



Liberia: Durable Illicit Power Structures

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After a 15-year civil war that shocked the world with the scope and scale of its brutality, the UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding work in Liberia is a qualified success. The Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed on August 18, 2003.¹ National elections were held in 2005 and 2011. The winner of both presidential polls, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, also won the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, awarded to her along with two other women in recognition of their roles in promoting peace, democracy, and gender equality. Peacebuilding comes at considerable expense, however, and Liberia retains drivers of instability behind a facade of stability.

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has monitored a peace agreement since September 2003. UNMIL personnel peaked at about 15,000 in 2006, and foreign assistance to build government security and administrative institutions typically exceeded the country's annual domestic product throughout the first postconflict decade. The foreign reconstruction of Liberian state authority has required a complete overhaul of the army, police, and intelligence services. Despite this extraordinary effort, illicit networks associated with wartime rebel groups continue to influence the country's political and economic scenes. External intervention was essential to ending open conflict in Liberia. The impact of intervention is great, but it has not fundamentally altered the illicit social and economic relationships and political patronage networks that are the focus of this analysis.

The gradual withdrawal of foreign assistance raises concerns about the roles that illicit power may play in the future. One concern is that resurgent criminal networks will bring a return to a violent status quo ante. The more likely prospect is that illicit power will continue to adapt to the international stabilization process and reappear in new forms. Rather than a return to war, this interaction is likely to lead to a more authoritarian and corrupt Liberia, which diverges from the democratic model that stabilization was designed to create. International actors and Liberian reformers will find repeatedly that they must deal with officials and others whose real interests lie in these illicit power structures, some of which are indeed essential for providing local order. And in many instances, interveners will be forced to choose between this order and good governance.

The Conflict and Its Causes

The leaders of all the main armed groups in Liberia's 1989-2003 conflict were players in a violent prewar political system of personal rule that predated, but intensified under, Samuel K. Doe, the master sergeant who led a successful coup on April 12, 1980. Doe demanded the personal loyalty of his associates and used a system of material rewards and threats of violence to remain in power. That system dictated how Liberia was run before the war, and it continues to set the pattern for postwar politics. As Doe lost his

¹ UN Security Council (UNSC), *Peace Agreement between the Government of Liberia, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia, and the Political Parties* (Accra, Ghana: United Nations, 2003), www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/peace/Lib%2020030818.pdf.

grip on power, his more enterprising subordinates organized their own supporters to seize power. In this sense, the conflict was a civil war, but not one that featured rival ideologies or political programs. The fighting was not tribal or sectarian at first, though it became so as the politicians-turned-rebel-leaders targeted their rivals' home communities for attack. This conflict was brutal, notable for the use of child soldiers, plunder of resources, and devastation of noncombatant communities. By the war's end in 2003, estimates of conflict-related deaths ranged from 150,000 to 250,000 out of a prewar population of about three million people. Ultimately, personal loyalties and patronage networks, which have always been important in the underlying logic of the country's politics, were the drivers of this conflict.

The Old Order

By the 1960s, President William Tubman (1944-71) reviewed any official expenditure of more than \$250 to evaluate whether it reinforced the president's personal influence in the political system.² In the private sector, too, a tight-knit political establishment dominated commerce, including illicit trade and trafficking directly connected to a system of political domination that participants leveraged for personal profit. Historically, high-level officials used state security forces and armed supporters to attack critics and rivals and protect personal business operations. They used their positions in government to manipulate laws and regulations in ways that shielded their activities. Political supporters benefited from this selective targeting of investigations and prosecutions, while opponents faced bureaucratic obstacles and prosecution.

These networks of high-level corruption have included international outlaws. In one wartime example from the early 2000s, UN reports cited Russian citizen Viktor Bout's air transport companies, logging firms of Ukrainian-Israeli Leonid Minin, and Dutch businessman Gus van Kouwenhoven for transferring weapons and ammunition to President Charles Taylor in defiance of a UN arms embargo.³ Arms suppliers needed to be paid for their wares, and to do this Taylor linked them into existing illicit commerce in diamonds, timber, and other resources that he personally controlled. This nexus of illicit commerce and wartime politics played a large part in the decisions of Security Council member states, particularly the United States, to support imposition of the arms embargo and, when Taylor continued to violate it, to support his prosecution for war crimes before the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

This situation illuminates a core element in Taylor's political logic. He needed the illicit source of weapons and commercial operations to survive in power and to organize fighters. For example, some especially trusted associates, including foreign business partners, were allowed to maintain militias within the country, for their personal use and to carry out tasks for their politician protectors. This illicit channel linking commerce and military supplies was essential for Taylor in a country that lacked a viable economy or any other means of exercising authority and financing his battles against rivals.

² Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987), 117.

³ Paul Holtom, "Case Study: Liberia, 1992-2006," in *United Nations Arms Embargoes: Their Impact on Arms Flows and Target Behaviour* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2007), 12-13.

These criminal syndicates, both before and during the war, were integral to the exercise of political authority in Liberia. Access to any substantial source of income, licit or otherwise, depended on accommodations with members of the president's clique and important government officials. This system of control, with the threat of violence by state security forces and regime favorites never far away, gave Liberia's political leaders the capacity to co-opt critics and challengers, hound opponents, and discipline supporters. Even black-market operators and others who seemed beyond the grasp of tax collectors and regulators had to seek protection from the same politicians who were the real middlemen in a wide range of both legal and illicit activities. For example, even the lowest-level black-market currency trader or vender of smuggled goods needed a protector and, therefore, had to come to an accommodation with this power structure. For the top levels of this trade were dominated by political insiders whom Taylor (and Doe before him) allowed to exploit these business opportunities in return for political and financial support. That is, the country's political leaders and their business partners were also the top black-market operators and the biggest smugglers.

By the 1980s, it was hard to distinguish state officials from criminal syndicates. In an illustration of this blurred distinction, a task force set up in 1985 to recover arrears of \$150 million owed to government corporations found that most of the debtors were government officials, including two heads of then-president Samuel Doe's security services.⁴ This investigation occurred because Liberia's foreign creditors insisted on it. The reality was that the entire system of governance rested on this dense system of misappropriated funds, insider scams, and illicit commercial activity under the protection of the country's political leaders, up to and including the president.⁵ A Liberian activist summed up this prewar system of governance as "years of rape and plunder by armed marauders whose ideology is to search for cash and whose ambition is to retain power to accumulate and pocket wealth."⁶

The Rise of Charles Taylor

Charles Taylor, the future head of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), was one of the officials involved in illicit activities in the 1980s. Samuel Doe gave him the job of running the General Services Agency, the government's procurement office. He saw Taylor as a rising political actor, in part because of Taylor's activities in the 1970s as a student organizer among the Liberian diaspora in the United States. Also, Taylor had a close personal relationship with Thomas Quiwonkpa, one of Doe's confederates in the coup that brought Doe to power.

In 1983, Taylor fled to the United States to avoid prosecution in Liberia. His crime was not that he had engaged in corruption, but that he was an ally of the former head of the army, who was plotting to overthrow President Doe. Doe then requested that U.S. officials extradite Taylor, claiming that Taylor had embezzled \$900,000 from the

⁴ *Africa Confidential*, "Liberia: Towards Collapse," April 10, 1985.

⁵ USAID, "Final Report of the Liberia Economic Stabilization Support Project," USAID, Dec. 1989, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDABP324.pdf.

⁶ Jimmy Kande, "What Does the 'Militariat' Do when It Rules? Military Regimes, the Gambia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia," *Review of African Political Economy* 23, no. 69 (Sept. 1996): 396.

procurement office.⁷ In any event, in 1985 Taylor escaped from a Massachusetts federal prison, where he was being held pending a decision on the Liberian government's request for his extradition to Liberia. About a year later, after moving around West Africa in search of supporters to help him overthrow Doe, Taylor traveled to Libya with help from Burkina Faso's ambassador to Ghana, Memuna Qattara, and the ambassador's cousin, Captain Blaise Compaoré.⁸

These contacts were especially useful after Compaoré's October 15, 1987, coup, which put Taylor in a better position with his Libyan patrons and positioned Burkina Faso to play an important role as intermediary in future arms transfers to Taylor's NPFL.⁹ Taylor's mastery of this regional network of ambitious political operators who were organizing to overthrow their governments enabled him to prevail among the numerous factions of Liberian dissidents who were plotting against Doe's government. And it established him as the head of the NPFL. Then Taylor and about 160 men – Liberians and others he had met either in Libya or during his stays in West Africa – entered Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire on Christmas Eve, 1989.

Ivorian President Félix Houphouët-Boigny's stake in allowing Taylor to organize in his country ultimately involved a family matter. The 1980 coup leaders murdered, among others, Liberian President A. B. Tolbert's son, who was married to Houphouët-Boigny's stepdaughter, Daisy Delafosse. She then married Captain Compaoré – another reason why it was so easy for Taylor to find shelter in Côte d'Ivoire and to launch his invasion from that country. Thus began his bid to overthrow President Doe and install himself as the next president – an event that sparked Liberia's 13-year civil war.

A key point in understanding the root causes of Liberia's war is that the "rebels," whether in Taylor's NPFL or in the half-dozen other groups that opposed the NPFL at various points in the war, were not ideologically driven. They merely reflected the efforts of enterprising members of Liberia's political establishment to control this intersection of political and commercial networks. This competitive ambition – not rebellious youth, masses of unemployed people, or marginalized communities – drove the conflict. This underlying continuity from the "peace" of a violent and corrupt government to the tumult of civil war pointed up the major roles of smuggling rackets and partnerships with shady foreign "businessmen" in the political strategies of prewar and wartime politicians.

Taylor associate Guus Kouwenhoven managed timber companies that helped President Doe finance arms imports, and then used this enterprise to do the same for Taylor.¹⁰ Many Liberians who were business partners with officials under Doe's government also found places in Taylor's network. This transferable nature of intermingled criminal trafficking organizations and political authority continues to define Liberian politics.

⁷ "In the Matter of the Extradition, Charles M. Taylor" (D. Mass., Magistrates Docket, 1986) [court docs in author's possession].

⁸ Alberta Davies, *Raw Edge of Purgatory: I Survived the Liberian Pogrom* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2011), 26.

⁹ Mark Huband, *The Liberian Civil War* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 51-55.

¹⁰ UNSC, *Report of the Panel of Experts Appointed Pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), paragraph 19, in Relation to Sierra Leone*, Dec. 2000.

Other Actors in the War

Other ambitious political actors appeared on the wartime scene from 1990 onward, reinforcing the dominance of the prewar political model in defining the wartime environment. These included Prince Yormie Johnson, a U.S.-trained soldier who served as aide-de-camp to General Thomas Quiwonkpa, the commander of Liberia's army until both fled into exile in 1983. Johnson started out as Taylor's partner but split in early 1990 to form his own Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). He was notable early in the war for his hand in the torture and murder of Doe (which happened when Doe was in Johnson's custody) – an event that was captured on videotape and can easily be located on the Web. Johnson is a durable figure, serving as a senator in postwar Liberia and taking third place in the 2011 presidential election, with 11.6 percent of the vote.¹¹

President Doe's information minister, Alhaji G. V. Kromah, emerged in September 1991 as leader of the United Liberation Movement for Democracy, which brought together former army officers and government officials. He received 2.8 percent of the vote in his 2005 run for Liberia's presidency and lost the 2014 Lofa County Senate race. Kromah's attempt to continue in postwar electoral politics ultimately failed, but his transformation from Doe's time to Taylor's and then into postwar politics reflects how prominent figures in Liberia refashion old connections and resources to remain relevant in the country's political scene.

George Boley, President Doe's former presidential secretary and assistant secretary of education, formed the Liberia Peace Council – another armed faction despite its misleading name. He was deported from the United States in 2012 under the provisions of the Child Soldiers Accountability Act of 2008, for his role in recruiting and using child soldiers in Liberia's war.¹² He then ran for the Grand Gedeh County Senate seat in 2014, receiving 12.5 percent of the vote. Although he lost the election, Boley's performance shows how even the widespread knowledge of his past misdeeds was not sufficient to deter the one-eighth of the voters in Grand Gedeh who supported him in the election. Given the underlying logic of Liberian politics, it is reasonable to suppose that Boley's greater capacity to mobilize wartime connections to people and resources accounts for his better electoral showing than Kromah's.

Political Patronage Networks and Conflict: The Integral Connection

Wherever an armed group controlled territory and people, its method of governance reproduced the tight integration of political authority and illicit power rooted in the local and regional economy. Taylor created a unit within the NPFL to invite timber firms based in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, many of which had done business in Liberia under Doe's rule, to operate in NPFL-controlled territory.¹³ These firms were required to

¹¹ National Elections Commission, "2011 Presidential and Legislative Elections," NEC, Nov. 8, 2011, www.necliberia.org/results2011/.

¹² US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "Liberian Human Rights Violator Removed from US," Mar. 29, 2012, www.ice.gov/news/releases/liberian-human-rights-violator-removed-us.

¹³ Letter from member, NPFL's Special Economic Committee, to the NPFL commander of River Cess,

make ad hoc “contributions” and provide logistical support to NPFL members for their personal use, in a practice that mimicked prewar relations between politicians and loggers.¹⁴ Initially, violent, predatory criminal operators responded to the invitations to do business in this risky environment. Taylor made deals with them to come to the port and load logs that other loggers had left there when they fled or that Taylor’s local business partners had cut, but then some of these foreigners would simply disappear without paying, or abscond after threatening local NPFL agents.

“Everybody he sold a cargo of logs to, they’d take the logs and that was that; they’d never come back,” said an American businessman referring to some of the first foreign operators who responded to Taylor’s invitations to do business. The high risks of doing business with armed rebels tended to attract criminals who were accustomed to risky operations. “And the reason for that was, why should they come back? I mean, they’d make twenty, thirty million or whatever they were making off a cargo of mahogany logs.”¹⁵ This violent commercial environment troubled some of the legitimate operators from Doe’s time, who returned to Liberia only to find that they now had to fear for their personal safety amid the mix of unpredictable rebel fighters and rogue shippers accustomed to using violence whenever it gave them an edge in business transactions.¹⁶

This development is important because it showed that even well-armed experts who were well connected to regional illicit power structures were vulnerable to getting ripped off by international seafaring criminals; thus, they had to establish some sort of system of stable relations with their commercial partners in these illicit operations. NPFL officials dealt with this problem by implementing procedures to identify ships that arrived at the port and compelling those allowed to dock to prepay for port services and rebel-imposed fees and taxes.¹⁷

This close integration of armed groups, state administration, elite politics, and the illicit economy continued throughout the war. This type of politics was familiar to Liberians while continually presenting a challenge to international actors seeking to end the conflict. Taylor spoke directly about this integral relationship, warning Liberians not to interfere with his “pepperbush” – a colloquial term for a personal possession that is dear to the owner. At least once after becoming president, Taylor used this expression to refer to the Oriental Timber Company, a firm that UN investigators cited as violating international sanctions against trade in “conflict timber.”¹⁸ Such cozy relationships between politicians and criminal elements in the economy remains a staple of the Liberian postwar political scene.

Grand Kru, Sinoe, and Maryland Counties, written in San Pedro (Côte d’Ivoire), Nov. 6, 1990 [in author’s possession]. (Many of the smaller logging operators took refuge in San Pedro, Côte d’Ivoire, close to the Liberian border, to avoid the violence.)

¹⁴ For example, Forestry Development Authority, “Request for Payment,” Buchanan, Liberia, July 18, 1991 [in author’s possession].

¹⁵ Interview with U.S. logger, Nov. 2001, Chicago.

¹⁶ Author interview with member of the Liberian Timber Association, Aug. 1994, San Pedro, Côte d’Ivoire.

¹⁷ “Payment for Services at the Ports,” Associated Development Company, Buchanan, Liberia, Nov. 23, 1991 [in the author’s possession].

¹⁸ Global Witness, “Taylor-made: The Pivotal Role of Liberia’s Forests and Flag of Convenience in Regional Conflict,” report, Global Witness and ITF, Sept. 2001, 25, www.globalwitness.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/taylormade2.pdf; Republic of Liberia, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume 3, Title III: Economic Crimes and the Conflict, Exploitation and Abuse* (Monrovia: Truth Commission, 2008), 24-27.

The Peace Settlement

The 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement created a National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), which included elements of the major armed factions, leaders of civilian political parties, and leaders of major civic groups.¹⁹ Charles Taylor was notably absent from this arrangement because the two main rebel groups opposed to him, Liberians United for Reconstruction and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), declared that an agreement would be impossible if he continued in office. The parties included in the agreement received cabinet positions in the NTGL. This was an interim arrangement since the agreement called for elections in 2005 to establish a post-settlement democratic government.

Two months after the agreement was signed, Gyude Bryant, a Monrovia businessman with no significant ties to any of the warring parties, took office as chair of the transition government. Removing Taylor from office also addressed U.S. government concerns that Taylor's connections to criminal networks implicated him in support for international terrorist groups. A 2001 *Washington Post* article reported that men named by the FBI as al-Qaeda operatives purchased diamonds from Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF), an armed group that by then was widely thought to have close ties to Charles Taylor.²⁰ Even though Taylor and people central to his regionally disruptive relationship with rebels in neighboring countries were excluded from the postwar settlement, the incorporation of the political networks of wartime leaders into the interim government ensured that the illicit power structures would continue to play significant roles in postwar Liberian governance.

The Accra Agreement cleared the way to establish the UNMIL peacekeeping force, with a peak strength of 15,000 uniformed personnel, to oversee disarming the warring factions and to guarantee the new government's security. The agreement reserved no place for rebel units or elements of the old Liberian Army (AFL) to join a restructured army, specifying instead that recruits be "screened with respect to educational, professional, medical and fitness qualifications as well as prior history with regard to human rights abuses." The agreement also stipulated a leading role for the United States in restructuring the army, while the police and security forces previously under Taylor's personal control were to be restructured under UN auspices.²¹ The 2003 agreement had no provisions for dealing with the serious problems of corruption in Liberia's political establishment, beyond a recommendation to convene a reform commission. That advice was ignored, although a truth commission, also provided for in the peace agreement, sat from 2006 to 2009 to investigate human rights violations and economic crimes.

Although its recommendations were ignored, the commission was significant for its reflection of public sentiments. Initially planning to interview 34,000 people—about one percent of Liberia's population—it met with about half that number. Testimonies of

¹⁹ UNSC, Peace Agreement.

²⁰ Douglas Farah, "Al Qaeda Cash Tied to Diamond Trade: Sale of Gems from Sierra Leone Rebels Raised Millions, Sources Say," *Washington Post*, Nov. 2, 2001. This analysis is reflected in UNSC, *Report of the Panel of Experts Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1343 (2001)*, paragraph 19, Concerning Liberia, Oct. 26, 2001.

²¹ Accra Agreement, Article VII, Article VIII.

alleged perpetrators and companies associated with these crimes led the commission to recommend that many incumbent politicians, including President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, be barred from public office for 30 years.²² These recommendations captured the popular sense that most of Liberia's politicians were corrupt, and the inclusion of the category "economic crimes" accurately reflected the tight connections between the country's political establishment and the illicit economy. This also showed how real reform in Liberia would be tantamount to a social revolution, completely disrupting the existing order—something that neither the incumbent local establishment nor international actors desired.

The peace settlement seemed to signal a radical break with the politics of the civil war. It differed from the dozen or so preceding agreements in not specifying offices for leaders of armed groups to occupy in a new government, instead leaving it to them to win elections if they wished to remain in politics. Also, international actors—such as U.S. diplomats involved in mediating the transition—had the power to pressure notable politicians and businessmen, threatening to use their previous human rights violations and violations of UN sanctions to exclude them from politics if they should act as spoilers to the settlement. Liberians had to take these threats seriously, given the advent of prosecutions for war crimes and other abuses after conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, and the promise to do the same in West Africa. Taylor was excluded entirely, leading to his exile from Liberia. Defying and, in many cases, frustrating this agenda of a radical break from the past was the reality that many wartime leaders really did have popular bases of support that they could mobilize to win elections. For these people, politics still included engagement with criminal enterprises as sources of income to build patronage networks supporting their business and political ambitions. For example, Charles Bennie, a former LURD spokesman, contested with Senator Roland Kaine, a former NPFL member who defeated him in a 2005 senate race, to control valuable land. Bennie hired armed men at \$25 a day to clear Kaine supporters from the land.²³ About 3,700 LURD ex-combatants settled on Guthrie rubber plantation under the protection of Sumo Dennis, a former LURD commander.²⁴ The peace agreement grossly underestimated the durability of the underlying Liberian political system and of many of the principal actors from the civil war.

Rebel Networks

Illicit power was integral to the rebel organizations in much the same way that it had been essential to the operation of Liberia's formal government. Even before the NPFL's 1989 push into Liberia, the group's organization rested on regional illicit power. At that time, Libya's leader, Muammar Qaddafi, one of Taylor's hosts before the 1989 NPFL invasion, provided a fertile environment for multiple illicit power structures.

²² Lansana Gberie, "Truth and Justice on Trial in Liberia," *African Affairs* 107, no. 428 (2008), 455-65.

²³ Othello Garblah, "The Land Wars: Rising Dispute over Scarce Land," *New Democrat*, June 11, 2008, 2-3.

²⁴ Christine Cheng, "The Emergence of Extralegal Groups after Civil War and Liberia's Rubber Industry," Univ. of Oxford, Apr. 15, 2008, 12-14, www.yale.edu/macmillan/ocvprogram/conf_papers/cheng.pdf.

A Regional Rogues' Gallery

Qaddafi's support for rebels and opposition groups from several African countries linked Taylor with opposition figures who went on to fight in Sierra Leone's civil war or to participate in a coup in Gambia.²⁵ At first, what would later become the NPFL was little more than a network of opponents to President Doe. But Taylor leveraged his contact with the Libyan leader to convince exiled Liberians and politicians, political dissidents and aspirants, and businessmen from throughout West Africa that Taylor had the best chance of overthrowing Doe and installing a new political network in the capital, with himself at the top.

These preinvasion contacts played important roles in the construction of Taylor's security apparatus once the NPFL was inside Liberia. For example, Taylor's chief of operations, Mohamed Adams, and the deputy commander of his paramilitary Anti-Terrorist Unit, Abu Suleimana, were Ghanaians. The NPFL's vice president in 1990, Kukoi Samba Sanyang, was a Gambian, and the NPFL was assisted by hundreds of troops from Burkina Faso.²⁶ These networks simply replaced similar networks that Doe had constructed to tap resources and assert his political authority. In this sense, the rebel war in Liberia represented continuity in political practice (albeit in a more violent form), rather than an abrupt break from a previous order.

Foreign Business Connections

As a key part of his political strategy, Taylor set out to make deals with as many foreign businesses as he could to generate the income he needed to build his own armed patronage network. Some that made deals included companies with existing assets in Liberia, such as U.S.-based Firestone. After the NPFL had seized Firestone's rubber plantation headquarters, it negotiated with the company, encouraging it to return and pay taxes to the rebels.²⁷ The company then imported rice to Liberia, which it "donated" to the NPFL as one of the costs of doing business.²⁸ The foreign firm's infrastructure provided Taylor with resources and a base from which the NPFL was able to stage its October 1992 Operation Octopus invasion of Monrovia.

This practice replicated the prewar arrangements between President Doe and foreign timber companies, in which the president acted simultaneously as a private business partner and head of state security forces while the foreign investor provided resources and logistics that the president needed to train and equip armed forces that answered to him personally.²⁹

²⁵ Special Court for Sierra Leone, *Prosecutor of the Special Court v. Charles Taylor*, Transcript of 7 Feb. 2008, 3418-22.

²⁶ Stephen Ellis, "Charles Taylor and the War in Sierra Leone," Dec 5, 2006, 5 [Exhibit P-478, Document prepared for the Special Court for Sierra Leone].

²⁷ "Memorandum of Understanding" and "Firestone Restart Timetable," Gbarnga, Liberia [NPFL headquarters], Jan 16, 1992 [mimeograph copies in author's possession].

²⁸ U.S. Embassy, "Liberia Situation Report," Monrovia, Oct. 4, 1991, www.propublica.org/documents/item/1362170-dos-1991-october04-monrov-07468.html.

²⁹ *Africa Confidential*, "Liberia: What to Do with Doe?" Oct. 21, 1988, 24. See also PBS episode "Firestone and the Warlord," *Frontline*, Nov. 18, 2014, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/firestone-and-the-warlord/.

To bolster his authority, Taylor outdid even his predecessors in letting others conduct illicit trade in timber and diamonds. A U.S. diplomat estimated that during 1990-94, Liberia exported diamonds—many of them smuggled from Sierra Leone—valued at US\$300 million, timber valued at over \$50 million, and rubber valued at \$27 million, mostly from areas controlled by Taylor’s NPFL.³⁰

These operations built on the long practice, among Liberian politicians, of seeking out foreign investors to organize the exploitation of natural resources and then using at least some of the proceeds to train paramilitary forces and import weapons. The typical ground-level relationship involved bringing a local politician into the firm as a partner and giving him a portion of the profits in exchange for his protection. Taylor’s desperate need for resources early in the war pushed him and his associates to solicit a wide array of foreign logging operators to generate revenue and provide logistical services to NPFL fighters, such as letting fighters use their premises as bases and lending vehicles and other equipment to support NPFL operations.³¹

The Warlord’s Trappings of Respectability

The intersection of political patronage networks and international mediation of the conflict were central to Taylor’s ascension to Liberia’s presidency in 1997. The 1995 Abuja Accord, the thirteenth peace agreement since 1990, set up a six-member Council of State, which included the heads of the main rebel groups and allocated ministries and public corporations to them as a prelude to a general election in 1996 (later postponed to 1997).³² This agreement essentially codified and sought to regulate the competition between rebel leaders in grabbing resources with which to build rival political networks. By 1996, as head of the largest and most successful rebel group, Taylor reportedly exercised personal control over an annual income of \$75 million, with which he paid commanders and fighters who understood that he paid them based on their loyalty and usefulness to him.³³ These resources gave him an advantage over his rivals, many of whom he killed once he was Liberia’s president.

Once elected, Taylor set to work using the prerogatives of his office to sustain and expand his personal networks. Unlike during his days as a rebel leader, he was now in a position to give official Liberian government logging concessions to local and foreign firms. These included one of up to 1.44 million hectares, to Oriental Timber Company, to export timber in defiance of a UN embargo.³⁴ The company allegedly maintained a

³⁰ William Twaddell, “Statement of William Twaddell, Hearing on Liberia, before the House International Relations Committee,” U.S. State Dept., June 26, 1996, 12, <http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/bureaus/afr/960626Twaddell.html>.

³¹ NPFL, “Guidelines for Reactivating Logging Companies,” Office of the Chairman, Special Economic Committee, Gbarnga, Liberia, Nov. 5, 1990 [memo in author’s possession].

³² “Abuja Agreement to Supplement the Cotonou and Akosombo Agreements as subsequently clarified by the Accra Agreement,” USIP Peace Agreements Digital Collection, www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/liberia_08191995.pdf.

³³ U.S. State Dept., “Testimony by William Twaddell, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs,” Washington, DC, June 26, 1996, <http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/bureaus/afr/960626Twaddell.html>.

³⁴ *The Perspective*, “Investigative Report on Oriental Timber Corporation,” Mar. 20, 2000, www.theperspective.org/otc.html.

private militia of 2,500 armed men, which operated in support of Taylor's government and paid various "public relations" contributions and "advance taxes" to Taylor.³⁵ The operation, under the direction of Guus van Kouwenhoven, was reported to include involvement in arms imports in violation of a UN embargo, involving transactions with many businesses across several continents.³⁶

Taylor Stirs the Sierra Leone Pot

Along with the timber export revenues available for Taylor's personal use, his resources increasingly came to include revenues from diamonds smuggled from parts of Sierra Leone under RUF control. The importance of this transnational trafficking network in Taylor's domestic political strategy, and his support for the RUF, which controlled Sierra Leone's diamond mining areas, pushed the UN Security Council (UNSC) to form a panel of experts to investigate whether there was a link between the illicit diamond trade and the supply of weapons to the RUF. The expert investigators estimated that an illicit trade in diamonds to Liberia, on the order of \$25 million to \$50 million annually (exceeding official Liberian government revenues) linked Taylor to the RUF and that "a Liberian is said to be President Taylor's representative in Kono [the center of Sierra Leone's diamond mining industry], with a mandate to supervise diamond operations."³⁷ This network included foreign air transport companies and South African mercenaries.³⁸

The collapse of a peace agreement in Sierra Leone, and RUF attacks on peacekeepers there focused international attention on the links between Taylor's government and the conflict in Sierra Leone. "Taylor's role emerged more clearly than ever as pivotal," wrote the U.S. ambassador to Sierra Leone, who concluded that "as long as Liberia sought access to Sierra Leone's diamonds and offered refuge to RUF fighters, the war would continue."³⁹ European investigators concluded that Taylor harbored two al-Qaeda operatives. He received \$1 million, allegedly to hide the men in Camp Gbatata, near his private farm, which also served as the base for Liberia's elite "antiterrorism" unit and the mercenaries accused of training the unit.⁴⁰

The Juggling Act

Such networks of domestic commercial operations, support for a neighboring country's rebel group, and foreign suppliers and logistics was central to the Liberian president's exercise of authority. This system built on old linkages that politicians had built in cross-border trades in diamonds and other illicit commerce. Though more violent in wartime,

³⁵ Andrew Feinstein, *The Shadow World: Inside the Global Arms Trade* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 123.

³⁶ Marlise Simons, "The Dutch Try One of Their Own over Links to Liberia," *New York Times*, May 3, 2006; UNSC, *Report of the Panel of Experts on Liberia Submitted Pursuant to Paragraph 5 (c) of Security Council Resolution 1792 (2007) Concerning Liberia* (New York: United Nations, June 12, 2008), 27-28.

³⁷ UNSC, *Report of the Panel of Experts Appointed Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000)*, 18.

³⁸ *Africa Confidential*, "Godfather to the Rebels," June 23, 2000, 1-2.

³⁹ John Hirsch, *Sierra Leone: Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 89.

⁴⁰ Douglas Farah, "Report Says Africans Harbored Al Qaeda," *Washington Post*, Dec. 29, 2002, A1.

this network was well entrenched by the middle of the twentieth century and played important roles in the politics of Sierra Leone and Liberia.⁴¹

In addition to providing political leaders with patronage resources, personal control over these economic opportunities enabled them to sustain their own armed militias on the basis of personal loyalties. Taylor took advantage of this opportunity and, after his election in 1997, maintained about a dozen militias, which he used to protect commercial operations, hound rivals, and provide personal security. They were staffed and supported in ways that forced them to compete with one another for their leader's favor, reducing the risk that their commanders might collaborate to overthrow Taylor. The command structures of the security forces underscored the intertwined nature of these illicit networks and the state, since many of those involved in these networks simultaneously occupied official offices, were businessmen, and had personal followings as important wartime commanders.⁴²

The Fall of Taylor

Taylor's personal control over these networks began to unravel in 2003 as two rebel groups, LURD and MODEL, gained ground in their fight to seize power. He also became the target of prosecutors for the Special Court for Sierra Leone, which had been established in 2002 to try those deemed most responsible for crimes against humanity connected to Sierra Leone's war. Given Taylor's relationship with the RUF, he was a major focus of the prosecution, which issued an indictment against him in 2003. Taylor resigned on August 11, 2003, and left Liberia for exile in Nigeria. His Nigerian government hosts allowed him to settle there, provided that he not interfere in Liberian politics. Illicit power structures still provided him with levers to influence politics, however, and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan reported to the Security Council that Taylor's "former military commanders and business associates, as well as members of his political party, maintain regular contact with him and are planning to undermine the peace process."⁴³ Taylor was arrested in 2006, while attempting to flee from his exile in Nigeria, and was delivered to the court for trial.

At the time of the peace settlement in 2003, significant elements of this illicit power structure were violently opposed to the peace process. And in the long run, the underlying logic of patronage-based governance and the violent pursuit of commercial resources remained intact.⁴⁴ These linkages retained their importance in Liberian politics after Taylor's exile in 2003 and during the international intervention to promote peacebuilding in Liberia. This persistent influence of illicit power up to 2003 created a conundrum for international actors in how to respond to these networks and how to conduct large-scale interventions to halt conflicts more generally.

⁴¹ H. L. van der Laan, *The Sierra Leone Diamonds: An Economic Study Covering the Years 1952-1961*, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965).

⁴² Global Witness, *The Usual Suspects: Liberia's Weapons and Mercenaries in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone*, (London: Global Witness, 2003), 14-15.

⁴³ UNSC, *Sixth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia* (New York: United Nations, 2005), 18.

⁴⁴ François Prkic, "The Phoenix State: War, Economy and State Formation in Liberia," in Klaus Schlichte, *The Dynamic of States* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005) 115-36; Douglas Farah and Shaoli Sarkar, *Following Taylor's Money: A Path of War and Destruction* (Washington, DC: Coalition for International Justice, 2005).

In short, the risk was that the more the international actors did to build the state, the less their local partners would contribute to this effort. Local networks could easily adapt to exploit the opportunities associated with the huge volume of resources needed for this task. And this they did, siphoning off aid money without helping the foreign contributors build an effective state. Yet effective state building is the only long-term answer to the problem of illicit power in Liberia. Unfortunately, state building in such an environment is a slow, violent process. The international response to these networks from 2003 on, the subject of the next section, provided a good test.

International Strategies and Their Impacts on Illicit Power

Liberia in 2003 looked like an ideal place to test the international community's political will and capacity to target illicit power in a coordinated attempt to implement extensive postwar reforms. This was a revolutionary state-building project, since it envisioned changing the core logic of how the country was run, permanently eliminating illicit networks from governance and the economy and fundamentally changing the relationship between the government and the citizenry. If it could be done anywhere, Liberia was a good candidate for success, for these reasons:

- its small population (about four million people),
- its long historical ties to the United States (which has a sizable skilled Liberian diaspora community) and to Europe,
- concern among officials in West Africa and beyond that an unresolved conflict in Liberia would destabilize other countries in the region,
- and indications that Liberia's population would tolerate significant foreign intrusion in domestic affairs (distinguishing this from most international involvement, such as in Somalia in the early 1990s).

This urgency to transform Liberia's political economy occurred against the backdrop of wider international responses to the al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. As noted above, Taylor was indicted before the Special Court for Sierra Leone in March 2003, charged with crimes against humanity linked to his wartime association with Sierra Leone's RUF. He was convicted of these crimes and sentenced in May 2012 to 50 years, which he is now serving in a prison in Manchester, UK.

Taylor was the first former head of state convicted by an international tribunal, and the first head of state to be prosecuted for the use of rape and child soldiers in war. By bringing him to justice for crimes against humanity and war crimes, the Special Court for Sierra Leone removed a major player from Liberia's political scene. But it is not evident that even this deep intervention actually transformed the underlying political economy of Liberia, including the integral role of illicit power structures.

Seeking a New Order

Tentative international efforts under the Accra Agreement to create an alternative to corrupt governance began in October 2003, with the appointment of the Transitional National Government (TNG). The TNG was intended to break with conflict-era politics while also recognizing the reality that anti-Taylor armed groups and the various security agencies and paramilitaries loyal to Taylor and his associates could act as spoilers if left out of the distribution of state offices. Therefore, the TNG included some members of wartime rebel groups, but its mandate was limited to preparing the way for national elections in 2005.

The October 2005 elections promised more opportunity to break with the past and, ultimately, appeared free from the influence of rebel leaders. The two main presidential candidates were a football star and a former international banker.⁴⁵ Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the international banker, became Africa's first elected female head of state. Her winning the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize underscored what appeared to be a significant break with the politics of the past. At the same time, she had her own connections to this past in her efforts at raising money early in the war to support the NPFL's campaign to oust President Doe. While she admitted to this in her memoir and in testimony before the Truth Commission, many Liberians suspect that her early ties to the NPFL went deeper. Moreover, her admitted record was at odds with the Nobel Prize committee's justification for the award as including nonviolent struggle.

Timber Extraction: Business as Usual?

Other reform efforts focused on severing the connection between state power and the exploitation of Liberia's resources to reward political clients and perpetuate the power of a corrupt political class. After a UN panel of experts called for a review of forest management practices, the Liberian government reviewed links between the illicit export of timber and the maintenance of personal militias. The government's 2005 review found that most forestry concessions did not comply with basic regulations and involved numerous people who were targets of UN travel bans for their suspected roles in Liberia's civil war.⁴⁶

Numerous networks of wartime vintage continued to play a role in the timber industry despite UNSC sanctions from 2003 to 2006 on timber exports. For example, a large concession granted to foreign investors included Eddington Varmah as their Liberian partner. When Varmah was justice minister in Taylor's government, "he signed an agreement with Exotic Tropical Timber Enterprise, owned by Taylor confidant and business partner Leonid Minin, whereby the government paid ETTE \$2 million for undisclosed services."⁴⁷ Using his Odessa criminal contacts, Minin played a central role in connecting Ukrainian small arms suppliers to Taylor as well as to Côte d'Ivoire's dictator, Robert Guei, before Guei was overthrown in 2000.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ David Harris, "Liberia 2005: An Unusual African Post-conflict Election," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 44, no. 3 (2006): 375-95.

⁴⁶ Government of Liberia, *Forestry Concession Review, Phase III* (Monrovia: Forestry Concession Committee, 2005), www.fao.org/forestry/lfi/29659/en/.

⁴⁷ Africa Confidential, "Undue Diligence in the Timber Sector," July 2009, 6.

⁴⁸ Ian Traynor, "The International Dealers in Death," *Guardian*, July 9, 2001, www.theguardian.com/world/2001/jul/09/armstrade.iantraynor.

Although the UN peacekeeping force and security sector reform (detailed below) played critical roles in drastically reducing violence, the underlying link between timber exploitation and political corruption remained intact through new means well after the war's end. Adaptations such as "private use permits" enable officials of the Forestry Development Authority to collude with logging companies by signing exploitation agreements outside the regulatory framework that reviews concession agreements. This loophole, originally justified to allow private landholders to exploit their own assets and as a response to foreign pressure to open up the forestry industry to greater investment, gives officials and their commercial partners a cover to appropriate communally held land for private gain. NGOs report that land deeds are often suspicious or irregular, and long-drawn-out government efforts to address these problems suggest a lack of incentive or political will to deal with the problem.⁴⁹ The durability of this illicit extraction scheme points to the participants' ability to seemingly comply with international norms while finding new ways to shield themselves from the intended effects of reforms.

Drug Trafficking in the New Liberia

UN investigators started to find evidence of a growing problem of cocaine and heroin trafficking through Liberia. In 2014, they reported that "a considerable number of those individuals involved in this trafficking as couriers were former combatants and currently serving personnel of the military and police forces."⁵⁰ Reports that South American traffickers have used Liberia as a transit point and tried to bribe Liberian officials suggest that traffickers view corrupt politicians in Liberia as potential partners.⁵¹

The scale of resources involved in drug trafficking risks turning a small, poor country into a narco-state and will require a significant international role to compensate for Liberia's lack of enforcement capacity. In 2010, for example, U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) officials, based in U.S. embassies in Monrovia and several other countries, managed a joint undercover operation to prevent Colombian and Venezuelan drug traffickers from using Liberia as a transit point to move four metric tons of cocaine under the protection of the Colombian rebel group FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia), valued at over \$100 million, to Europe and the United States. The traffickers attempted to bribe officials in Liberia, promising cash and a portion of the cocaine to traffic in their own operations.⁵²

Liberian government cooperation with DEA officials was real, with the president's stepson and head of Liberia's National Security Agency, Fombah Teh Sirleaf, playing a

⁴⁹ Global Witness, *Logging in the Shadows: How Vested Interests Abuse Shadow Permits to Evade Forest Sector Reforms* (London: Global Witness, 2013), 16-18.

⁵⁰ UNSC, *Midterm Report of the Panel of Experts on Liberia Submitted Pursuant to Paragraph 5 (b) of Security Council Resolution 2128 (2013)*, Apr. 25, 2014, 20.

⁵¹ UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment," press release, Feb. 25, 2013, 32, www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2013/February/transnational-organized-crime-continues-to-affect-vulnerable-west-african-countries-says-new-unodc-report.html; Yudhijit Bhattacharjee, "The Sting: An American Drugs Bust in West Africa," *Guardian*, Mar. 17, 2015, www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/17/the-sting-american-drugs-bust-liberia.

⁵² U.S. Attorney, SDNY, "Manhattan U.S. Attorney Announces Unsealing of Charges Arising from Historic Joint Undercover Operation in the Republic of Liberia," June 1, 2010, www.justice.gov/usao/nys/pressreleases/June10/operationrelentlessliberiapr.pdf.

key role in the sting operation. The closely coordinated work of U.S. government agencies played a decisive role in the operation.

Drug traffickers fit well with Liberia's culture of illicit power, and resources from drug trafficking can be huge. UN officials estimate that traffickers ship 18 tons of cocaine through West Africa each year. Just one ton has a value exceeding the military budgets of most countries in the region.⁵³ This puts some Liberian officials in ideal positions to incorporate drug trafficking in their own patronage networks. Thus, while high-level officials cooperated with the U.S. antinarcotics effort noted above, UN investigators found that "senior officials of the Government of Liberia have prevented the arrests of heroin couriers on at least two occasions in 2013." They concluded that even though the deputy director of Liberia's Drug Enforcement Agency was fired for violating policies, "networks of higher-level Liberian government officials continue to be influenced by criminal networks smuggling narcotics."⁵⁴ One danger for international actors in this environment is that counternarcotics efforts that appear to be based on cooperation may, in fact, consist of foreigners and a few Liberians who actually do the work of maintaining the facade of state capacity. The foreign partners publicly give credit to the Liberian agencies relevant to the effort, but the underlying structure of governance goes merrily on with business as usual.

The Persistence of Insider Networks

International efforts to dismantle illicit power structures after the 2006 transition to an elected government required considerable intrusion into domestic governance, in many ways. Given its external dependence, Liberia's elected government had little option but to agree to the Government and Economic Management Assistance Program's (GEMAP's) overseeing official fiscal and financial accountability. GEMAP put foreign financial experts into nearly every Liberian government agency that spent donors' resources. Expenditures required countersignatures of the foreign experts, and the program was overseen by a panel headed by President Johnson-Sirleaf and the U.S. ambassador.

Even though GEMAP concluded in 2010, public perceptions of insider networks remained. For example, one of the president's sons, Robert Sirleaf, served as chairman of the board of the National Oil Company. A former National Oil Company head claimed in an open letter to the president that Robert Sirleaf used his position to advance his political and economic interests. The president denied this allegation, but since the president's son contested the 2014 Montserrado senate election, it appeared to many that nepotistic insider networks were at work, regardless of the professional qualifications of the candidate.⁵⁵ While it is not surprising that in such a small country, two well-connected men should hold the same position in succession in the oil company and then face each other in an election, this intertwining of elite networks feeds the popular perception that personal relationships trump merit in determining one's position or of-

⁵³ UNODC, "Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment," Sept. 2013, www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/TOC_East_Africa_2013.pdf.

⁵⁴ UNSC, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Liberia Submitted Pursuant to Paragraph 5(f) of Security Council Resolution 2079 (2012)*, Nov. 21, 2013, 9-10.

⁵⁵ UNSC, *Twenty-eighth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, Aug. 15, 2014, 2.

face, and that hidden agendas drive such people's behavior. It is worth noting that three other sons of the president served in government posts, including deputy internal affairs minister, deputy governor of the Central Bank, and, as noted above, head of the National Security Agency.⁵⁶

Wartime political networks found places in Liberia's political system after the peace settlement. The speaker of the National Assembly, George Dweh, a former leader of LURD and cousin of President Doe, continued to exercise considerable personal authority. Rather than resign after being accused of embezzlement, he appeared in the legislature with armed guards and held other legislators hostage until UNMIL soldiers intervened.⁵⁷ Dweh did not return to the legislature despite his protests that he had nothing to apologize for.

The 2005 elections saw the migration of wartime patronage networks into post-settlement governance. Senate election winners included Jewel Howard-Taylor, Charles Taylor's former "first lady," who won reelection in 2011, and Prince Johnson, the former INPFL leader. Johnson also ran for president in the 2011 election, placing third with 11.6 percent of the vote, and had to be satisfied instead with his 2014 reelection to the senate. Another senator, Adolphus Dolo, known as "General Peanut Butter," faced a UN travel ban aimed at wartime commercial and political actors. After MODEL commander Kia Farley, whose nom de guerre was "White Flower" (also the name of Taylor's Monrovia mansion), was elected to the House of Representatives, fighters under his command occupied a rubber plantation and were in contact with fighters in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire.⁵⁸ Speaker of the House of Representatives Edwin Snowe appeared on the UN travel ban because of his ongoing ties to the exiled Taylor. He resigned in 2007 but was reelected to the House of Representatives in 2011.⁵⁹ Another representative had previously served as deputy chief of police in Taylor's government.⁶⁰

It is not remarkable for prominent wartime personalities to continue to play important roles in politics after peace settlements and political transitions. The issue in Liberia, however, is whether wartime figures continue to exercise political authority through personal control over proceeds from illicit enterprises, in collusion with state officials responsible for making and enforcing laws. Ample evidence shows that this mode of politics persists in Liberia at the expense of impartial bureaucratic procedures and policies that are the objective of foreign engagement. Illicit power plays a major role in shaping how citizens relate to state power. Thus, many Liberians continue to regard politics, the (often illicit) accumulation of personal wealth, and violence as closely related endeavors.

⁵⁶ *Africa Confidential*, "Liberia: Feted and Berated," Nov. 1, 2013, 10; *Africa Confidential*, "Family Business under Pressure," May 2, 2014, 8-9.

⁵⁷ UNMIL, "Liberia: UNMIL Humanitarian Situation Report no. 3," Reliefweb, Mar. 22, 2005, 1, <http://reliefweb.int/report/liberia/liberia-unmil-humanitarian-situation-report-no-3>; International Crisis Group (ICG), "Liberia's Elections: Necessary but Not Sufficient," ICG Africa Report no. 98, Sept. 7, 2005, 12, www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/liberia/098-liberias-elections-necessary-but-not-sufficient.aspx.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁹ UNSC, *List of Individuals Subject to the Measures Imposed by Paragraph 4 of Security Council Resolution 1521 (2003) concerning Liberia*, Dec. 15, 2006.

⁶⁰ Backgrounds of legislators elected in 2005 appear in Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, *A Profile of Members of the 52nd Legislature of Liberia* (Monrovia: Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2006), www.kas-benin.de/liberia/Profiles_2005_52nd_Legislature-Liberia.pdf.

The International Footprint

Resources involved in the international effort to reform Liberia's politics have been immense when measured in relative terms. In 2003, the GDP of Liberia stood at about US\$500 million, with government revenues at about \$80 million, while three-quarters of Liberians subsisted on less than a dollar a day.⁶¹ In such a small economy, the international material presence was enormous. UNMIL cost \$6.2 billion from 2003 to 2013.⁶² Official overseas development assistance over the first six years of the intervention amounted to almost \$3.2 billion.⁶³ NGO assistance contributed millions more.

GEMAP's insertion of foreign experts to oversee the inner workings of Liberia's government administration was intended to transform how the government related to its citizens. These resources and policy reforms did promote high economic growth rates—above eight percent annually from 2011 to 2013—though these figures also represent substantial growth of investments in extractive enterprises, such as iron ore mining and timber exploitation, that continued to be either insulated in enclaves or implicated in illicit power. Even though poor infrastructure and limited access to credit constrain local job creation, Liberians benefit from a vastly improved security situation compared to the years before 2003.⁶⁴ Yet in this sector, too, international intervention leaves significant elements of illicit power intact, as detailed in the next section.

Strategies for Security Sector Reform

In 2003, Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) were core elements of the international strategy to weaken the dominance of illicit power and assert the state's monopoly over the use of force. One major objective was to dismantle the militias and create a cohesive army and police, under government control, that would protect the citizenry.

Impediments to SSR

After the 2003 settlement, SSR faced a contradiction. The transitional government included the still-powerful leaders of the armed groups that opposed Taylor's government, as well as top commanders of Taylor's NPFL. These leaders still claimed considerable popular support from their home communities. This situation differed from neighboring Sierra Leone's more thorough SSR, happening at the same time, largely because insurgents in Sierra Leone eventually met a decisive defeat and lacked any meaningful

⁶¹ International Monetary Fund (IMF), "Liberia: Report on Post-Conflict Economic Conditions and Economic Program for 2004/05," IMF Country Report no. 04/408, Dec. 2004, www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2004/cr04408.pdf.

⁶² Calculated from quarterly UNSC Reports of UNMIL operations. See United Nations, "United Nations Documents on UNMIL: Reports of the Secretary-General," 2003-15, www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil/reports.shtml.

⁶³ Global Humanitarian Assistance, "Liberia: Key Figures 2012," 2012, www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/countryprofile/liberia.

⁶⁴ IMF, "Liberia: First Review under the Extended Credit Facility Arrangement," IMF Country Report no. 13/216, July 2013, 6, www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2013/cr13216.pdf.

post-intervention political structure. (Sierra Leone's military, while hardly a standard-bearer of civilian protection during that war, lacked the legacy of deep complicity in the pervasive preconflict violence that characterized Liberia in the 1980s.)⁶⁵ Thus, it was difficult to begin serious SSR before the inauguration of the democratically elected government in late 2005.

The 2003 Accra Peace Agreement confronted a situation in which two groups, Taylor's NPFL and the coalition of LURD and MODEL forces, were still well armed and mutually hostile. Consequently, the agreement called for DDR and SSR programs to neutralize this threat. It gave several LURD leaders positions in the transitional government, as well as management of the Liberian Petroleum Refining Corporation. By 2004-5, that company proved well suited to illicit business ventures built around manipulating government imports of fuel, and fuel prices, to maximize personal profits, despite GEMAP oversight.

These illicit operations sometimes involved cooperation that crossed old wartime divides. A high-profile corruption case involved Edwin Snowe, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, noted above. MODEL occupied key timber-exporting coastal towns and was given control of the Forestry Development Authority. These decisions, deeply flawed from the perspective of eliminating illicit power structures and reforming Liberia's security sector, reflected the reality that elements of established rebel armies continued to be influential. Co-opting them was essential to gaining their acquiescence to deployment of the international peacekeeping force.

Prominent leaders of anti-Taylor armed groups from the 1990s found post-settlement positions in state security as well. Brownie Samukai, the head of the Black Berets, who fought alongside ECOMOG in the 1990s, became defense minister in 2006. Samukai proved able to run the ministry in a professional fashion. Nevertheless, his wartime service to the state as a leader of a paramilitary force rather than as a regular army commander highlighted the extent to which institutions of the Liberian state had collapsed during the war. While individuals such as Samukai had specific military skills, they also had experience running political networks. In Liberia in the 1990s, this meant that because a network's members were not paid, it had to combine its exercise of violence with illicit revenue-generating activities. During the 1990s, the AFL had essentially been disbanded and replaced with armed groups held together by personal loyalty to their commanders. These groups also included the Anti-Terrorist Unit, Jungle Lions, Marines, Special Strike Force, Special Security Service, Special Operations Division, and numerous smaller units, most of which were involved in illicit businesses as a means to support themselves and, for some of them, to set up other businesses.⁶⁶ This meant that the implementers of security sector reform, even if they found competent local professionals to work with, had to operate in a context where even the state security forces assumed the fragmented personalist structure that is a key characteristic of conflict in failed states.

The political trajectories of some wartime leaders deemed threats to security illustrate the considerable popular support some of these men enjoyed years after the civil war. For example, Benjamin Yeaten, the head of Taylor's Special Security Service, lost

⁶⁵ For an analysis of Sierra Leone's SSR, see Peter Albrecht and Paul Jackson, eds., *Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone, 1997-2007: Views from the Front Line* (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 2010).

⁶⁶ ICG, *Liberia: Security Challenges*, Africa Report no. 71, Nov. 3, 2003, 8, www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/liberia/071-liberia-security-challenges.aspx.

that job when the militia was disbanded. UN investigators noted, however, that in 2011 he was also involved in recruiting mercenaries to fight in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire's conflict.⁶⁷ Although a UN monitor's report paints a picture of minimal mercenary activity and effective government surveillance, Yeaten could not be apprehended, because he could call on supporters to conceal him.⁶⁸ The head of the Special Strike Force was elected to the Senate. He mobilized his fighters to take up business in his hometown, combining his patronage for these ex-fighters with new licit business opportunities to build up his popular support base. By 2007, four years after the start of the SSR program, a RAND report still found that "rebel group structures and command chains have not been eradicated and remain a concern."⁶⁹

Evidence of armed militias continued well into what was supposed to be the draw-down of the peacekeeping force. In 2014, for example, a team of UN experts investigating a series of attacks on UN peacekeepers in Côte d'Ivoire – which included Liberians among the attackers – reported "a much broader and more sophisticated combatant network than previously known." The investigators linked these combatants, including the Liberians among them, to illicit regional networks that brought violence to neighboring countries, much as Taylor's network had done during Liberia's war. The investigators concluded that the attacks "revealed evidence that they had been, at least in part, organized, planned and financed by the political and economic elite linked to the former President of Côte d'Ivoire," who had played a significant role in wartime Liberian networks.⁷⁰ The situation demonstrates the need for significant resources, particularly for increasing the capacity of the border control force and national police to sustain effective security sector reform. More problematic is the persistence of interests among local actors to limit state capacity in the security sector.

For more than a decade after the 2003 settlement, Liberia has seen periodic incidences of violence as former fighters and their political patrons occupy rubber plantations and engage in illicit logging. These events showed how wartime connections between commanders and fighters continued in other ways, too. Clashes over land ownership illuminated some of these ties. In 2008, a long-standing land dispute between a former NPFL leader who had become a senator, and the former spokesman for LURD (who were distantly related!) resulted in clashes that killed at least 16 people. This shows how wartime networks melded with postwar commerce and long-standing local tensions – in this case, a generational dispute over who owned a productive piece of land – to influence postwar politics.⁷¹ This influence extended to the capital since the former LURD official was a patron of Monrovia street hawkers, providing some with employment in return for their political support. A critical concern is whether these networks will reas-

⁶⁷ UNSC, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Liberia Submitted Pursuant to Paragraph 6(f) of Security Council Resolution 1961 (2010)*, Dec. 7, 2011, 32, 50.

⁶⁸ UNSC, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Liberia Submitted Pursuant to Paragraph 5 (f) of Security Council Resolution 2079 (2012)*, Oct. 22, 2013, 67, 24.

⁶⁹ David Gompert, Olga Oliner, Brooke Stearns, Keith Crane, and K. Jack Riley, *Making Liberia Safe: Transformation of the National Security Sector* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007), 11.

⁷⁰ UNSC, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Liberia Submitted Pursuant to Paragraph 5 (b) of Security Council Resolution 2128 (2013)*, Nov. 24, 2014, 11, 16.

⁷¹ UNSC, *Seventeenth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, Aug. 15, 2008, 3.

sert their influence once the international peacekeeping force completely withdraws—an event scheduled, at the time of this writing, to occur in 2016.

Implementing SSR

Given the density and persistence of illicit power, SSR in Liberia entailed building a new army and police force from scratch and revising a justice system that had largely ceased to function by the war's end.

Reforming the army. Initially, the view of the UN special representative of the secretary-general, Jacques Klein, was that Liberia did not need an army, because an army would just “sit around and play cards and plot coups.”⁷² The start of SSR also had to wait for the U.S. government, the partner in the international coalition specified in the 2003 agreement as leader on SSR matters, to engage DynCorp and Pacific Architects and Engineers, two private firms that work in coordination with U.S. military personnel, through lengthy State Department contracting procedures, to implement SSR measures.⁷³ Thus, the training of new noncommissioned army officers did not begin until April 2007. Even then, DynCorp had to refurbish much infrastructure and remove former AFL soldiers squatting in AFL facilities, including the Ministry of Defense building. When these people departed, they stripped the buildings of all valuable materials, including roofing.⁷⁴

Reforming the police. Liberian police training under UNMIL auspices proceeded at a faster pace than the military training program, and the National Police Academy opened in July 2004. Within five years, the training program had produced almost 3,500 police officers—close to the mandated level.

Although police reform looked good on paper at that point, the police chief of Lofa County reported in 2009 that he had one vehicle to patrol an area with a quarter-million inhabitants. This encouraged local people to rely on vigilante units, some of them created out of old wartime command structures.⁷⁵ Five years later, a researcher reported that police headquarters in Bong County, a major interior center, lacked secure radio communication and had no budget for fuel, photocopying case documents, or feeding detainees. Lacking vehicles, police had to use motorbikes or taxis to transport suspects to court or prison. These logistical constraints prevented police from making regular patrols, leaving large areas of the region essentially inaccessible to the police, and the

⁷² IRIN, “Liberia: Klein Urges New Government to Abolish Army,” Nov. 5, 2003, www.irinnews.org/report/47067/liberia-klein-urges-new-government-to-abolish-army. See also Ezekiel Pajibo, “Why Demilitarization Makes Sense,” *Perspective*, Nov. 19, 2003, www.theperspective.org/demilitarization.html.

⁷³ See Mark Malan, *Security Sector Reform in Liberia: Mixed Results from Humble Beginnings* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007).

⁷⁴ See ICG, “Liberia: Uneven Progress in Security Sector Reform,” Africa Report no. 148, Jan. 13, 2009, www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/liberia/148-liberia-uneven-progress-in-security-sector-reform.aspx.

⁷⁵ Ana Kantor and Mariam Persson, *Understanding Vigilantism: Informal Sector Security Providers and Security Sector Reform in Liberia* (Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2010).

people reliant on their own devices.⁷⁶ In 2015, a year before UNMIL's scheduled departure, a UN report concluded that police capacity was "emerging" amid continuing problems of criminal behavior and misconduct among senior leaders.⁷⁷

Reforming the judicial sector. Police are still accused of harassment and extortion, slow response times, and a weak presence that encourages citizens to take the administration of justice into their own hands with vigilante violence.⁷⁸ Judicial sector reform was supposed to address these problems, since a reliable judicial sector that was responsive to public demands would deter police from engaging in criminal behavior. But judicial reform has been problematic. The bulk of disputes in Liberia are adjudicated through customary courts that are state sanctioned but lack mechanisms for judicial review of judgments and abuses of power and are subject to executive authority.⁷⁹ An Independent National Commission on Human Rights was established in 2010. Under the terms of the 2003 agreement, this body was to oversee implementation of the truth commission's recommendations on wartime crimes and abuses of power. But the continuing influence of many who were identified as perpetrators of crimes during the war has prevented implementation of these recommendations.

Integrating SSR. International actors continue to adjust strategies to address problems. One response was the 2013 creation, with UN Peacebuilding Support Office funding, of the first justice and security hub in Gbarnga, the wartime headquarters of Taylor's NPFL. This, the first of five hubs, combines justice and security operations in a single location to coordinate government responses to citizens' complaints of abuses of power and to provide an alternative to seeking protection through vigilantism. The hubs concept, extended to the rest of the country in 2015, is designed to gain support for government reform efforts and shift popular reliance away from political patrons with roots in illicit networks as citizens turn to the state for security and services. The concept also shows the seriousness of the continuing impediments facing security sector reform, given that it still imitates classic counterinsurgency strategies. More than a decade after the formal end of the civil war, the hubs strategy aims to extend state services and security to the citizens in an effort to win them over from power structures outside the formal institutions of the state. This task is difficult when target populations believe that the government lacks the political will to make these changes and that many officials benefit from the insecurity and corruption that this consolidated institutional initiative is meant to address. This was tested in 2014-15 during the Ebola virus epidemic, "which revealed the depth of public distrust and weakness in national institutions" – a problem that faces the security sector as much as it does the rest of the government.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Trine Nikolaisen, "Decentralising Liberia's Security Sector: The Role of Non-governmental Actors in Justice and Security Delivery," *Conflict Trends*, 2014, 52.

⁷⁷ UNSC, *Twenty-ninth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, Apr. 23, 2015, 11.

⁷⁸ U.S. State Department, "2012 Human Rights Reports: Liberia," Apr. 19, 2013, 12, www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2012/af/204136.htm.

⁷⁹ No Peace Without Justice, "Making JUSTICE Count: Assessing the Impact and Legacy of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in Sierra Leone and Liberia," Sept. 2012, 18, www.npwj.org/content/Making-Justice-Count-Assessing-impact-and-legacy-Special-Court-Sierra-Leone-Sierra-Leone-and.

⁸⁰ UNSC, *Twenty-ninth Report*, 9.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Illicit power remains integral to Liberia's politics and economy. It serves as an attractive tool for individuals and groups to defend or improve their positions in a hierarchy of power. This happens, for example, when politicians use their office and commercial partnerships to gain access to "vacant" land through their control over the exercise of eminent domain. This power makes them attractive as political patrons who can offer access to economic opportunities such as timber. These political strategies are manifest in bureaucratic incapacity, which is partly intentional, and in the parallel political-commercial networks. Thus, the Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative indicated that 60 of the country's 68 concessions in the mining and timber industries were not in compliance with national laws.⁸¹ Illicit power also provides options to people who are otherwise marginalized or disadvantaged. In 2013, for example, Liberian government officials estimated that 1,500 children left school to work in illicit mining operations.⁸² These vertical patron-client links play an important role in stabilizing political order, at least in the short term, since the disadvantaged discover that their most feasible survival strategy is to integrate as best they can and find a capable protector. In sum, patron and client alike may recognize the long-term benefits of deep reform at the same time that they oppose it for the threat it poses to their immediate survival strategies.

The central role of illicit power in Liberia's political economy translates into a significant moral dilemma for international actors that promote state building. This happens when those actors' resources and efforts end up facilitating Liberians' involvement in the very illicit power structures they were intended to suppress. This is not uniformly true, but many Liberians discover ways to manipulate and adapt to pressures, and to channel new resources into illicit networks. The outcome is a hybrid arrangement: a more functional postwar state with persistent illicit power structures. To some international actors, it can seem as though they are trapped in an open-ended position of having to manage critical tasks that the state is supposed to perform. This is particularly true of tasks associated with keeping regional and domestic order, such as suppressing transnational crime and keeping the peace inside Liberia, which are also primary interests of the international community. It is true that Liberian officials cooperate in counternarcotics in high-profile ways. The government participates in institutions such as the West Africa Cooperative Security Initiative and facilitates joint efforts, but at the same time, its own Transnational Crime Unit is inactive.⁸³ Similarly, the multilateral Peacebuilding Fund supports regional security hubs outside the capital, which are central to international actors' strategies, at the same time that Liberian government allocations to them decline.⁸⁴

The international community cannot do for Liberians what Liberians are unwilling to do for themselves. International capabilities are great enough to keep a lid on the problem as long as the political will to do so remains. But in the relationship between

⁸¹ Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, *4th EITI Report for Liberia* (Monrovia: Ernst and Young, 2013), www.scribd.com/doc/152662365/LEITI-4th-Reconciliation-Report.

⁸² Jennifer Lazuta, "Liberian Children Quitting School to Mine Diamonds," *Voice of America*, Feb. 11, 2013, www.voanews.com/content/Liberian-children-quitting-school-to-mine-diamond/1601253.html.

⁸³ UNSC, *Twenty-ninth Report*, 11.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

personal interest and political power, the Liberian people and their leaders have to decide how they are going to change the culture. Some Liberians have made this decision, but the evidence insists that many have not. The main point is that foreigners can help the Liberians and partner with them every step of the way, but they cannot do it all for them.

There are indications that some problems associated with illicit power structures may be self-fixing outside the policy framework of international intervention. Economic changes across the region may encourage some patrons to shed costly clients as they find that it is easier to get ahead by focusing on enterprise efficiency rather than by working through political patronage networks. They do not end their relationships with supporters (including former fighters) or with state officials, but instead commodify their relationships with followers, turning them into employees rather than clients.⁸⁵ This changed “business model” has taken the form of commanders redeploying ex-combatants as employees in private security firms, poultry factory farms, and fisheries; and, in one instance, giving scholarships to former soldiers.⁸⁶ Ultimately, promoting some of these changes means turning the illicit networks into something else based on the self-interest of key figures, rather than directly confronting every aspect of illicit power as a security issue.

Recommendations

The recommendations below fall in a practical order, starting with those that are most urgent, have greatest potential for positive impact, are most feasible, and are least likely to produce unintended negative consequences.

1. Maintain an implicit U.S. guarantee of the security of democratically elected governments.

It is imperative that democratically elected Liberian officials who are otherwise committed to reform not believe that they must distribute state resources to threatening groups to lower the risk of their violent removal from power. The decision of other West African governments to condemn coups in the region is a positive development. A coup leader in Liberia would encounter difficulties governing in the face of sanctions and political isolation. Clear signals of U.S. commitment would increase the willingness of key Liberian politicians and policymakers to remain committed to difficult and often unpopular reforms.

2. Privilege security sector reforms that create an environment where Liberians can sort out their own problems. Police are the common point of contact between citizens and coercive agencies of the state. A 2013 Transparency International survey of Liberians found that 94 percent of those surveyed considered police to be “corrupt” or “extremely corrupt.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ See Mariam Persson, “Demobilized or Remobilized? Lingering Rebel Structures in Post-war Liberia,” *African Conflicts and Informal Power: Big Men and Networks*, ed. Mats Utas (London: Zed, 2012), 101-18.

⁸⁶ Mats Utas, Anders Themnér, Ilmari Käihkö, “The Informal Realities of Peacebuilding – Military Networks and Mid-Level Commanders in Post-War Liberia,” Nordic Afrika Institute, 2014, www.nai.uu.se/research/finalized_projects/the-informal-realities-of/.

⁸⁷ Transparency International, “Global Corruption Barometer 2013: Liberia,” 2015, www.transparency.org/gcb2013/country/?country=liberia.

Continued reform of police institutions ought to address low salaries—police earn, on average, about \$100 per month—to deter collusion with criminals and illicit power structures for additional income. Ways need to be found to enable police officers to keep the income that they earn, without being pressured to pay commanders for their positions and support themselves with bribes collected from citizens.

3. *Continue reform of the army while maintaining its small size.* Many Liberians share Jacques Klein’s skepticism that the army is good only for playing cards and plotting coups. Reform of the army has been slow and expensive, and some Liberians engaged in this effort resented that the United States sent corporations rather than “the real army” to assist in the effort. Since 2010, U.S. military engagement has focused on using Army Special Forces to train and advise the Armed Forces of Liberia. This has been effective in depoliticizing the force and refocusing it on useful tasks such as participation, since 2013, in the multinational stabilization mission in Mali.

4. *Focus on land tenure issues.* The trend toward freehold land tenure in rural Liberia is part of a continental trend and accords with economic policies intended to promote private enterprise. But where “private enterprise” is closely linked to illicit power networks, land tenure reform can have the unintended effect of increasing these networks’ influence and generating wider insecurity. Reform needs to take local conditions into greater account and be exposed to wider public debate as this transition proceeds.

5. *Accept that some tasks, such as transnational crime prevention, are likely to require open-ended international oversight.* Suppression of drug trafficking and related transnational threats is critical to the success of other reforms in Liberia. Indeed, suppression is of sufficient U.S. and West African interest to justify external provision of this collective good to Liberia, regardless of the local resources committed to the effort. Local buy-in should be encouraged, perhaps through selective Liberian participation in regional organizations and operations.

Conclusion

International actors cannot fix everything in Liberia all at once, and they will not be effective without substantial Liberian buy-in. A more measured response to the problems of illicit power has its downsides, however. First, foreign officials who hold back will face criticism from the threat-inflation chorus. Second, some illicit power structures could pose a threat to local and regional stability. In any event, the core tensions in international strategy concern the persistence of deeply rooted corrupt practices in Liberian politics and society, and the difficulties in disrupting these. Also at play is the insidious dynamic that the more that foreigners do, the less their Liberian partners do. Effective state building is the only long-term solution to these problems, and state building will be effective only if it is driven by locals.