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The history of the civil war in Liberia

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Abstract
The Liberian Civil War, spanning two major phases between 1989 and 2003, remains one of the most harrowing chapters in West African history. This paper investigates the roots, trajectory, and aftermath of both conflicts, which were deeply embedded in Liberia's historical inequalities, ethnic divisions, and chronic political instability. The first war erupted in 1989 when Charles Taylor launched an armed rebellion against President Samuel Doe, plunging the country into chaos and ultimately resulting in the deaths of over 200,000 people and the displacement of millions. Although peace agreements temporarily halted the fighting, unresolved tensions led to the outbreak of a second civil war in 1999. This renewed violence only subsided with Taylor's resignation and exile in 2003, alongside the intervention of international peacekeeping forces. The study delves into the critical roles played by regional organizations like ECOWAS, the United Nations, and Liberia's transitional government in facilitating peace and laying the groundwork for national recovery. By exploring both the immediate and long-term effects of the war on Liberia's governance, economy, and society, this research sheds light on the complex challenges of rebuilding a nation and the enduring resilience of its people.

Keywords: Liberia, ECOWAS, West African history, complex challenges, history, civil war

1. Introduction
We conduct a broad analysis of the Liberian Civil War, an extremely protracted and devastating modern African war that lasted from 1989 to 2003. But like so often in history, the sudden, rapid rise and fall of a major empire sets off political instability and societal and economic disintegration. The problem of the section is the root causes of the conflict, the actor of the conflict, the international relations, the process of post-conflict recovery and especially the stages of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) in the process.
Of all the post-colonial wars in Africa, the Liberian Civil War was especially costly in human terms. The population at the time in the small country was about 2.1 million and more than 200,000 people were killed. Moreover, almost one million people were displaced, the majority of whom fled to neighboring countries (Kieh, 2009) [10]. The conflict began on 24 December 1989, when Charles Taylor initiated an armed insurgency from Côte d'Ivoire with the support of the Libyan government. The Gio and Mano ethnic groups in Nimba County were Taylor's group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), the main base of support.
The underlying causes of the war were deeply rooted in Liberia's historical ethnic and political divisions. Taylor's NPFL rose as a reaction to systemic marginalization faced by the Gio and Mano communities under the regime of President Samuel Doe, an ethnic Krahn who came to power through a military coup in 1980. Doe's rule was characterized by corruption, patronage politics, and ethnic favoritism, which alienated large sections of the population. These grievances eventually erupted into armed resistance (Ellis, 2007) [1].
The civil war was defined by extreme violence, including massacres, torture, and the use of child soldiers. Various armed factions emerged as the war progressed, often splintering from larger groups. Besides the NPFL, groups like the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), the Independent NPFL (INPFL), and later, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) contributed to the country's descent into chaos.

[1] Ellis S, 2007. The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War. New York: NYU Press

Despite numerous diplomatic interventions by regional and international actors including ECOWAS, the United Nations, and the African Union lasting peace remained elusive for more than a decade.

After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra in 2003, Liberia began a difficult journey toward reconstruction. The DDR programs initiated with international support sought to reintegrate tens of thousands of former combatants into society. However, the destruction of Liberia's institutions, coupled with widespread poverty and limited economic opportunities, posed significant challenges to the success of these efforts. Many former fighters, including children, struggled to adapt to civilian life amid continuing trauma and social stigma.

The war's legacy continues to shape Liberia's socio-political landscape. Issues such as youth unemployment, land disputes, and weak governance structures remain persistent, hampering reconciliation and national development. Nonetheless, understanding the dynamics of the Liberian Civil War is critical for informing future post-conflict recovery strategies, particularly in states grappling with similar ethnic, political, and institutional crises.

This chapter further examines the chronological development of the conflict, the key factions and leaders involved, and the roles played by external actors. In doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of civil wars and post-conflict recovery processes in fragile states.

1.2 The First Liberian Civil War (1989-1996)

The First Liberian Civil War (1989-1996) stands as one of the darkest chapters in Liberia's history, defined by immense human suffering, widespread destruction, and enduring socio-political fragmentation. According to Senator Prince Y. Johnson's testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2009 [1-2], the war was the result of decades-long political, ethnic, and economic tensions that culminated in a violent struggle for power and representation. The trauma, loss, and structural collapse left in the aftermath of the war were conditioned by these rifts borne way outside the trauma of the war, and these were the wounds that shaped the trajectory of the war.

At the root of the conflict were long-standing ethnic divisions and political exclusion. The 1980 military coup led by Samuel Doe marked a critical turning point. As Liberia's first indigenous head of state, Doe, an ethnic Krahn, concentrated political power among his ethnic allies while marginalizing groups such as the Mano and Gio of Nimba County. The ensuing repression, corruption, and nepotism alienated large sections of the population, especially in the northeast, setting the stage for resistance (Ellis, 2007) [1]. These grievances were instrumental in the rise of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), whose recruitment and support base were predominantly drawn from these aggrieved communities.

The war commenced on 24 December 1989, when Taylor launched an armed incursion from Côte d'Ivoire. His NPFL rebels, initially presenting themselves as liberators, rapidly gained ground in rural areas. The rebellion, however, quickly evolved into a multifaceted and brutal civil conflict, with the emergence of several armed factions. Among them were the Independent NPFL (INPFL) led by Prince Y. Johnson and the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO), which later splintered into ULIMO-J and ULIMO-K, reflecting deeper ethnic and ideological divides (Kieh, 2009) [10].

The humanitarian cost of the war was staggering. By 1996, an estimated 200,000 people had died, and nearly half of Liberia's population had been displaced internally or externally. Entire communities were decimated, schools and hospitals destroyed, and the economy was left in ruins. Atrocities including mass killings, torture, rape, and the widespread use of child soldiers were reported across all factions (Human Rights Watch, 1994).

Regional and international responses were slow and often inadequate. The United Nations and the United States maintained a largely hands-off approach during the early years of the war. In contrast, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) took a more active role. In August 1990, ECOWAS deployed the Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to intervene militarily and stabilize the situation (Sesay, 1996) [6]. However, ECOMOG's involvement was complex. The mission, initially neutral, was drawn into active combat and faced logistical and political challenges, including divergent interests among member states.

Operation Octopus in October 1992, launched by Taylor's NPFL in a bid to seize Monrovia, marked one of the most violent phases of the war. ECOMOG forces managed to repel the offensive, but the siege underscored the fragility of peace initiatives and the entrenched ambitions of warlords. Throughout the conflict, efforts to broker peace such as the Cotonou and Akosombo Accords yielded only temporary ceasefires, as rival factions refused to compromise or disarm.

The war's regional impact was significant. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled to neighboring countries like Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire, straining resources and exacerbating tensions in those regions. Moreover, the proliferation of small arms and cross-border militia activities contributed to regional instability.

Despite the formal end of the war in 1996, many of the root causes remained unaddressed. Structural inequalities, corruption, and weak governance persisted, ultimately fuelling the outbreak of the Second Liberian Civil War in 1999. Efforts at post-war reconstruction, including the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs, were hampered by a lack of infrastructure, limited funding, and the psychological trauma suffered by thousands of former combatants many of whom were minors during the conflict (Momodu, 2017) [8].

The legacy of the First Liberian Civil War is one of shattered institutions, wounded communities, and a generation scarred by violence. While post-war efforts have laid the foundation for democratic governance and peace building, the lessons of this conflict continue to serve as a stark reminder of the consequences of unresolved political grievances and unchecked state violence.

1.3 Primary Factors behind the first Liberian civil war

- **Political oppression and Ethnic Tension:** The roots of the First Liberian Civil War lie deeply embedded in the nation's complex historical and political framework. A longstanding divide between Americo-Liberians and indigenous ethnic groups fostered political and social tensions that erupted into open conflict. Successive governments, dominated by Americo-Liberians since 1847, failed to create inclusive policies, leaving indigenous Liberians marginalized both politically and economically.

- **Authoritarian Rule under Samuel Doe:** President Samuel Doe's authoritarian regime, established after the 1980 coup, quickly lost public support due to widespread corruption, human rights abuses, and the ethnic favoritism shown to the Krahn group, Doe's own ethnicity. Ethnic minorities such as the Gio and Mano were systematically excluded, deepening national divisions and seeding resentment that later ignited into violence (Samuel Momodu, 2017) [8].
- **Ethnic Rivalries and Manipulation:** Liberia's fragile political environment was further destabilized by ethnic rivalries, which were exploited by political factions to build power bases and justify armed conflict. Ethnicity became a mobilizing tool for warlords and leaders, exacerbating animosity and violence between communities.
- **Socio-Economic Decline:** Despite Liberia's abundance of natural resources, decades of poor governance, economic mismanagement, and corruption had pushed the majority of the population into poverty. The growing economic disparity and lack of basic services created fertile ground for insurgent groups like Charles Taylor's NPFL, which capitalized on national frustrations to recruit and expand its influence.
- **Widespread Poverty and Youth Recruitment:** Unemployment and scarcity were already on the rise by the late 1980s, especially for the rural youth. Young men were thereby militarized, in search of financial stability and responding to promises of money, food and loot, so joining rebel groups.
- **Neglect of Rural Areas:** The central government dilated attention on Monrovia and disregarded rural infrastructure and rural development which further aggravated resentment. Consequently, indigenous communities were alienated, they felt disenfranchised and excluded from national prosperity as so entrenched demand for reform and resistance (Samuel Momodu, 2017) [8].
- **Historical and Political Grievances:** Liberia's history of politics is filled with grievances that arise from Americo-Liberians having dominated the indigenous majority. As a result, resentments are flowing from this heritage of exclusion and inequality that resulted in movements toward massive decentralization of power and equitable governance (Samuel Momodu, 2017) [8].
- **Legacy of Americo-Liberian Domination:** Over a century, the Americo-Liberian minority maintained political and economic control that translated into systemic inequalities. Indigenous representation in government and national institutions prompted calls for change, when this was ignored, calls grew into armed resistance. (Samuel Momodu, 2017) [8].
- **External Influences and Regional Dynamics:** Meanwhile, important material and logistics support for Charles Taylor's NPFL insurgency was provided by Libya and Burkina Faso, the latter giving it arms, training and access to Liberia through the Masakounda between Silo and Fattah in Guinea. This involvement from outside helped NPFL to start a full-scale insurgency with a cross-border campaign launched from Côte d'Ivoire.
- **Governance Failure:** Despite a dismal record of pushing back corruption, protecting the people and delivering basic services, many Liberians had become disillusioned with the state. However, since the government institutions could not meet the citizens' needs, the alternative authorities such as the rebel factions gained legitimacy in the eyes of many people (Samuel Momodu, 2017) [8].

1.4 Samuel Doe's Rise to Power (1980-1985)

A dramatic political upheaval was experienced by Liberia in 1980 when a military coup led by Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, of the Krahn ethnic group, overthrew President William R. Tolbert. Doe now became the first Indigenous Liberian to ascend to the presidency, ending more than a century of Americo-Liberian political control. From the nation's 1847 founding, the Americo-Liberian elite ruled the political scene at the cost of indigenous populations. At first, the Liberians viewed Doe's ascendancy as the harbinger of profound political and social reform, especially from the third class still historically excluded (Max A. Sesay, 1996) [6]. Still, the early hope for Doe's government soon proved to be empty. His administration became more and more autocratic and repressive rather than characterized by democratic inclusion. Motivated by deep-seated paranoia and the fear of dissent, Doe used to cut political opposition with brute violence, which completely undercut any prospect of meaningful reform. Eight years of his rule were characterized by widespread corruption and human rights violations, while his whole government ruled with a heavy hand alienating his former supporters, as well as the population.

Doe organized presidential elections in 1985 in a bid to legitimize his authority and bring Liberia back to civilian governance. However, these elections were widely considered to be fraudulent. The process was marked in reports of voter intimidation, electoral manipulation and suppression of opposition parties. International and domestic criticism notwithstanding, Doe was declared the victor, a declaration that further eroded the public credibility of his regime and contributed to deepening Liberia's political crisis.

The 1985 elections left the country more unstable than it was before. As Doe's legitimacy came into question and a growing number of ethnic and political groups became increasingly disillusioned, Liberia became further polarized. Fertile ground for rebellion had been the combination of ethnic favoritism, authoritarian governance and electoral injustice. Ultimately, these conditions provided conditions ripe for what became less than five years later, the First Liberian Civil War and several more years of violence and civil conflict.

1.5 The Coup Attempt by Thomas Quiwonkpa, the Rise of Charles Taylor and the NPFL (1985-1989)

In November 1985, there was a failed coup attempt in Liberia carried out by Thomas Quiwonkpa, a former Commanding General of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and a close ally of Samuel Doe. However, Quiwonkpa fell out with Doe and was demoted and fled into exile in 1983 in Sierra Leone. He returned to Liberia with the hope of reclaiming power and overthrowing the Doe regime. Nevertheless, the coup was quickly put down, Quiwonkpa was caught and supposedly tortured, and his mutilated body was displayed in front of the Executive Mansion. Doe's ruthlessness was chillingly demonstrated in this gruesome act and his desire to preserve power through fear and intimidation (Sesay, 1996) [6].

And existing ethnic tensions were made worse in the wake of the failed coup. Quiwonkpa, like many of the people he was perceived to be supporting, was a member of the Gio ethnic group. In response, Doe's overwhelmingly Krahn-led government invaded these groups and massacred their members. Violent suppression of others and preferential treatment of the Krahn strengthened Liberia's ethnic divide by creating resentment and marginalization among non-Krahn populations. These divisions, however, marked the future of conflict and greatly contributed to the sprouting of future civil war in a few years.

Public dissatisfaction with Doe's authoritarian rule kept growing and a prominent opposition figure began to appear, Charles Taylor. Taylor had been accused of embezzling nearly $900,000 from state funds when she was imprisoned in the United States for related charges. Moving dramatically, after escaping from a Massachusetts prison in 1985, Taylor returned to West Africa. He started organizing a rebellion to overthrow Doe's regime after being there.

Doe's violent rule alienated the disenfranchised Gio and Mano ethnic groups, gaining Taylor's support as they desired change. With backing from them, Taylor then set up the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) to become a leading rebel movement that would soon drive Liberia into civil war.

Not only did the AFL's measures fail to bring the rebellion to a stop but they prompted further resistance to Doe's regime. It was just in late 1989 when the First Liberian Civil War began, a prolonged and destructive conflict that changed the history of the country and left its marks on the social and political grounds of the nation (Momodu, 2017) [8].

1.6 The brutal escalation of the conflict and ECOWAS Intervention (1990)

As loyal to Doe as they were seen, the Krahn ethnic group became targets for reprisal killings. At this period, one of the most horrific atrocities was on July 29, 1990, when over 600 civilians slaughtered who had taken sanctuary at St. Peter's Lutheran Church compound, Monrovia, by AFL soldiers. However, this event, which is among the deadliest, continues to be one of the most infamous civilian massacres in Liberia's history.

By the time May 1990 rolled around, AFL troops had been forced to retreat so far north as Gbarnga, a strategic stronghold for Taylor's NPFL. The NPFL forces captured the town and started a relentless siege of the capital, Monrovia, and turned its forces on the capital, Monrovia. Things rapidly degenerated in Monrovia as the city became a ghost town with looting, starvation, disease, mass displacement and chaos.

In July 1990, the conflict splintered further when former NPFL commander Prince Y. Johnson broke off and formed the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). Ultimately, Johnson's faction of the rebel faction added to the siege of Monrovia, making the violence worse and further complicating the battle for control. By August, the humanitarian situation had become dire and the United States Navy evacuated foreigners, diplomats and expatriates.

With violence increasing, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) realized that sooner rather than later the Liberian state would implode and the country spill over. In response, ECOWAS had recourse to the unprecedented step of a military intervention, sending the Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in August 1990. In addition to being led by Nigeria, these peacekeeping troops also included troops from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Guinea, but later also attracted troops from countries outside ECOWAS (Uganda and Tanzania) showing the wider concern amongst States regarding security in the region.

ECOMOG's mission was multi-faceted. Its key objectives were to:

- Enforce a ceasefire.
- Protect civilians from ongoing violence.
- It also served to evacuate any foreign nationals who still are trapped in conflict zones.
- Facilitate an interim government to be formed.
- Prevent the regional destabilization by containing the conflict within Liberia's borders.

These goals hardly materialized, as ECOMOG could not work well. A major priority of it was to force President Samuel Doe to step down. Doe, however, refused to relinquish power, who had been encircled in the Executive Mansion and also facing mounting military pressure, this greatly hampered diplomatic efforts and prolonged the war.

The first major military operation of ECOMOG took place on August 24, 1990, when Nigerian and Ghanaian naval vessels landed at the Freeport of Monrovia. This marked the beginning of a peacekeeping mission that would prove both complex and controversial. While the presence of ECOMOG provided some relief to civilians, the force encountered resistance from AFL troops, fragmented rebel factions, and logistical difficulties in asserting control over key areas of Monrovia.

Although ECOMOG was mandated to act as a neutral peacekeeping force, it often came under criticism for alleged biases, particularly favoring certain factions over others. The limited resources, coordination problems, and deep divisions among warring groups made it nearly impossible to stabilize the country in the short term. Nevertheless, ECOMOG's intervention marked a significant moment in African-led peacekeeping and demonstrated the willingness of regional organizations to respond to internal conflicts threatening broader stability (Kieh, George Klay Jr., 2009) [10].

1.7 ECOMOG's Struggle to Restore Peace and Order after the Death of President Doe

On 9 September 1990, following months of confinement in the Executive Mansion, President Samuel Doe made the fateful decision to leave his stronghold and visit the recently established ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) base at the Freeport of Monrovia. According to the testimony of Senator Prince Y. Johnson before Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2009 [1-2], Doe's primary frustration stemmed from the ECOMOG commander's failure to grant him a formal audience as the sitting president. However, the full motivations behind his departure remain speculative. At that time, Doe was facing mounting pressure from internal opposition and international actors urging him to step down and seek exile a pressure that rendered him increasingly vulnerable (TRC, 2009) [1-2].

Afterward came a grim and defining episode in Liberia's history. Doe was (brutally) tortured, executed and mutilated by Johnson's Independent National Patriotic Front of

Liberia (INPFL). Footage of the incident was shot and spread worldwide, and the man became an infamous symbol of Liberia's rapid descent into anarchy. The violence did not end at his public execution; instead, the hostilities between the INPFL and Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) raged and fought to control a fractured and lawless Monrovia.

After Doe's death, disorder took over the capital city, and armed factions and militias struggled in a power struggle. Consequently, ECOWAS increased its presence by sending over the multinational ECOMOG peacekeeping force of about 4,000 men and women primarily from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and The Gambia. The force was mandated to enforce a ceasefire, protect civilians, and support diplomatic peace processes.

However, peace remained out of reach. Both the NPFL and INPFL resisted ECOMOG's presence and authority, complicating efforts to stabilize Monrovia. Although ECOMOG managed to negotiate temporary ceasefires, the port area of Monrovia remained a flashpoint, with recurring clashes between Taylor's fighters and peacekeeping units. The fractured nature of the conflict, marked by undisciplined militias and competing allegiances, severely hindered ECOMOG's ability to restore long-term stability (Sesay, 1996) [6].

Despite persistent instability, regional and international actors pushed forward with diplomatic peace initiatives. A series of negotiations took place in Bamako (November 1990), Lomé (January 1991), and Yamoussoukro (June-October 1991), among others. As Max A. Sesay notes, these talks repeatedly failed to produce a unified resolution, largely due to the uncompromising stances of the warring factions and their competing ambitions (Sesay, 1996) [6].

A significant development occurred in Banjul, The Gambia, in November 1990, where ECOWAS facilitated the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU). The result of this summit was the establishment of the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU), with Dr. Amos Sawyer of the Liberian People's Party (LPP) appointed as interim president, and Bishop Ronald Diggs, a senior figure in the Liberian Council of Churches, named vice president.

However, the peace initiative was given a major blow by the rejection of the Banjul Accord by Charles Taylor's NPFL, which also refused to fully participate in the unity government. The IGNU was further dealt a blow with Taylor's refusal to cooperate as Taylor's forces held vast territories and represented the most formidable military threat to any competing faction.

Hostilities quickly resumed after Banjul was signed, revealing the great divisions and mutual mistrust among the factions.

In response to the continuing instability, ECOWAS decided to increase the number of ECOMOG troops in Monrovia to protect the newly established interim government. While Dr. Sawyer's leadership was acknowledged within the capital, his authority did not extend far beyond Monrovia. Large parts of the country remained under the control of Taylor's NPFL, local militias, and various warlords. As a result, the situation remained volatile, with the IGNU's influence largely confined to Monrovia and the peace process struggling to gain momentum amid ongoing violence and limited support (Max A. Sesay, 1996) [6].

1.8 Rebels attacks on Monrovia (1992)

The United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) was formed in the early 1990s with the primary aim of countering Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and avenging the brutal murder of President Samuel Doe. In 1991, ULIMO aligned itself with the Sierra Leonean military to confront the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a group closely linked to Taylor. This collaboration facilitated ULIMO's incursion into western Liberia, where it seized control of strategic regions, including the resource-abundant counties of Lofa and Bomi (Kieh, 2009) [10].

Despite its initial military successes, ULIMO was soon crippled by internal divisions. In 1994, the group fractured along ethnic lines into two competing factions: ULIMO-J, commanded by General Roosevelt Johnson and predominantly composed of Krahn fighters, and ULIMO-K, led by Alhaji G.V. Kromah and largely consisting of Mandingo fighters. These divisions mirrored the ethnic polarization that characterized Liberia's broader conflict and significantly diminished the group's cohesion and operational effectiveness (Kieh, 2009) [10].

Like other factions in the Liberian civil war, both ULIMO-J and ULIMO-K were implicated in grave human rights violations. Their territorial rule was marred by reports of widespread violence, looting, and extrajudicial executions. This conduct contributed to the worsening humanitarian crisis, inflicting lasting trauma on civilians and undermining prospects for post-war reconciliation (TRC, 2009) [1-2].

As diplomatic negotiations faltered and international mediation efforts struggled to gain traction, Taylor's NPFL and rival militias continued their campaigns for dominance. According to testimony by Senator Thomas Yaya Nimely during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, the IGNU backed by Prince Johnson's forces and endorsed by ECOMOG lacked the strength to counterbalance the NPFL's aggressive expansion (TRC, 2009) [1-2]. Taylor's forces persistently challenged the interim government's legitimacy, especially in and around Monrovia.

On 15 October 1992, Taylor launched Operation Octopus, a large-scale military offensive aimed at capturing Monrovia. The assault, reportedly reinforced by foreign fighters from Burkina Faso, resulted in a devastating siege that lasted over two months. The operation led to widespread destruction, severed humanitarian supply lines, and caused a major crisis among civilians trapped in the capital (Kieh, 2009) [10].

ECOMOG forces, charged with protecting the interim government and restoring order, engaged in fierce combat with Taylor's troops. By December 1992, they had successfully repelled the NPFL from Monrovia's outskirts. However, the operation underscored the instability of Liberia's political landscape and the persistent threat posed by armed factions. Amid the ongoing conflict, civilians were left in a constant state of fear and vulnerability, as political aspirations and ethnic hostilities continued to eclipse efforts at national unity and peace building (Ellis, 2007) [1].

1.9 (United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia) UNOMIL

Despite the presence of both UNOMIL and ECOMOG, the peacekeeping mission faced numerous challenges. Several factions took peacekeepers hostage, further complicating an already fragile peace process. By mid-1994, Liberia was experiencing a severe humanitarian crisis, with approximately 1.8 million people requiring urgent aid. The escalating violence severely hampered the ability of

humanitarian organizations to deliver much-needed assistance.

In September 1994, Liberia's factional leaders signed the Akosombo Agreement in Ghana, supplementing the earlier Cotonou Peace Agreement. The Akosombo Agreement aimed to address security concerns and create momentum for a lasting peace. However, the situation remained volatile, with ongoing fighting and limited progress toward a stable resolution.

In October 1994, as the budgetary capacity of ECOMOG and the unwillingness of Liberia's warring factions to cooperate began showing through, the UN Security Council decided to cut down the number of UNOMIL personnel to around 90. While this cut in UNOMIL's strength has occurred, the Security Council has renewed UNOMIL's mandate, and the mission is continuing to operate in Liberia until September 1997, with more renewals since then.

In December 1994, a major event occurred with the signing by key factions and other stakeholders of the Accra Agreement which was an improvement upon the Akosombo Agreement. However, recurring violence and continued mistrust between the conflicting factions continued to block progress in the peace process in the aftermath of the treaty.

In August 1995, additional diplomatic efforts led Liberia's major factions to sign another major agreement. This war and the events that led to the war culminated in a peace agreement facilitated by Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings, ECOWAS, the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union and, among others, the Organization of African Unity that included a ceasefire and was a fundamental step towards peace. By September 1995, the three main warlords of Liberia Charles Taylor, George Boley, and Alhaji Kromah made notable entries into Monrovia, marking a shift in the political landscape. These leaders, alongside civilian Wilton G. S. Sankawulo, formed a new ruling council, setting the stage for elections that were initially planned for 1996 (Max A. Sesay, 1996) [6].

1.10 Invasion of Monrovia (1996)

In April 1996, Liberia faced a renewed wave of violence as forces from the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO) clashed in Monrovia, the nation's capital. These fierce confrontations led to widespread destruction of the city's infrastructure, prompting many international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to evacuate their personnel. In response to the escalating conflict, the U.S. military launched Operation Assured Response, evacuating 485 American citizens and over 2,400 foreign nationals from 68 countries, highlighting the severity of the situation.

Fighting officially ended in August 1996, when the reigning Nigerian president headline the signing of the Abuja Accord in Nigeria. It was the point of this peace agreement made in 1992, which detailed a roadmap for the disarmament and demobilization, to be achieved by 1997. It also initiated a stage for elections, which were scheduled for July 1997.

She was chairperson of the National Transitional Government (NTG) from 3 September 1996 to 2 August 1997 (succeeding Wilton GS Sankawulo). Her appointment was viewed as an important step in stabilizing the country after years of civil war.

Progress still was made under the peace agreements, however, elections held in July 1997 were held in an uneasy and unsettled environment. It still had to cope with the aftermath of years of violent conflict, and there was insecurity, so it was difficult to move voters and candidates. It did not, however, prevent Charles Taylor, leader of the National Patriotic Party (NPP), from winning the elections by 75 percent of the vote. Along with the NPP, he beat 12 other candidates to receive a majority in the national legislature. While the elections represented a major milestone in Liberia's recovery, reports of voter suppression, intimidation, and violence cast a dark shadow over the polls.

Ruth Perry handed over the presidency to Charles Taylor on August 2, 1997, to begin his presidency to end Liberia's long and violent period of unrest. Isolated incidents of unrest were reported sporadically even as Monrovia received some improvements.

Nevertheless, as Max A Sesay (1996) [6] points out, Liberia's recovery was by no means certain at the close of the war. He is accused of arming rebel factions in neighboring countries using profits from his diamond sales to buy weapons and living a lavish lifestyle. The worsening of the economic conditions, combined with these actions, only reinforced the constant challenges that Liberia faced during the last years of the 1990s.

1.11 The Second Civil Conflict (1997-2003)

The Second Liberian Civil War can be said to have officially started in April 1999 when the insurgent group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) attacked Liberia from Guinea, crossing the border. In particular, Guinea was an important military and financial backer of LURD, allowing the group to take up strategic positions. Under the leadership of Sekou Conneh, LURD had taken control by mid-2000. Its composition comprised former ULIMO-J and ULIMO-k fighters who had resisted Charles Taylor in the First Liberian Civil War. LURD continued to base recruitment and mobilization on ethnic affiliations, especially among the Krahn and Mandingo populations.

A major development took place when LURD allied itself with Kamajors, a Sierra Leonean civil militia. General Maxwell Khobe of ECOMOG Sierra Leone made this possible by providing General White Eagle with the nudge he needed for LURD to reorder itself and significantly boost its combat capability. Having fought in the Sierra Leonean conflict, the Kamajors came under commanders Samuel Hinga Norman and Eddie Massally.

In revenge, President Charles Taylor recruited from both old NPFL combatants as well as newly recruited irregulars such as those in the Anti-Terrorist Unit. Foreign support to these forces came from Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and dissident groups from Guinea provided support as well. Despite some initial gains, Taylor's military offensive stalled by early 2001 as his troops were repelled back into Liberian territory.

By 2002, the conflict had broadened into a regional war involving Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. LURD received external assistance from Guinea and Sierra Leone, while Taylor maintained his alliance with the RUF in Sierra Leone. This regional entanglement and Taylor's support of rebel groups drew increasing condemnation from the international community, particularly from the United States and the United Kingdom, which supported Guinea diplomatically. In May 2001, the United Nations Security Council imposed sanctions on the Liberian government; however, the impact of these sanctions on Taylor's capacity to wage war remained contested (Kieh, 2009) [10].

Although the First Liberian Civil War ended with Taylor's election in August 1997, it failed to resolve the root causes of Liberia's instability. As highlighted by Senator Prince Y. Johnson in his 2009 testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the cessation of overt conflict did not translate into sustainable peace. Taylor's initial rebellion, launched in 1989 through the NPFL, fractured the country along ethnic and political lines, a division that continued to fuel unrest during his presidency. Notably, while the NPFL controlled much of Liberia's interior, the capital Monrovia remained under the control of Prince Johnson's rival faction, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), illustrating the fragmented nature of Liberia's governance even during lulls in direct combat.

Famous for the execution of Samuel Doe by INPFL forces in September 1990 and continuous resistance by this faction, this by no means accounted for the length of these wars. While the NPFL had military dominance in the conflict, it did not cease, as it was affected by internal strife and struggles for power. There had been violent clashes for years before a 1996 peace agreement and the 1997 elections. Charles Taylor won with 75 percent of the vote and his National Patriotic Party (NPP) swept to an overwhelming majority in the Liberian legislature. The electoral process however did not measure up to democratic standards. Taylor used the control of media, set the stage for fear of possible violence, grew, and restricted the face of democratic values; and so, undermined the reliability of the election.

Upon assuming office, Taylor quickly consolidated power and established an authoritarian regime characterized by corruption, suppression of opposition, and the silencing of dissent. Many of his critics either fled the country or were silenced, leading to the formation of opposition groups in exile that would later contribute to regional instability.

By 1999, growing political and military tensions, alongside Taylor's destabilizing influence in the region, led to the eruption of the Second Liberian Civil War. The peace Taylor had promised in 1997 quickly unraveled as internal and external opposition to his regime escalated. Once again, Liberia was thrust into widespread devastation, with various rebel factions and external actors exacerbating the chaos, as noted by Senator Prince Y. Johnson in his TRC testimony.

Fig 1: Image of soldiers moving to Monrovia via United Nation web site

1.12 Rebel Factions Capture and Take over Monrovia

By February 2002, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) had advanced to Klay Junction, located just 44 kilometers from Monrovia. In response to the mounting threat, President Charles Taylor declared a state of emergency. A February 2002 report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) revealed that LURD utilized tactics such as infiltrating the dense southern Lofa bush in southwestern Liberia, deliberately avoiding major government strongholds and focusing on critical supply routes. Though LURD claimed to have between 300 and 500 fighters, the actual number of rebels actively engaging in combat was believed to be only around 20. The threat posed by LURD was somewhat overstated, as the group primarily employed "hit-and-run" tactics instead of prolonged, direct combat.

Throughout the early months of 2002, LURD staged several raids in key counties, including Bomi, Bong, and Montserrado. They briefly captured important strategic locations like Klay Junction, Gbarnga, and Tubmanburg, forcing government forces to retreat temporarily. In May 2002, an assault on Arthington, just 20 kilometers from the capital, sent shockwaves through Monrovia, triggering widespread panic.

By July 2003, Monrovia was on the verge of collapse, with widespread devastation even as peace talks were underway. A report from BBC's Paylaylay Jonathan highlighted the increasingly dire situation in the capital. In response to the escalating violence, the United States launched Joint Task Force Liberia, a military operation involving a U.S. Navy amphibious group and the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit stationed off the coast of West Africa. The U.S. also deployed a small contingent of troops to secure the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, which had been targeted (Paylaylay, Jonathan, BBC report, July 2003) [2].

1.13 Main Causes of the Second Liberian Civil Conflict

- **Failure of Post-Conflict Reconstruction:** Ineffective Transitional Processes, after the end of the first Liberian civil war, efforts focused on disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration (DDRR) were insufficient. The absence of comprehensive security sector reform created a power vacuum, leading to frustration among former combatants and civilians, which ultimately contributed to the resurgence of conflict (Kieh, George Klay, Jr., 2009) [10].

Ineffective Peace-Building: The peace-building initiatives after the First Civil War were poorly managed, failing to establish a stable political framework or foster genuine national reconciliation. The lack of a solid and inclusive peace process was a critical factor that allowed tensions to resurface and played a significant role in reigniting the conflict (Kieh, George Klay, Jr., 2009) [10].

- **Human Rights Abuses:** During the regime of Charles Taylor in Liberia, grave human rights violations such as political repression, ethnic targeting and violence against civilians took place. Numerous Liberian communities were alienated by these abuses and began to increasingly feel a growing resentment and dissatisfaction toward Taylor's leadership. Therefore, the violations supported different rebel movements and contributed a lot in exacerbating support for the conflict

[2] Paylaylay, Jonathan BBC report 2003, July

(Kieh, George Klay, Jr., 2009) [10].

- **Chronic Socio-Economic Issues:** Liberia had been marked by poverty and inequality, as it continued to have widespread poverty, high unemployment, and considerable social cleavages. These matters were never addressed by Taylor and public dissatisfaction grew further with the resultant worsening of existing socio-economic discrepancies. Basic needs were neglected and this led to a heightened frustration among the people making them easy targets for rebellion and unrest across the country (Kieh, George Klay, 2009) [10].
- **Regional Dynamics:** The conflict in Liberia further became a regional issue, as Guinea backed the Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). It was critical to the insurgents that they were able to effectively challenge Taylor's regime in the name of external backing. The war lasted for a long time due to the involvement of neighboring countries like Guinea which also made the conflict a complex one due to the involvement of regional actors as well as compromising stability across borders (Kieh, George Klay, Jr., 2009) [10].

2. Conclusion

The First and Second Liberian Civil Wars were deeply interconnected, with the unresolved political, ethnic, and regional tensions from the first conflict fueling the second. The wars, marked by brutal violence and widespread suffering, highlighted the dangers of unchecked state violence, political exclusion, and corruption. Despite international interventions and efforts at peace, both wars left Liberia deeply fragmented, with many of the root causes unaddressed. Post-war recovery has required extensive international aid, truth-seeking efforts, and rebuilding trust among divided communities. The lessons of these conflicts emphasize the importance of inclusive governance, national reconciliation, and regional cooperation to prevent future violence.

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