



## **United States Foreign Policy and the Second Liberian Civil War**

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### **Abstract**

After about three years following the end of its first civil war in 1996, Liberia was again plunged into another civil war, when the Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a group of rebels, attacked the country from neighbouring Guinea. The efforts by the Taylor regime to repel the attack occasioned a full-scale war. Initially, the war was confined to the western and north-western portions of the country. But, by early 2003, LURD's forces had advanced to the outskirts of Monrovia, the capital city.

For the initial four years of the war, the United States displayed a non-chalant attitude. This was because Liberia was no longer of any strategic value to the US. Also, given the adversarial relationship between the Taylor regime and Washington, the latter thus had no empathy for the former. However, amid the escalation of the war and its attendant adverse consequences, especially the death of hundreds of civilians, ECOWAS, the AU, the EU, the UN and various actors within the American domestic setting, including Liberian Diaspora Groups, pressured the Bush administration to join the efforts to end the carnage. Consequently, the Bush administration obliged. After an ECOWAS-brokered agreement that led to the resignation of President Taylor and his subsequent departure to Nigeria in exile, the United States intervened by supporting ECOWAS' peacekeeping operation.

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Against this backdrop, this article has interrelated purposes. First, it examines the nature and dynamics of American intervention in the second Liberian civil war. Second, it discusses the impact of the American intervention on the civil war. Third, it maps out the emerging trajectory of US–Liberia relations in the post-Taylor era. Fourth, it proffers ways of rethinking the relationship so that it would be mutually beneficial.

### Résumé

Environ trois ans après la fin de sa première guerre civile en 1996, le Liberia a été de nouveau plongé dans une autre guerre civile, lorsqu'un groupe de rebelles, les Libériens unis pour la réconciliation et la démocratie (Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy – LURD), a attaqué le pays à partir de la Guinée voisine. Les efforts du régime de Taylor pour repousser l'attaque ont entraîné une guerre totale. Celle-ci était confinée au départ aux régions ouest et nord-ouest du pays, mais au début de l'année 2003, les forces de LURD avaient progressé jusqu'aux abords de Monrovia, la capitale.

Pendant les quatre premières années de guerre, les Etats-Unis ont affiché une attitude nonchalante, car le Liberia n'avait plus aucune valeur stratégique pour eux. En outre, compte tenu des relations conflictuelles entre le régime de Taylor et Washington, ces derniers n'avaient aucune empathie pour le premier. Cependant, face à l'escalade de la guerre et des conséquences négatives qui en découlent, en particulier la mort de centaines de civils, la CEDEAO, l'Union africaine, l'Union européenne, les Nations Unies et divers acteurs à l'intérieur des Etats-Unis, y compris des Groupes de la diaspora libérienne, ont mis la pression sur l'administration Bush afin qu'elle se joigne aux efforts pour mettre fin au carnage. Ce qu'elle accepta donc. A la suite d'un accord négocié sous l'égide de la CEDEAO qui a abouti à la démission du Président Taylor et son départ subséquent en exil au Nigeria, les Etats-Unis sont intervenus en soutenant l'opération de maintien de la paix de la CEDEAO.

Dans ce contexte, le présent article a des objectifs étroitement liés : un, examiner la nature et la dynamique de l'intervention américaine dans la seconde guerre civile libérienne ; deux, discuter de l'impact de l'intervention américaine sur la guerre civile ; trois, dresser la carte de la trajectoire émergente des relations entre les Etats-Unis et le Liberia après l'ère Taylor ; et quatre, offrir des moyens de repenser les relations pour qu'elles soient mutuellement bénéfiques.

### Introduction

For almost four years, the United States demonstrated nonchalance in its foreign policy behaviour toward the second Liberian civil war. Several factors accounted for this. First, with the end of the 'Cold War,' Liberia was no longer of strategic importance. Second, given the hostile relations between the United States and Liberia during the Taylor regime, Washington therefore saw the insurgency launched by the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), an amalgam of former leaders and members of the various warring factions from Liberia's first civil war (1989-1997), as an opportunity to oust the Taylor regime from power. Toward this end, despite its foreign policy behaviour, the United States acquiesced in the transfer of its weapons from Guinea (LURD's sub-regional patron) to LURD (Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers, 2004). The weapons were then used by LURD's forces to wage the war and the campaign to oust the Taylor regime from power. Third, the theatre of the war was limited to the western and north-western regions of Liberia from early 1999, when the war commenced, to early 2003. Thus, the horrendous human rights violations (Human Rights Watch 1999; Human Rights Watch 2000; Human Rights Watch 2001; Human Rights Watch 2002) that were committed by the belligerents – Taylor's government forces and those of LURD – were not publicly known. Thus, there was no public outcry at that time for intervention by the United States and other global actors.

However, by March 2003, the theatre of the war expanded to the outskirts of the capital city, Monrovia. The resultant 'tugs and pulls' between government and LURD forces witnessed an escalation of the violence, as hundreds of civilians were wounded and killed by both targeted and indiscriminate attacks from the warring parties. With the war and its associated unmitigated violence within full view, there were calls from various quarters for the international community to intervene and halt the orgy of violence that had engulfed the entire country with the emergence of the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), an offshoot of LURD, as the so-called 'second' insurgent group. As Liberia's neo-colonial patron, the United States came under an avalanche of pressure from the European Union, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and various Liberian Diaspora groups based in the United States to intervene in the war. Ultimately, the United States shifted its policy from nonchalance to engagement in the second Liberian civil war.

Against this background, the article has several interrelated purposes. First, it will examine the nature and dynamics of the United States' engagement in

the second Liberian civil war. Second, the study will assess the impact of the American engagement in the war. Third, the article will probe the state of US–Liberia relations in the post-Taylor era. Fourth, it will suggest ways for rethinking US–Liberia relations as a strategy for helping to forestall the re-occurrence of war in Liberia.

### **The Stabilization Support Model**

The study uses the stabilisation support model as its theoretical framework for describing and explaining the thrust of the United States’ engagement in the second Liberian civil war. The model is anchored on several pillars. First, stabilisation support takes place in the context of armed violence. And the violence serves as a barrier to the delivery of humanitarian relief and peace-making.

Second, stabilisation support entails the indirect participation of an actor in the efforts to terminate a war by supporting the military intervention of another actor. The support usually takes the form of assistance with training, planning, the transporting of troops, and the provision of equipment, logistics and intelligence. Importantly, the ‘supporting actor’ may use its military forces as the conduits for aiding the ‘engaged actor’.

Third, the ‘supporting actor’ collaborates with the ‘engaged actor’ in the identification of the sources of the violence that undergirds the war. Subsequently, the former helps the latter in bringing the intervention assets to bear on halting the violence, and stabilising the environment. In turn, this creates the conditions for the distribution of humanitarian relief to civilians. Ultimately, this helps to restore hope to, and comfort for the civilian population (Freedman 2007:248). Also, the mitigation of the violence and the stabilisation of the environment provide propitious conditions for the undertaking of peace-making efforts to resolve the war and its underlying conflict.

### **The Second Liberian Civil War**

#### ***Background***

Based on ECOWAS’ ‘exit strategy’, post-conflict election was hastily organised when the conditions were not propitious. The ‘exit strategy’ was informed by intervention-fatigue. That is, the peacekeeping operation had exacted substantial human, financial and logistical costs on the participating West African states, especially Nigeria that provided the majority of the troops and the funding (Adebayo 2002). It is estimated that the peacekeeping operation cost Nigeria in excess of \$500 million (Hutchful 1999). Against this background, the

leaders of the sub-region led by President Sani Abacha of Nigeria made the determination that the holding of election would be the best 'exit strategy' (Interviews 1998a and 1999).

ECOWAS' 'exit strategy' adversely affected the electoral environment in various ways. One major way was that the disarmament and demobilisation phases, which were critical to what Lyons (2001:1) calls 'the demilitarization of politics', were incomplete (Ballentine and Nitzschke 2005). By the time these two phases ended on 7 February 1997, only 21,315 of the estimated 60,000 fighters had been disarmed (Human Rights 1998; Tanner 1998). This worked to the advantage of the Taylor-led National Patriotic Party (NPP), the political expression of the NPFL, the largest warring faction. With the military and administrative machinery of the NPFL intact in the majority of Liberia's territory, the NPP had the machinery for waging the presidential campaign through the use of intimidation and fear (Tanner 1998; Lyons 1999). With the political space still militarised, voters were fearful that if they did not support Taylor and the NPP, harm would either befall them personally or the country as a whole (Lyons 1999; Lyons 2002). The fear was buttressed by Taylor's recurrent claim that if he did not win the Liberian Presidency, he would revert to the waging of war (Lyons 1999).

Another advantage for the NPP was that the NPFL's military machinery was used to intimidate and make it difficult for the other presidential candidates to campaign freely throughout the country (Lyons 1999; Lyons 2002). Two cases are instructive. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the flag bearer of the Unity Part (UP), was intimidated and harassed by NPFL operatives, while she campaigned in Nimba County, the north central region of the country (Interviews 1998b). Similarly, NPFL militiamen obstructed H. Boima Fahnbulleh, the standard bearer of the Reformation Action Party (RAP), as he tried to campaign in Grand Cape Mount County, his home region, in the western section of the country (Interviews 1998b).

Additionally, Taylor had an overwhelming advantage over the other political parties (mainly civilian-led) in the critical areas of financial and material resources. Given the fact that Taylor used the war to plunder and pillage Liberia's rubber, diamond, gold and timber (Reno 1996), he had a huge 'election war chest,' including money for vote-buying, a radio station, automobiles, t-shirts, posters and other resources that far exceeded the combined resource bases of all of the other political parties (Lyons 1998). Also, given ECOWAS' plan to award Taylor the presidency, he was allowed to begin campaigning in advance of the official commencement of the campaign season (Harris 1999). Even though, this was clearly in contravention of the electoral code, Taylor was never penalised.

### *From 'Democratic' Elections to Failed Peacebuilding*

With the 'electoral playing field' not levelled, and amid major security challenges, Liberians went to the polls *en masse* to choose its new president. To the chagrin of some Liberians and observers of Liberian affairs, the overwhelming majority of the electorate, for a variety of reasons, gave Taylor and his NPP a landslide victory in the presidential election – over 75 per cent of the votes (Independent Election Commission, 1997a). Based on the proportional representation electoral formula, Taylor's political party was allotted 21 out of 30 seats in the Senate, and 49 of the 64 seats in the House of Representatives (Independent Election Commission 1997b). This meant that Taylor was in complete control of the government.

Clearly, Taylor's victory was a great disappointment to the Clinton administration, which despite its chequered involvement in peacemaking efforts, showed considerable interest in the election. Specifically, the Clinton administration was hopeful that Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (now the incumbent president), a member of the 'old local wing' of the Liberian ruling class spanning the Tubman (portion) and Tolbert regimes, would have won the election. As a member of what Prado (1966) calls the 'bureaucratic wing' of the local ruling class, Madam Sirleaf held several positions, including assistant minister of finance, deputy minister of finance for expenditure and debt management, minister of finance and President of the Liberian Bank for Development and Investment (LBDI). As well, she held positions at Citibank in the United States, the World Bank and the United Nations (Sirleaf 2009). The 'old local wing' of the Liberian ruling class had a 'patron-client relationship' with the United States and its ruling class (Lumumba-Kasongo 1999). Under this relationship, the 'old local wing' of the Liberian ruling class performed an assortment of functions and services on behalf of the United States and its ruling class, including creating propitious conditions for the accumulation of capital by American multinational corporations like Firestone (Mayson and Sawyer 1979; Lumumba-Kasongo 1999; Kieh 2007).

Having achieved his ambition of becoming the President of Liberia, the hope was entertained by Liberians and various actors in the international community, including ECOWAS, the OAU (now the AU), the UN and the United States, that Taylor would provide the requisite leadership for shepherding the post-conflict peace building project, especially the exigency of addressing the root causes of the first Liberian civil war. Unfortunately, the Taylor regime undertook various actions that undermined the peace building project and eventually led to its failure. At the vortex, the Taylor regime refused to set into motion measures for addressing the taproots of the first Liberian civil war. The

overarching failure was the refusal to democratically reconstitute the neo-colonial Liberian state, the generator of the crises of underdevelopment that occasioned the war. To make matters worse, the performance of the Taylor regime was horrendous. For example, the social and economic conditions of the members of Liberia's subaltern classes grew worse. By 1999, the poverty rate was 76.2 per cent, and the unemployment rate stood at an alarming 85 per cent (United Nations Development Programme 2006). During the same period, the Human Development Index (HDI) was 0.276, ranking the country 174th out of 175 countries worldwide (United Nations Development Programme 1999). Politically, Taylor reverted to authoritarianism as evidenced by, among other things, the unmitigated violation of human rights (Freedom House 2010). In the security realm, the Taylor regime reneged on its commitment to undertake security sector reform as required by the Abuja II Peace Accord. Instead, President Taylor transformed his militia into Liberia's new military, security and police apparatus (Lehtinen 2002). One of the major consequences was the heightening of the sense of insecurity that had enveloped the leaders of the various former militias, who were apprehensive about a Taylor presidency, especially in terms of its impact on their security.

At the sub-regional level, President Taylor embarked upon a campaign of destabilisation in the extended Mano River Basin of West Africa. At the core was the continuation of his support for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone (Human Rights Watch 2006). Also, in Guinea, President Taylor supported the Rally of Democratic Forces of Guinea (RFDG), a rebel group, in its effort to depose the government of President Lasana Conte (Ploughshares 2000). In Côte d'Ivoire, the Taylor regime provided military and other support to the rebel outfit Movement for Peace and Justice (MPJ), which was determined to overthrow the regime of President Laurent Gbagbo (Dukule 2002). Significantly, President Taylor's sub-regional destabilisation project was propelled by two major objectives: Taylor's insatiable appetite for the personal control of natural resources as the locus of his private accumulation of capital project, and his penchant to become a sub-regional 'power broker.'

Clearly, President Taylor's actions helped to fuel the antagonistic relationship between his regime and the United States government. Particularly, the American government was incensed by Taylor's destabilisation campaign, especially in Sierra Leone and Guinea, whose regimes were friendly toward the United States. Accordingly, the United States government pursued three major sets of interrelated measures as the cornerstones of its relations with Liberia. The locus was the political and diplomatic isolation of the Taylor regime, although as Human Rights Watch (2002:2) aptly observes, 'The U.S. was less public in its approach.' Another measure was the imposition of sanc-

tions on the importation of Liberian rough diamonds (Human Rights Watch 2002:2). Washington also pursued a humanitarian assistance programme through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which focused on the resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons, and a modest but less successful democracy and governance programme (Human Rights Watch 2002:2).

### **The Return to Warfare**

Despite its efforts to construct a 'garrison state,' the Taylor regime was unable to dragoon the Liberian people into supporting it. Hence, with the evaporation of the euphoria and the resultant legitimacy which it enjoyed both prior to, and immediately after the 1997 election, the Taylor regime became vulnerable to insurgency. Accordingly, an amalgam of some of the leaders of the former militias (Taylor's adversaries), their supporters and some of Taylor's disgruntled supporters established LURD as an insurgency movement with the sole goal of removing Taylor from power, and assuming control of the state. Then, using Guinea as the 'launching pad,' LURD's forces attacked the western and northwestern portions of Liberia in 1999 (Brabazon 2003). In return, the Taylor regime mobilised the full battery of its military assets and sought to repel the attack. The resultant 'tit for tat' plunged the country into its second civil war.

As has been discussed, for almost four years, the war was focused in the west and northwest regions of Liberia. It was not until mid-2003 that the war progressed to the outskirts of the capital city region. This development was helped in part by the decision of LURD to split into two groups: LURD, the original militia, and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). As Joe Wylie, one of LURD's military advisors boasted, 'MODEL [was] an integrated force of LURD' (Global Security 2005a:1). The decision to create MODEL was propelled by the determination that a two-front war would exert enormous pressure on the Taylor regime, especially its demoralised military. Accordingly, MODEL opened a 'second front' in the south and south-eastern regions of the country, while LURD continued to focus on the west, north-western and capital city regions.

By May 2003, the Taylor regime had lost control over the entire country with the exception of an enclave in Monrovia, the capital city, where Taylor and the core of his fighters were ensconced. So, for about two months, the residents of the capital city region were subjected to attacks from LURD and the Taylor regime. And this resulted in the injury and death of thousands of innocent civilians (Clapham 2003). The escalation of the violence and the result-

ant injuries and deaths eventually led to a humanitarian crisis. In turn, there were calls from various quarters for the international community to intervene and halt the carnage.

### **The Bush Administration and U.S. Policy Responses to the Second Civil War**

#### ***The Phases of American Policy Responses***

American policy toward the second civil war went through various phases spanning the 'wait and see' to engagement through the stabilisation mission. In this section of the article, the nature and dynamics of the various phases will be examined.

#### ***The 'Wait and See Phase'***

The United States was cognizant of the deteriorating security conditions in Liberia as a consequence of the outbreak of the latter's second civil war, long before the highly publicised siege of the capital city region by LURD in mid 2003. This was evidenced by various actions taken by the United States' European Command (EUCOM), which then had responsibility for American military and security activities in the African region. In early 2003, EUCOM sent a survey and assessment team and a Naval SEAL platoon to Monrovia (Ross 2005:1).

Few months later, with the security situation in Liberia deteriorating at a fast pace, EUCOM increased the security at the US Embassy in Liberia with a Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team Platoon (Ross 2005:1). Also, EUCOM deployed a humanitarian and assistance survey team to determine the extent of the humanitarian crisis (Ross 2005:1). Then, in late July 2003, EUCOM pre-positioned the 398th Air Expeditionary Group in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and Dakar, Senegal (Ross 2005:1). EUCOM also placed Special Operations Forces (SOF) in neighbouring countries, in preparation for a possible non-combatant evacuation of US citizens (Ross 2005:1). In late July 2003, a Joint Task Force for Liberia was established. The force trained in case a military operation in Liberia was ordered by the President of the United States.

#### ***The Nonchalance Phase***

Despite being cognizant of the reign of violence and its associated consequences of injuries and deaths in Liberia, the Bush administration decided that the United States would not intervene militarily in the civil war. Two major factors accounted for this. First, consistent with the United States' realpolitik foreign policy framework, Liberia was of no strategic value to the United States;

hence, a military intervention and its attendant risks were unwarranted. As Beinart (2003:1) laments, 'In countries that lack oil and strategic location, rescuing suffering people still falls into the Clintonian category of 'foreign policy as social work'.' Second, the Bush administration was still suffering from what has been referred to as the 'Somalia overhang' (Crocker 1995). This mindset, which is based on the failed American-led peacekeeping mission in Somalia in 1992, militates against any American 'armed humanitarianism' in civil war ravaged African countries that are enveloped by humanitarian crisis.

Accordingly, like the administration of 'Bush 41' did during the first Liberian civil war in 1989, the regime of 'Bush 43' chose to watch the Liberian civil war and its deleterious consequences. Thus, the US Joint Task Force Liberia, which was organised in the case of an eventuality, was ordered to change its former stance, since no American military intervention in the conflict was in the offing. So, as the second Liberian civil war raged on, the United States took a non-chalant attitude toward the conflict. In fact, as thousands of Liberians besieged the US Embassy for help, the Marines stationed at the American Embassy simply protected the facility (Beinart 2003:1). This attitude on the part of the Bush administration disappointed many Liberians, who expected the United States to intervene in their country's civil war. To express their anger at the Bush administration's indifference, some people of Monrovia lined up bodies of civilians killed during the fighting in front of the US Embassy (Cherin 2003:1).

### *The Engagement Phase*

Riveted by an avalanche of domestic and international pressure amid the 'killing fields' in Liberia, the Bush administration finally decided to get involved in the efforts to help end the civil war and its attendant human suffering. Several factors contributed to the policy shift. Within the Bush administration, some officials of the Department of State led by Secretary of State Colin Powell, pressed the case for American involvement (Matthews 2003:1). Another factor was that several civil society groups in the United States pleaded for American intervention on humanitarian grounds. In making the case, the *New York Times* (2003:A18) asserted, 'Swift American intervention could help end two decades of carnage that has destroyed Liberia and crippled several of its neighbours. It can save lives, stabilise the region, and prove that America's commitment to Africa is real.' As well, the Liberian Diaspora community pressed for American intervention (Africa Focus 2003:1). At the global level, ECOWAS, the AU, the EU and the UN exerted pressure on Washington (O'Connell 2004).

Yet, another major factor revolved around American security interests, especially against the backdrop of the post-9/11 international environment. In

this vein, the United States is concerned about so-called 'failed states' being used as 'terrorist beachheads.' In accentuating this point in the context of the second Liberian civil war, Condoleezza Rice, the then National Security Advisor to President Bush noted,

The President does believe that Liberia and the stability of West Africa [are] important to U.S. interest. In addition to the humanitarian situation there, we've also recognized since 9/11 that one wants to be careful about permitting conditions of failed states that could lead to greater sources of terrorism (Freeman 2003:1).

Specifically, President Taylor was accused of having ties to Al Qaeda. For example, a confidential investigation by the Special Court for Sierra Leone found that there were links between Taylor and Al Qaeda (Global Witness 2003; allAfrica.com 2004:1-2; O'Connell 2004). Similarly, according to Farah and Shultz (2004:A19), 'American security agencies like the FBI found that Al Qaeda was involved in the diamond trade under the protection of President Taylor.' Against this background, 'the U.S. was planning strikes against Al Qaeda operations in Liberia, but the intervention was called off' (allAfrica.com 2004:1-2).

However, the puzzle remained the instrument through which the United States' involvement would be channelled. Hence, several options were considered by the Bush administration, including American involvement in a multilateral peacekeeping operation that would require deploying thousands of troops (Stearns 2003:1). With regards to the peacekeeping option, Bush administration officials were divided over the risks of American involvement in such a military operation (Stearns 2003:1).

Ultimately, President Bush decided that the United States' involvement in helping to end the second Liberian civil war would be through the provision of support for a stabilisation project undertaken by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Against this background, the Bush administration's 'stabilization promotion strategy in Liberia' was based on three interlocking tenets. First, ECOWAS would establish a peacekeeping force, and the United States would provide financial, logistical, training and operational assistance for the stabilisation mission. Second, prior to the ECOWAS peacekeeping force's intervention into the conflict, President Charles Taylor had to resign and leave Liberia. The rationale was that this would help create a conducive environment for both peacekeeping and peacemaking, especially the termination of the war and the formulation of a peace building project embodied in a peace settlement. Third, a ceasefire agreement needed to be negotiated and implemented among the belligerents. This would then provide the

requisite space within which the ECOWAS peacekeeping force would operate. Subsequently, a stabilised environment would serve as the *terra firma* for the intervention of a much larger United Nations peacekeeping force.

### ***War Termination and Stabilisation Support Activities***

The Bush administration undertook various steps to support efforts to terminate the second Liberian civil war and stabilise the country. First, as a demonstration of American support for the stabilisation mission, three warships with 2,300 marines were initially deployed off the Liberian coast (Pham 2006:38). Then, following President Taylor's resignation, and subsequent departure from Liberia for exile in Nigeria, the warships were brought in full view closer to the Liberian coast. This was designed to show support for the stabilisation mission, and to send a signal to the belligerents that the United States was determined to help terminate the war, and stabilise Liberia (Lawson 2007).

Second, the Bush administration helped to pressure President Taylor to resign and leave Liberia. In framing his administration's position on the matter, President Bush insisted, 'President Taylor needs to step down so that his country can be spared further bloodshed' (Law 2008:1). Subsequently, President Bush and some of his senior foreign policy advisors recurrently urged President Taylor to resign and leave Liberia. The resignation refrain made President Taylor to believe that if he failed to comply, the United States would use military force to oust him from power. President Taylor's position was informed by the widely held perception that the Bush administration did not hesitate to use military force inducing compliance. As well, the leaders of ECOWAS played a pivotal role in negotiating the agreement that led to Taylor's resignation as the President of Liberia on 11 August 2003, after the expiration of his term of office, and his subsequent departure for Nigeria.

Third, the Bush administration collaborated with ECOWAS in the brokering of a ceasefire agreement among Liberia's warring parties. Consequently, a formal ceasefire agreement was signed on 17 June 2003. The signing of the ceasefire agreement provided the requisite space for the intervention of the Economic Community of West African States' Military Mission to Liberia (ECOMIL), the sub-regional peacekeeping force. The Bush administration had insisted that its support for the peacekeeping force and the broader war termination and stabilisation project was contingent upon the signing of a ceasefire agreement.

Fourth, the U.S. Joint Task Force Liberia (JTFL) provided assistance to ECOMIL, the peacekeeping force, in the prosecution of the war termination and stabilisation project. One critical area was the provision of assistance with

troop readiness. Moreover, the JTFL assisted the peacekeeping force with the deployment of its troops in the various strategic zones in Liberia's capital city region. Another was the provision of equipment and logistics. In the area of intelligence, the JTFL assisted with the gathering of information on the security situation, including the activities of the belligerents. The locus of the intelligence collection dimension was the conduct of daily aerial patrols over Liberia by JTFL.

### **The Dividends of the United States' War Termination and Stabilisation Activities**

The various war termination and stabilisation activities undertaken by the United States produced several benefits. First, President Taylor resigned, and left for Nigeria. This helped removed one of the major obstacles to the termination of the war. Both LURD and MODEL had recurrently insisted that the *sine qua non* for the termination of the war was the resignation of President Taylor, and his departure from the country.

Second, American assistance was pivotal to the deployment of ECOMIL, the peacekeeping force, and the subsequent stabilisation activities. For example, ECOMIL was able to secure Roberts International Airport and the Freeport of Monrovia, two strategic assets. In turn, this helped to facilitate the flow of humanitarian assistance from various countries and non-governmental organisations. Similarly, the peacekeeping force established security corridors through which food, medicine, clothing and other items were delivered to civilians, especially in the capital city region. Additionally, the peacekeeping force removed the forces of the warring factions that were occupying various locations around the capital city region. Subsequently, the peacekeeping force established various 'buffer and security zones.' The resultant effect was that the various warring factions were confined to specific zones, especially in the capital city region. This enabled the peacekeeping force to monitor their activities more effectively.

Third, the mayhem and the resultant humanitarian crisis were reduced, particularly in the capital city area. However, the size of the peacekeeping force (3,600 troops) militated against ECOMIL's capacity to police the entire country. Hence, the peacekeeping force was only able to effectively reduce the rate of the wanton killing of civilians, and to halt the emergent humanitarian crisis principally in the capital city region. Although the peacekeeping force eventually extended its activities to various regions of Liberia that were closer to the capital city, its limited size vis-a-vis the forces of the three warring factions – the total size of the combined forces of the Liberian government, LURD and MODEL was estimated at 40,000 (Global Security 2005b).

Fourth, the stabilisation project helped to create propitious conditions for the undertaking of the 'Akosombo/Accra Peace Process,' and the eventual brokering of the 'Accra Peace Accord' or the 'Comprehensive Peace Agreement' by ECOWAS. The agreement, among other things, embodied the ceasefire agreement signed on 17 June 2003, the modalities for the termination of the war, the composition, mandate and term of office of the interim government, and some of the major rubrics for post-conflict peace building. The subsequent signing and promulgation of the peace accord fundamentally altered the security environment in Liberia by shifting from war to post-conflict peace building.

Fifth, the stabilisation activities were central to the creation of an enabling security environment for the deployment of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force. That is, with American assistance, ECOMIL was able to create the requisite space for the UN peacekeeping force to assume the security functions in Liberia. Also, ECOMIL, drawing from the lessons of its intervention, was able to provide the UN peacekeeping force with valuable information covering a broad range of issues. Clearly, this has been critical to the success of the UN peacekeeping force over the past five years.

### **US–Liberia Relations during the Post-Taylor Era**

#### ***Taylor's Resignation and Departure to, and Arrest in Nigeria***

As earlier discussed, ECOWAS brokered an agreement that led to the resignation of President Taylor (BBC News 2003). Although Taylor's term of office expired on 2 August 2003, under the Liberian Constitution, he would have remained in office until January 2004, when the new president was sworn in (*Constitution of Liberia* 1986). Taylor resigned on 11 August 2003, and departed for Nigeria, where he was granted political asylum (BBC News 2003). The locus of the plan, according to Femi Fani-Kayode, the Presidential Spokesperson for former President Obasanjo, was that 'Taylor reached an agreement with the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS to trade prosecution at the hybrid court in Sierra Leone for exile in Nigeria' (*The Analyst* 2010:1). Vice President Moses Blah was sworn in as President on 11 August 2003. Under the terms of the ECOWAS brokered agreement, Blah served until 14 October 2003, when the National Transitional Government of Liberia headed by Gyude Bryant assumed power.

Interestingly, on 29 March 2006, Taylor was arrested by the Nigerian Police in the State of Borno on the border with Cameroon (Associated Press 2006; Reuters 2006). There are several explanations for Taylor's arrest. One of them is that the United States pressured President Ellen Johnson

Sirleaf, the new Liberian chief executive, to request that Nigeria revoke Taylor's asylum status and return him to Liberia, so he could be sent to the Special Court for Sierra Leone to face trial for war crime charges (*The Analyst* 2010). The related point is that during a state visit to the United States in March 2006, President Bush 'refused to see [President Obasanjo] until Taylor was produced' (*The Analyst* 2010).

On 29 March 2006, Nigeria returned Taylor to Liberia. After a very brief stay, on the same day, Liberia sent Taylor to Sierra Leone to face war crime charges at the Special Court for Sierra Leone for his alleged involvement in the Sierra Leonean civil war (Soares 2006). About a month later, Taylor was sent to the Hague, Netherlands to stand trial at the Special Court for Sierra Leone, which was moved from Freetown (*Afro News* 2006). Taylor's trial commenced in the Hague in January 2007 (*The Guardian* 2009).

### ***The Transitional Period***

The end of the Taylor regime occasioned a shift in US–Liberia relations from a state of hostility back to the traditional amity. During the Taylor regime (1997–2003), an adversarial relationship developed between the two countries (US State Department 2010). From the American perspective, the situation was caused by the confluence of three major factors: 1) Taylor did not improve the lives of Liberians (US State Department 2010); 2) Taylor supported the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the insurgency group, to destabilise Sierra Leone (US State Department 2010); and 3) Taylor's misrule led to the second Liberian civil war (US State Department 2010). Accordingly, the US cut direct financial and military aid to Liberia, imposed a travel ban prohibiting Taylor and his senior officials from visiting the United States, and recurrently criticised the Taylor regime for human rights violations (US State Department 2010). With one exception – the charge that Taylor supported the RUF –, all of the US' client regimes in Liberia – Tubman (1944–1971), Tolbert (1971–1980), and Doe (1980–1990) – neglected the needs of the subaltern classes in Liberia as well. And overtime, this created the contradictions and crises that led to the first Liberian civil war in 1989. Without holding brief for Taylor, the point is that the welfare of ordinary Liberians has never been a concern of US foreign policy toward the country. If this were the case, then the US should not have supported its aforementioned client regimes.

Against this backdrop, an assessment of some of the claims that Taylor has made at his war crimes trial indicate that the ruptured cordial relationship between Taylor and the United States prior to, and during, the first Liberian

civil war could be the critical causative factor for the development of hostile relations between the United States and Liberia during the Taylor presidency. It seems that Taylor may have ‘double-crossed the United States’ at some point. In this vein, two important assertions by Taylor are noteworthy. First, Taylor claims that the US government freed him from prison in 1985, while he was awaiting extradition to Liberia on embezzlement charges (Keating 2009:1). Second, according to Taylor, during the first Liberian civil war, ‘The NPFL [his militia] provided information to the CIA... And there was information from the CIA to the [NPFL]’ (Sesay 2010:1). In addition, Taylor asserts that the CIA provided sophisticated communications equipment to the NPFL (Sesay 2010:1). As I have argued, it appears that there were factors related to the ‘US-Taylor relationship’ that shifted the tenor of the relationship from friendship to enmity, beyond the official American government position.

#### ***The National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL)***

During the tenure of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), US–Liberia relations returned to its normal complexion based on friendship and cordiality. Two clusters of actions that were undertaken by the United States demonstrated the return to normalcy. The US supported the United Nations Mission in Liberia, as it undertook various peace building activities.

At the bilateral level, from 2004–2006, the United States contributed over US\$1 billion to the reconstruction of Liberia (US State Department 2010). As well, both the National Democratic and National Republican Institutes played pivotal roles in the development of the modalities for holding Liberia’s second post-conflict elections in October and November 2005. In addition, the United State Agency for International Development commissioned, as well as undertook various studies on economic, political and social issues in Liberia.

#### ***The Sirleaf Regime***

The election and subsequent inauguration of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the new President of Liberia on 16 January 2006, witnessed the resurgence of increased American involvement in Liberia. The process was set into motion by then First Lady Laura Bush and then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice attending President Sirleaf’s inauguration as official representatives of the United States government. About three months after her inauguration, President Sirleaf was invited to the United States to meet with then President Bush and to address a joint session of the United States’ Congress (allAfrica.com 2006). In November 2007, President Bush awarded President Sirleaf ‘The Presidential Medal of Freedom,’ the United States’ highest civilian award (Executive

Mansion 2007). In February 2008, President Bush visited Liberia during his second tour of selected African states (US State Department 2010). As well, Liberia is currently the second largest recipient of US bilateral development aid in Africa (US State Department 2010). Under the Obama administration, the cordial relationship between the two countries has continued. For example, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton has visited Liberia, and held several other meetings with President Sirleaf. Similarly, President Obama met with President Sirleaf at the White House on 27 March 2010.

In appreciation for the unprecedented American support for her regime, President Sirleaf, amid widespread opposition from her fellow African leaders, mounted a 'full court press' in strongly supporting and defending the establishment of AFRICOM, the US African Command, and offered to host the command's headquarters in Liberia (Nhamoyebonde 2010). Moreover, the Sirleaf regime has been courting American businesses to invest in Liberia under very generous investment terms, including the right to repatriate profits. So, the Sirleaf regime has emerged as a reliable advocate for the expansion of American imperialism on the African Continent.

#### **Beyond War Termination and Stabilisation: The Imperative of Rethinking US–Liberia Relations**

There is no doubt that the United States played a pivotal role in helping to terminate the second Liberian civil war, and to subsequently stabilise the country. Although these efforts are commendable, they however only addressed the consequences or effects of the underlying civil conflict that occasioned Liberia's two civil wars. Hence, in order for the American efforts to contribute to the construction of durable peace and the building of a new democratic and prosperous Liberia, it is imperative that US–Liberia relations be rethought. Overall, the overarching framework in which the bilateral relations are conducted needs to be changed. That is, the realpolitik model, which casts Liberia and other developing countries simply as objects of American foreign policy to be exploited for the benefits of the United States, needs to be rethought. This is because the resultant 'realist trap' would make it difficult for the United States to support the democratic reconstitution of the Liberian state, the generator of the crises of underdevelopment that led to the country's two civil wars. Instead, the United States would continue to support any regime in Liberia, irrespective of whether it is authoritarian or otherwise, on the basis of the latter's support for American national interests.

Such a myopic realist calculation would make the United States to continue to ignore critical problems such as human deprivation, ruling class-led pillage and plunder, political corruption, the lack of transparency, and the lack of accountability in Liberia. Over time, these problems could generate crises that could again lead to a violent conflict. Thus, in order to forestall such an outcome, the United States needs to use a new framework based on an equitable partnership with Liberia that advances political rights, civil liberties, accountability, transparency, the rule of law, serious efforts to combat political corruption, and policies that seek to address basic human social and economic needs such as jobs, education and health care in the latter.

Drawing from the new framework, the relations need to be anchored on several core pillars. First, the United States needs to encourage the Sirleaf regime to democratically reconstitute the Liberian state. This is the principal precondition for setting into motion the process of addressing the civil conflict that undergirded Liberia's two civil wars. Clearly, the state that was established in 1847, and subsequently transformed from a settler to a neo-colonial construct in 1926 is of the wrong type. This is because as the repository of evidence shows, this state construct has been anti-people, anti-democracy and anti-development. For example, the various regimes have asphyxiated political human rights (Freedom House 2010). On the social and economic fronts, the subalterns have lived in a state of abject poverty, deprivation and destitution (United Nations Development Programme 2006).

Additionally, the nature of the Liberian state does not reflect the historical and cultural experiences of the amalgam of Liberia's various ethnic groups. Since the Liberian state was primarily established to help 'resolve the race problem in the United States' (Smith 1972; Beyan 1991; Kieh 2008), the vision and national symbols, such as the national emblem, the motto and the flag reflect the experiences of the freed Black slaves, who were repatriated to Liberia beginning in 1820 (Dunn and Tarr 1988; Kieh 2008). In order for durable peace to be established, the vision and national symbols need to be changed, so that they can represent the collective historical-cultural experiences of Liberia's various indigenous ethnic groups, the repatriated Africans, as well as immigrants from other African countries, and the Caribbean.

Historically, the state's mission has been to create propitious conditions for the prosecution of the profit-seeking agenda of multinational corporations, and the predatory accumulation process of the members of the local Liberian ruling class (Mayson and Sawyer 1979). This has exposed the 'Janus-faced' complexion of the neo-colonial Liberian state: on the one hand, the Liberian state has created the conditions for the members of the local wings of the

ruling class and their relations to have their basic human needs, including jobs, education, health care, housing and food. However, on the other hand, the Liberian state has visited deprivation on the subalterns (Kieh 2007; Kieh 2008).

Similarly, by its character, the Liberian state is, among other things, exclusionary, predatory, criminalised, privatised, prebendal, exploitative, and non-hegemonic. Hence, it is controlled by the particular faction or fraction of the Liberian ruling class that has control of state power. Alternatively, Liberia needs a new democratic state type that is based on holistic democracy – cultural, economic, political and social. By this I mean the establishment of a comprehensive form of democracy that transcends political-centric nature of liberal democracy. To paraphrase Ake (1996), holistic democracy entails a ‘real democracy’ in which ordinary people have real decision-making powers, and the thrust is on the welfare of the people, and the associated investment in jobs, education, public health care, food security, public housing and public transportation. Such a construct would be inclusive and will serve the interests of all Liberians. It is critical to note that an exclusive focus on political restructuring would be inadequate, given the nature of the civil conflict that underpinned Liberia’s two civil wars.

The other major issue is that American policy toward Liberia needs to transcend regimes or the so-called ‘big man’ or now ‘big woman’. This is because such an approach in the past has made the United States to ‘look away’ as incumbent Liberian regimes violated political rights and civil liberties, and neglected the basic human needs of the members of the subaltern classes. Accordingly, a new approach is needed that emphasises the promotion of democratisation in concrete ways not simply by rhetoric. In other words, the United States must make the support for democratic principles a cornerstone of its new relationship with Liberia. The major advantage of such an approach is that it would help to cage the ‘authoritarian demon’ that has perennially terrorised Liberia, by promoting the institutionalisation of both procedural (political) and substantive democratisation (basic human needs, social justice, equitable power relationships, etc.).

Furthermore, the United States needs to support the rights of Liberian workers to receive decent pay and humane working and living conditions, and to use its influence in encouraging the Liberian government and Western and Japanese multinational corporations such as Firestone to do likewise, and to balance the need to get returns on their investments with the imperative of making concrete and meaningful contributions to the reconstruction of Liberia. Such an approach is exigent, because the history of private investment in Liberia is replete with evidences of collusion between the Liberian government

and Western multinational corporations with the acquiescence of the United States government in the exploitation of Liberian workers and the country as a whole. Clearly, the transformation of the dynamics of private foreign investment in Liberia would help to provide the financial resources that are exigent for reconstructing Liberia.

As well, the United States needs to tailor its foreign aid to Liberia to the critical areas of education, health care, and the rebuilding of the infrastructure – schools, hospitals, clinics, roads, bridges, electricity, running water, etc. Given the current pervasiveness of political corruption in Liberia (Frontpage Africa 2010), the American government should devise modalities for ensuring that the Liberian government spends American aid on human needs projects. One of the major contingent modalities that could be used by the American government is the contracting of projects directly to private companies. This would help circumvent the constraints that are imposed by political corruption.

### Conclusion

The article has attempted to examine the role of the Bush administration in the termination of the second Liberian civil war, and the subsequent stabilisation of the country. Clearly, the evidence shows that the United States played a pivotal role in the twin processes of war termination and stabilisation. For example, the exertion of pressure by the Bush administration on President Taylor to resign as part of the process of ending the war helped to remove a major obstacle. Similarly, the support provided by the Bush administration to ECOMIL, the peacekeeping force of ECOWAS, in the areas of troop preparation, troop transportation, intelligence collection, equipment and logistics was critical to stabilising Liberia. In turn, the termination of the war and the subsequent stabilisation of the country produced several dividends, including the delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians, the brokering of a peace agreement, the deployment of the UN peacekeeping force, the establishment of a transitional government, the holding of the 2005 national presidential and legislative elections, and the creation of an enabling environment for setting into motion the arduous process of post-conflict peacebuilding.

However, the study argues that the United States needs to transcend its role in the termination of the civil war and stabilisation by rethinking the framework that provides the tapestry for the conduct of its relations with Liberia. Overall, this would require the changing of the realpolitik *Weltanschauung*. As the derivatives, the United States needs to build an equitable partnership with Liberia that is based on the support for the democratic reconstitution of the Liberian state, the support for democratic principles over a regime or a ‘big

man' or 'big woman', the transformation of the nature and dynamics of private foreign investment by Western multinational corporations, and tailoring its foreign aid to Liberia to human needs-based projects, and the reconstruction of the infrastructure. If these can be done, the United States would then be making a lasting contribution to the building of durable peace in Liberia based on 'real democracy' (Ake 1996).

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