a broad range of civic

Non-governmental self-help organisations
by Philippa Atkinson

The growth of self-help relief organisations has been one of the more positive phenomena to have emerged through the Liberian war. Specific self-help organisations include;

National Volunteer Programme (NVP)
Under this scheme, devised by local people and supported by UN agencies and international NGOs, over 1,500 former combatants became involved in activities from road clearing on the Monrovia-Gbarnga highway, agricultural training and production, rubbish collection in Monrovia, education and vocational training. The majority of projects were small-scale, and implemented by local NGOs and government agencies. All of the projects were run through the provision of food-for-work, which provided an incentive for attendance. The scheme was discontinued partly due to the failure of the Cotonou Accord which it was supposed to support.

Special Emergency Life Food (SELF)
SELF was set up in Monrovia during the early part of the war with the express aim of taking responsibility within Liberia for the resolution of problems relating to the conflict. SELF devised a system of enumerating households and individuals that ensured that food aid could be delivered to the population of Monrovia as soon as it was available at the port. The SELF system of household, street and community level organisation was later extended beyond the delivery of food aid to include any type of development or reconstruction activity that could be fostered at a local level. Through its close contact with the World Food Programme (WFP), SELF has been able to get support in terms of food-for-work and management back-up for the implementation of projects including the rehabilitation of local schools, the cleaning of sewerage systems, and the building of latrines. The community welfare teams established through SELF follow careful guidelines for participation, decision-making and conflict resolution and have become one important channel for dealing with the traumas of the war and promoting local development. The WFP country director described SELF as 'the best local implementing partner we have ever worked with'.

actors. Some of the fundamental issues of interest to the IFMC remain the polarisation of Liberian society along ethnic lines, the intransigence of warring factions to disarm and the issues of justice and retribution in post-war Liberia. It continues to play a crucial role in both advocating peace and delivering social services.

Women's organisations

Among the range of atrocities endured by the Liberian population, women have been the specific target for rape, sexual abuse and harassment. Together with children, they also constitute the bulk of refugees and are overall the greatest losers in the conflict. Women activists coordinated their responses to this suffering through a national organization, the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI). The LWI has been instrumental in drawing local and international attention to the plight of women, in organising women's responses to overseas relief, in channeling the views of women to national and international mediators and in representing women in local, national and international peace negotiations. In a lot of cases, women have assumed leadership roles demonstrating immense resilience, fortitude and wisdom. This could contribute to an irreversible change in the role and perception of women in Liberian society.

Interest Groups and NGOs

Interest groups and local NGOs have also made significant contributions to the search for peace. The association of Interest Groups of Liberia (IGL), headed by Dr. Togba-Nah Tipoteh, has played a key role in organising a range of professional bodies serving teachers, legal workers,

drivers, traders and farmers whose combined efforts were crucial to the organisation of the two 'sit-home' strikes. In daily operations and through delegations at several major conferences, the IGL has identified the demilitarisation of Liberian society as key to conflict resolution and national reconciliation. It also provides an important model of grassroots democracy which will prove essential in post-war Liberia.

Two other prominent examples of local NGOs are Susukuu, a development agency also headed by Tipoteh, and the Special Emergency Life Food Programme (SELF). Although in existence well before the war, Susukuu has assumed an additional role complementing international efforts at disarmament. It does this by sponsoring ex-combatants for training in schools, colleges and technical institutes. SELF, for its part, is a local organisation concerned with relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. It was established in September 1990 to help ensure an orderly distribution of relief aid from abroad (see box). More recently, its major efforts have been geared towards the organisation and sensitization of local communities for effective participation in the post-war governance of Liberia.

# Bringing Peace to Liberia

Complexities in the Peace Process

Taylor's ambition

The difficulties encountered in the Liberian peace process emerge from the complex interplay of a plethora of factors. Some analyses (Sesay, 1996b) focus on the pivotal position of Charles Taylor. For a long time, Taylor's signing of ceasefire agreements and accords did not indicate a serious commitment to a political solution. His involvement in negotiations was generally secured only under intense military or diplomatic pressure and his adherence to peace agreements was conditional on their not obstructing his presidential aspirations. Taylor's refusal to recognise the IGNU frustrated the earliest peace efforts of 1990-91. It was also his decision to launch 'Operation Octopus', which brought about the collapse of the Yamoussoukro process and his all-out military confrontation with ECOMOG.

Official appeasement

On the other hand, despite two episodes of vigorous anti-NPFL 'peace enforcement', ECOWAS has repeatedly appeased and accommodated the warring factions. With an interest in ending the war quickly, it has particularly acceded to NPFL demands, providing for the expansion of ECOMOG, the involvement of UNOMIL and the replacement of IGNU with a transitional government increasingly dominated by the more powerful factions.
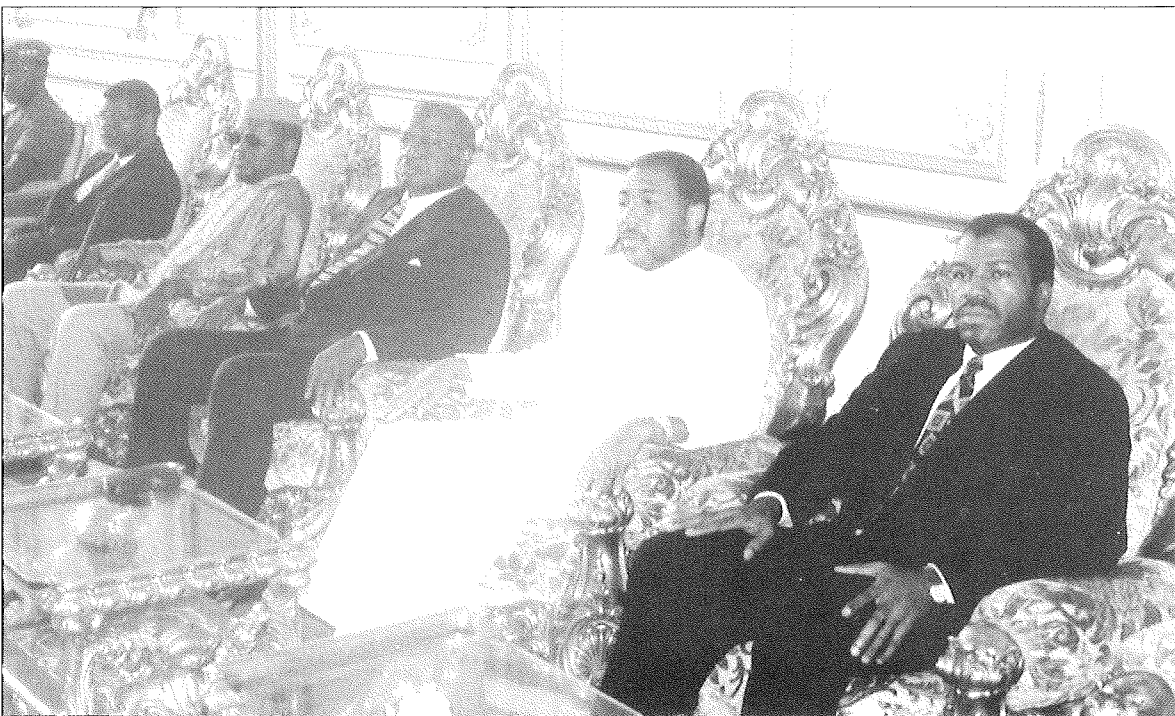
Members of the LNTG Council of State at their inauguration in September 1995 (l to r: Oscar Quiah (LNC), Alhaji Kromah (ULIMO-K), Wilton Sankawulo, Charles Taylor (NPFL), and George Boley (LPC))

Although all these concessions seem to have removed major obstacles to progress, they have not brought an end to the war in Liberia. This is due partly to failures of implementation. ECOMOG continues to be an under-staffed, under-resourced, Nigerian-dominated force, while UNOMIL has been severely under-strength for almost two years. However, and perhaps more importantly, bringing faction leaders into government has been fraught with difficulties. From the outset, the LNTG has been riven by violent squabbling within and between factions concerning the allocation of key posts in the Council of State, the cabinet and the parastatals.

'New' factions

The proliferation of warring factions has obstructed peace for at least three inter-related reasons. First, it has led to a wide diffusion of arms across the country and to an increase in the total number of combatants which has immensely complicated the process of disarmament. Second, it has compounded the commercial dimension of the war as Liberia's natural wealth has been carved up and contested by increasing numbers of covetous warlords and strongmen. Third, the proliferation of warring factions has complicated diplomatic negotiations as agreements have had to be inclusive of and acceptable to an increasing number of interests. The Yamoussoukro, Cotonou, and Akosombo accords all collapsed largely because new groups were either left out or refused to attend peace talks.

'The thieves dilemma'

Violations of the Abuja accord in December 1995 and April 1996 can be traced ultimately to the marginalisation of Roosevelt Johnson and ULIMO-J within

the LNTG. Johnson's appointment as Minister of Rural Development and the faction's control of a number of minor ministries, public corporations and state enterprises was regarded within ULIMO-J as wildly inadequate. Trouble began in December when ECOMOG troops were deployed to disarm ULIMO-J fighters around rich diamond mining sites in Bomi and Lofa Counties. In response, fighters loyal to Johnson went on the rampage around the city of Tubmanburg, killing and capturing several ECOMOG soldiers and civilians, and destroying property in the process (*Africa Confidential*, 16/2/96; *The Economist*, 20/1/96; *West Africa*, 22/1/96).

These troubles culminated in the intense fighting of April 1996, after a LNTG commission of inquiry into the December disturbances found Johnson guilty of wanting to derail the peace process. This led to Johnson's dismissal as leader of ULIMO-J and his consequent suspension by the Council of State from his cabinet post.

'What we have in Liberia today is a classic case of the 'prisoner's dilemma', or shall we say 'thieves dilemma'. All armed groups are keenly aware that none has operated under any formal system of rules that is based on trust, honesty, principles, and respect for law and order. Indeed each leader has so much blood on his hands that none believes the others are capable of using power for the common good. Each is therefore likely to opt for the gun in the 'rational' belief that a first strike would give advantages or in the rather 'irrational' consolation that it is better to deny the prize to the enemy even if everybody dies in the process.'

- *Yusuf Bangura, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Geneva, April 1996*

Following intra-factional skirmishes outside his home, a police force backed by NPFL and ULIMO-K fighters was despatched by the Council of State to arrest Johnson on charges of murder. In response, ULIMO-J supporters rioted, provoking the worst fighting and looting in Monrovia since 1992. Significantly, Johnson loyalists were joined in resistance to the NPFL and ULIMO-K by their Krahn kinsmen in both the AFL and LPC.

The divided consensus

Regional politics has added a further dimension to the complexities of the peace process. For instance, progress was obstructed in 1991 when the Yamoussoukro agreements were interpreted in a number of anglophone states as an attempt by the late Ivorian President Felix Houphouet-Boigny to steal the peace-making spotlight from ECOMOG. These talks were generally welcomed by the NPFL, but snubbed by others, especially the Nigerians and some of their officers in ECOMOG. The role of intra-ECOWAS antagonism in undermining the earlier accords is explored in more detail above.

Since the institution of the 'Committee of nine' in October 1992, intra-ECOWAS agendas have harmonised substantially. However, regional power politics remained a factor even after Jerry Rawlings became ECOWAS Chairman in 1994. In a swift and rather surprising move, Rawlings developed some kind of friendship with Taylor, with whom he and senior Ghanaian officials held closed talks in various locations around West Africa. Although these talks injected fresh momentum into the peace process, there were reports of Nigerian unease. If successful, the Akosombo and Accra

accords would have added to Rawlings' stature as an international statesman and served as an indictment of Nigerian diplomacy. Aware of the crucial need to obtain broad support for any peace deal in Liberia, Rawlings changed tack and sought conciliation with the Nigerians. He eventually helped Taylor mend fences with the Abacha regime, paving the way for the signing of the Abuja Accord. The Taylor/Abacha rapprochement also secured a measure of continuity in the peace process when the chairmanship of ECOWAS transferred to Nigeria in August 1996.

Obstacles to disarmament

Possibly the thorniest issue for peace efforts in Liberia has been the encampment, disarmament and demobilisation of the estimated 60,000 combatants. The fearfully slow progress on disarmament is explained by a combination of factors. Firstly, mutual suspicion among faction leaders has not only destroyed agreements, but has also made unilateral disarmament impossible. Faction leaders have executed, or threatened to execute, war-weary fighters who have disarmed without permission, leading to deep scepticism concerning their professed commitment to peace. Despite years of trying, peace groups have not yet been able to construct effective inter-factional confidence-building measures.

Secondly, several years of fighting have created a gun culture that has become a source of livelihood for thousands of young men. In response to this, adequate economic resources are needed to create sustainable non-violent livelihoods which are attractive to fighters. The government in Monrovia, cut off from access to timber, minerals, rubber and iron ore, is ill-placed

financially to fund such a programme. Susukuu has been useful in trying to solicit funds from the public and overseas for this purpose, but has not come near to what is required for comprehensive disarmament to occur.

Despite US contributions averaging US$10 million a year (and renewed pledges of an additional $30 million), there are also problems regarding ECOMOG funding for disarmament. A donor conference on Liberia held in New York in October 1995 pledged just over US$100 million towards disarmament, reconstruction and democratisation. However, for comprehensive disarmament to have taken place ECOMOG needed strengthening from 7,000 to 12,000 troops, an increase which alone required US$133 million. Furthermore, for effective monitoring of the nine designated safe havens and the 12 assembly points, UNOMIL also needed enlarging by 42 observers, requiring a further US$62 million (*West Africa*, 6/11/95). These estimates make the current pledges look grossly inadequate.

Prospects for the demilitarisation of Liberian politics were further worsened by Taylor's words and actions in early 1996. By this time, he had recruited over 800

*I*n my latest conversations with President Soglo, .. I am finding that he has thrown up his hands over Liberia, deciding that Nigeria has taken over ECOMOG and that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is too divided to have a common policy for a peaceful resolution of the problem. Let them fight, he mutters often, until they are all exhausted.'

- *leaked memorandum from the US Ambassador in Cotonou, Benin to the State Department, October 27 1992*

fighters to the armed, NPFL-controlled national police force, a move widely interpreted as a measure to circumvent the requirement to disarm. Arguing that total disarmament in his circumstances is unknown in world history, Taylor has even suggested that disarmament should take place after elections. However, in the wake of the April fighting, he has backtracked from this hardline stance, committing to immediate, if partial, disarmament in response to censure from civic groups, other faction leaders, ECOWAS and the broader international community.

Lessons of War and Peace in Liberia

The Liberian civil war, like those in Angola, Sudan, Somalia and Burundi, has shown that people are prepared to go on fighting until they completely dissipate themselves, are defeated militarily, or perceive the possibility of furthering their interests by other means. As a result of this, peace accords like Liberia's often become just another means of pillage for those involved, while excluded players seek to ensure that nothing meaningful comes of negotiations. We are yet to see whether those who accepted the political framework and principles of the Abuja Accord will eventually accept its authority, but the recent violence in Monrovia is clearly a cause for pessimism.

In the meantime, the nature of the war, the unprecedented military intervention it has provoked and the tardy nature of the peace process offer much food for thought both for the international community and for Liberians themselves.

Lessons for peace-makers

There are a number of lessons to be drawn from the nature and consequences of the

regional intervention. While ECOWAS governments have been remarkably persistent with their initiative, their efforts, notably ECOMOG peacekeeping, have not always been as professional as they could have been. This is partly due to insufficient and inadequate resources. In addition however, efforts have also been frustrated when the interests of individual countries have been allowed to over-ride their common purpose of returning peace to Liberia. For a enterprise of this nature to accomplish more in the future, it requires greater regional co-operation, and more professional, better resourced and experienced forces.

Much could also be learnt of the positive role indigenous civic organisations can play in times of crisis. In the case of Liberia, religious groups, academics, women's organisations, the media, interest groups and other local NGOs managed to maintain a semblance of ordered civil society amidst the chaos. Their input also strengthened the peace efforts of international actors, while providing a conduit for constructive criticism. The main lesson here is that indigenous NGOs should be encouraged and assisted to improve their organisation, finances, and political standing to exert a greater positive influence on peace initiatives.

The annual budget of UNOMIL is equivalent to the cost of five days UN peace-keeping in the former Yugoslavia

Lessons for Liberians

For Liberians, the horrifying spectacle of a wrecked nation and the thought of the challenges to be faced in the next century, have provoked an intense debate on the need to mould a new Liberia. This process of national reconstruction will entail eliminating the deadly weapons currently diffused throughout the country, rethinking the basis of political practice over the last century and a half, revamping old institutions including the state, and creating new and more viable ones. To be effective, however, any revolution of Liberian society has to be built on a thorough transformation of social attitudes. There is an urgent need to shed off the sycophancy and self-delusions that have infected the average Liberian psyche (Enoanyi, 1990).

As an excellent starting point, most Liberians are beginning to see that increased self-reliance is required to reduce the consequences of disappointment at the hands of trusted friends and traditional benefactors. The manner in which faction leaders and politicians have manipulated ethnic identities, traditional loyalties, and youth and rural resentments has also helped to make Liberians more wary of demagogues, of people who mobilise popular feelings and prejudices for their own selfish ends. To consolidate these lessons, sincere efforts have already been initiated by local organisations to increase awareness of the destructive effects of 'tribalism' and to start addressing the need for a transparent, competitive and inclusive political system headed by a competent, caring, dedicated and truly national leadership (Dixon, 1992; Moniba, 1992). Ultimately, the future of Africa's oldest republic lies in the hands of the traumatised survivors of this vicious war and of their supporters in the international community. ∎