

PART II



LIBERIA

OVERVIEW

In 2000, three years after Liberia's devastating eight-year civil war ended, the country again found itself embroiled in armed conflict. President Charles Taylor, the erstwhile leader of the National Patriotic Front for Liberia (NPFL), faced challenges from two new rebel groups: the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD, composed of groups that lost the 1989–96 civil war) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL, which formed in 2003). The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and the country's other security forces (including various paramilitary and militia groups) fared poorly against the rebels. By June 2003, war had engulfed most of the country, and the capital, Monrovia, was under siege, creating a humanitarian disaster.

The three parties engaged in negotiations in Ghana. On 17 June they concluded a ceasefire agreement (which was violated even before coming into force) and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in Accra on 18 August.

Taylor went into exile in Nigeria on 11 August 2003. The peace agreement provided for the disarmament of ex-combatants and the formation of a National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) that was to lead the country to elections scheduled for October 2005. As of 28 February 2005, a total of 16,503 international personnel were deployed in Liberia as part of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).¹

ARMED GROUPS

Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)

Origins/composition:

LURD was formed in Freetown in February 2000 by Liberian exiles, who felt frustrated by and excluded from the implementation of the 1997 Abuja Peace Accords and were opposed to the rule of Charles Taylor.² It is primarily composed of ethnic Mandingos and some Krahn. These same ethnic groups constituted the majority of the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), which fought Taylor's NPFL during the civil war.³ The

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Mandingos have ancestral roots in Guinea, where they are called Malinké. In addition, 500 Kamajor fighters from the Sierra Leone-Liberian border region joined LURD, largely on a contract basis, for a payment of as much as USD 300 each. More than 33,000 self-proclaimed LURD ex-combatants participated in the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reconstruction (DDRR) programme, including children associated with fighting forces (CAFF) and women associated with fighting forces (WAFF).⁵ This is in sharp contrast with expert estimates which give a range of between 3,000⁶ to 8,000⁷ fighters.

Leadership:

Sekou Damate Conneh was the first LURD leader.⁸ In 2004, however, just as LURD began to disarm, a leadership crisis emerged within the organization as Conneh and the Minister of Justice in the NTGL, Kabineh Jan'eh, each sought to be recognized as the group's Chairman. On 27 July 2004, Jan'eh was named the acting Chairman after the LURD Military High Command suspended Conneh. ECOWAS, however, announced in October 2004 that it technically recognized Conneh as the LURD Chairman.⁹ Days later, a LURD elec-

tion was held without Conneh and Jan'eh was elected and sworn in as the new Chairman.¹⁰ Support for both leaders is strong and there is clear dissension amongst the former LURD fighters, which has led to outbreaks of violence.¹¹ According to one senior official at the National Commission for DDRR (NCDDRR), the division within LURD is so significant, that should the group ever rearm, it would likely splinter into two distinct armed factions.¹²

Areas of control/activity:

LURD's stronghold is Lofa county, in the north-west of the country. An undetermined number of LURD combatants were based in Guinea's Forest region during the civil war, including the Kouankan refugee camp¹³ and the towns of Macenta,¹⁴ Guéckédou, and Nzérékoré.¹⁵ During the war, LURD was active throughout the country and even took Monrovia's port.

Sources of financing/support:

Guinea reportedly provided weapons as well as logistical and medical support to LURD,¹⁶ including mortar rounds and other ammunition manufactured in Iran.¹⁷ Former members of Sierra Leone's Civil Defence Force (CDF), Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and West Side Boys have also fought alongside LURD.¹⁸

Status:

LURD signed the CPA in Accra and participated in the DDRR process.¹⁹ It officially disbanded on 3 November 2004 following the end of the disarmament process, but remains very much an organized faction and is still considered powerful and potentially dangerous, despite its leadership problems. There is speculation among Liberians that LURD may not fully disband until after the scheduled October 2005 presidential elections.

Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL)

Origins/composition:

MODEL is mainly composed of ethnic Krahn who split from LURD in March 2003.²⁰ A number of fighters had previously fought in Côte d'Ivoire as mercenaries.²¹ More than 13,000 self-proclaimed MODEL ex-combatants participated in the DDRR programme, including CAFF and WAFF,²² which is in sharp contrast with expert estimates of 1,000 fighters.²³

Leadership:

Thomas Yaya Nimely, the leader of MODEL, is currently the transitional government's foreign minister.²⁴

Areas of control/activity:

MODEL was active in the eastern and south-eastern parts of Liberia, which border Côte d'Ivoire.

Sources of financing/support:

The Krahn are related to Côte d'Ivoire's We ethnic group. MODEL fighters frequently crossed the Ivorian border for logistical support and participated in the Ivorian conflict on President Gbagbo's side.^{25, 26}

Status:

MODEL participated in the DDRR programme but remains well organized.²⁷

Former Government of Liberia (GoL) militias and paramilitaries

Origins/composition:

Taylor created a number of militias and paramilitary groups (e.g. the Anti-Terrorist Unit, the Special Security Services and the Special Operations Division) to defend his government after the 1997 elections. These armed groups included fighters of the pre-1997 civil war as well as new and younger recruits, including child soldiers from Liberia and others affiliated with the RUF.²⁸ More than 15,000 self-proclaimed GoL paramilitaries and militias partici-

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pated in the DDRR programme, including CAFF and WAFF.²⁹

Leadership:

Taylor loyalists.

Areas of control/activity:

Taylor's security groups and militias were active throughout the country.

Sources of financing/support:

Charles Taylor/Liberian government.

Status:

In December 2003, 12,664 AFL and ex-militia/paramilitary fighters showed up at the first phase of the DDRR programme.³⁰

SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Stockpiles

Small arms:

LURD and MODEL fighters used self-loading pistols, M72 AB2 automatic rifles, FN FAL rifles, AKM and AK-47 assault rifles, M-16 rifles, SKS rifles, PKM light machine guns, RPK and RPD machine guns, and Chinese M-60 type 7.62 mm light machine guns.³¹

The AFL and pro-government groups mainly used Chinese-made AK-47s.³²

Light weapons:

Both rebel and government forces relied extensively on light weapons

for tactical reasons. Combat would quite systematically begin with rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPGs) shelling followed by small arms fire during the second phase.³³

The June–July 2003 offensive against Monrovia is a well-documented example of heavy mortar shelling by LURD.³⁴ Other light weapons in the hands of rebels included RPO-type grenade launchers, British-made 60 mm and 81 mm mortars, and DSHK 12.7 mm heavy machine guns, as well as SA-7/Strella surface-to-air missiles.³⁵ The AFL and pro-government groups used universal and general-purpose machine guns and RPG's.³⁶

Sources

Domestic:

LURD captured FN FAL rifles, AKM assault rifles, RPO-type grenade launchers, and SA-7 surface-to-air missiles from government forces or government-backed armed groups.³⁷ LURD also obtained weapons from 'unpaid military or police personnel from both Liberia and Guinea'.³⁸

Foreign:

Guinea reportedly provided weapons, ammunition, and logistical and medical support to LURD.³⁹ Some of the 81 mm mortar rounds LURD com-

batants used in the June–July 2003 Monrovia attacks were reportedly shipped from Iran to Guinea and then smuggled to LURD.⁴⁰ LURD has also allegedly used United Arab Emirates-made mortar ammunition, which is likely to have somehow leaked from Guinean stockpiles.⁴¹ Where roads permitted it, arms and ammunition were transported in trucks from Guinea to LURD bases in Liberia. In less accessible areas, LURD reportedly forced civilians to carry ‘boxes of ammunition and brand new weapons’ from ‘a non-military vehicle, a warehouse, or in one case from inside the military outpost in Ouet-Kama’ in Guinea to LURD bases in Kolahun and Bopolu in Lofa county.⁴² MODEL has reportedly received much of its arms and uniforms equipment from Côte d’Ivoire.⁴³

The Liberian government also admitted acquiring significant quantities of weapons from the Ex-Yugoslavia from June to August 2002 through the Belgrade-based Temex brokering company, using false Nigerian end-user certificates.⁴⁴ Regionally, Burkina Faso and Libya have allegedly served as transshipment points for arms transferred to the Liberian government.⁴⁵ Brokers in

Hong Kong and mainland China allegedly facilitated the transfer of Chinese-made weapons to Liberia’s largest, Taylor-controlled logging enterprise, the Oriental Timber Company.⁴⁶ The Taylor government used extra-budgetary revenue and logistics (ships, ports, etc.) of the logging and mineral extraction industries to import weapons in contravention of the UN arms embargo directed at the country.⁴⁷ Since the end of the war, however, external support appears to have ended.⁴⁸

Recovered

DDR:

A first disarmament campaign conducted from November 1996 to February 1997 collected 7,797 serviceable and 1,782 unserviceable weapons.⁴⁹ A UN Panel of Experts reports that 19,000 weapons were collected from 1997 to 1999, but it is not clear where this figure comes from.⁵⁰ However, it is known that between July and October 1999 over 20,000 weapons were destroyed in Liberia by the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and the UN Peace-building Support Office in Liberia (UNOL), which included those turned in during the disarma-

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ment and demobilization (DD) programme of 1996–97.⁵¹ In December 2003 an UNMIL-led DDRR programme was launched and approximately 13,000 government soldiers and militia were disarmed, surrendering 8,686 weapons in the process.⁵² DDRR was then suspended owing to ex-combatant misunderstandings regarding benefits and disturbances caused by ‘disgruntled elements’.⁵³

The programme was re-launched on 15 April 2004, and DD was completed by 31 October 2004. A total of 102,193 ex-combatants were disarmed and a total of 27,804 weapons and 7,129,198 rounds of ammunition were collected.⁵⁴ Weapons collected included 20,458 rifles and sub-machine guns, 690 machine guns, 641 pistols, 1,829 RPGs, and 178 mortars.⁵⁵ There was some concern, however, that heavy weapons were not being turned in and were instead being smuggled across Liberia’s borders,⁵⁶ notably to Côte d’Ivoire, where reintegration packages were expected to exceed by three times what was offered in Liberia (USD 900 vs. USD 300).

Other:

ECOMOG recovered 3,750 weapons between February and August 1997 during cordon and search operations; these were likely among the

20,000 weapons destroyed in 1999.⁵⁷ The Liberian DDRR Strategy and Implementation Framework called for a community arms collection programme, to be implemented following the completion of Liberia’s formal DDRR process.⁵⁸

HUMAN SECURITY ISSUES**CAFF****Extent of recruitment:**

MODEL, LURD, and former government armed forces all recruited and used child soldiers.⁵⁹ According to the UN, government militia groups and rebels recruited up to 15,000 child soldiers, forcibly or voluntarily.⁶⁰ A total of 11,221 children (8,704 males, 2,517 females) were admitted into the DDRR programme.⁶¹

Functions:

Child soldiers in Liberia were used on the front lines of combat, perpetrating killings, mutilations, rape, and looting. Often known as ‘wives’, girls served as fighters in all three groups and also cooked, cleaned, carried supplies, and served as spies.⁶²

Displacement

IDPs:

In 2004, there were 531,616 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Liberia.⁶³

Refugees abroad:

Although 50,000 Liberian refugees have already returned to Liberia since August 2003, approximately 300,000 remain scattered across West Africa (primarily in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Sierra Leone).⁶⁴

Refugees hosted:

When the ceasefire was broken in Côte d'Ivoire in November 2004, thousands of Ivorian refugees began fleeing into neighbouring Liberia.

Within the first few days, estimates of the new refugees ranged from 3,000 to 5,000 and were climbing.⁶⁵

Liberia hosted a total of 26,000 refugees in 2004.⁶⁶

Other violations or abuses

Killings, rape, and torture:

Government troops and pro-government militias have perpetrated killings, torture, and rape.⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch has reported that rape has been so pervasive throughout the Liberian conflict as to be termed a weapon of war; victims ranged-

from girls under eight years of age to elderly women in their seventies.⁶⁸

Other:

Abuses committed by LURD were reportedly less widespread and systematic than those by pro-government forces. Nevertheless, they included summary killings, abduction, rape, forced recruitment of men and children, and forced labour.⁶⁹

MODEL also subjected civilians to forced labour, and engaged in the widespread looting of civilian property, sometimes accompanied by rape and other forms of sexual violence.⁷⁰

OUTLOOK

Shortcomings aside, the DDRR process has successfully enabled Liberia to take significant steps on the path towards peace and stability. There is little doubt, however, that many legitimate ex-combatants were left behind, many still with arms. This assessment appears to be shared by many Liberians, and prior to the closure of disarmament, both LURD and MODEL representatives made public appeals for DD to be extended. Their concerns were reinforced in late November 2004 when ex-com-

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batants in Zwedru reportedly erected road blocks and harassed UN personnel to protest the closure of the DD process.

Funding shortages may aggravate the situation by postponing adequate reintegration and rehabilitation of ex-combatants. As of 1 November 2004, a total of USD 30.4 million had been pledged, while the actual amount received was USD 24.3 million—approximately 80 per cent of the total. With the caseload of ex-combatants disarmed far exceeding the original estimate of 38,000, the projected budget for DDRR was shattered.⁷¹ Long years of destruction and turmoil will make recovery—political, economic, and social—an arduous process as well. Security, in particular, remains a significant concern. Assuming the elections are peaceful, the post-election process will require a robust and sustainable security sector reform process and a commitment to keep engaged long after the elections.⁷²

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
CAFF	Children associated with fighting forces
CDF	Civil Defence Force
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DD	Disarmament and demobilization
DDRR	Disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reconstruction
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of Western African States
GoL	Government of Liberia
IDP	Internally displaced person
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
NCDDRR	National Commission for DDRR
NPFL	National Patriotic Front for Liberia
NTGL	National Transitional Government of Liberia
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenade launcher

RUF	Revolutionary United Front	13 HRW (2002b). 14 ICG (2003c, p. 18).
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy	15 UNSC (2001, para. 167). 16 ICG (2002, p. 11); Global Witness (2003). 17 HRW (2004d).
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia	18 Brabazon (2003, p. 8). 19 IRIN (2004a).
UNOL	UN Peace-building Support Office in Liberia	20 UNSC (2003, paras. 56–57). 21 Confidential written correspondence with Western diplomat based in West Africa, May 2004.
WAAF	Women associated with fighting forces	22 UNMIL (2004); NCDDRR (2004). 23 ICG (2003b, p. 11). 24 IRIN (2004a).

ENDNOTES

- 1 These included 14,738 troops, 205 military observers, 1,074 civilian police and 486 international civilian personnel (UNDPKO, 2005).
- 2 ICG (2002, p. 4). Other sources claim that LURD formed in July 1999 (Brabazon, 2003, p. 2).
- 3 Brabazon (2003).
- 4 Szajkowski (2004).
- 5 UNMIL (2004); NCDDRR (2004).
- 6 Brabazon (2003, p. 7).
- 7 IISS (2004).
- 8 IRIN (2004a).
- 9 The Analyst (2004).
- 10 The News (2004).
- 11 UNSC (2004c, par. 10).
- 12 Interview with NCDDRR official in Monrovia, 20 November 2004.
- 25 CSC (2004); see also Amnesty International (2003).
- 26 ICG (2003a, p. 14). See also 'Côte d'Ivoire' in Part II.
- 27 IRIN (2004a). See chapter 4.
- 28 HRW (2004c).
- 29 UNMIL (2004); NCDDRR (2004).
- 30 UNSC (2004a, para.19).
- 31 UNSC (2003); Global Witness (2003); Brabazon (2003); ICG (2003b).
- 32 Global Witness (2003, p. 24).
- 33 Brabazon (2003, p. 9).
- 34 HRW (2003).
- 35 UNSC (2003, para. 114); Brabazon (2003, p. 9); HRW (2003).
- 36 Global Witness (2003, p. 24).
- 37 Brabazon (2003, pp. 8–9).
- 38 UNSC (2002, para. 93).
- 39 UNSC (2003, para. 68); ICG (2002, p. 11); HRW (2002a, p. 10); HRW (2003b, pp. 18–25).

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- 40 HRW (2003, p. 15).
- 41 UNSC (2002, para. 94); HRW (2003B, pp. 18–25).
- 42 HRW (2002a, p. 10).
- 43 ICG (2003b, pp.10–11).
- 44 UNSC (2003, paras. 69–70, Table 1).
- 45 Global Witness (2003, p. 22); UNSC (2000, paras. 203–04).
- 46 Global Witness (2003, p. 21).
- 47 Global Witness (2004a, p.10).
- 48 Confidential written correspondence with informed source, May 2004.
- 49 UNSC (1997a, Annex II). See also Chapter 4.
- 50 UNSC (2004d, para. 64). See Table 4.2 in Chapter 4 for a different breakdown of weapons recovered since 1996.
- 51 PCASED (1999). For a breakdown of these weapons, see Table 4.2 in chapter 4.
- 52 UNSC (2004a, para. 19).
- 53 UNSC (2004a, para.19).
- 54 UNMIL (2004); NCDDRR (2004).
- 55 UNMIL (2004); NCDDRR (2004). See Table 4.3 in Chapter 4 for a breakdown of DDRR statistics.
- 56 UNSC (2004b, p. 5).
- 57 UNSC (1997b, para. 16).
- 58 Draft Interim Secretariat (2003, p. 16).
- 59 CSC (2004, pp. 24-25).
- 60 IRIN (2003).
- 61 UNMIL (2004); NCDDRR (2004). See Table 4.3 in chapter 4.
- 62 HRW (2004b). See also Chapter 6.
- 63 UNOCHA (2004, p. 9).
- 64 IRIN (2004b).
- 65 UNHCR (2004).
- 66 UNOCHA (2004, p. 9).
- 67 HRW (2002a, pp. 4-7).
- 68 HRW (2003a); Global IDP Project (2004).
- 69 HRW (2002a, pp. 7–9).
- 70 HRW (2004a).
- 71 See chapter 4. Funding figures drawn from UNDP (2004).
- 72 Colombant (2005).

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