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Outram, Q orcid.org/0000-0002-3433-9761 (2016) *Liberia: Recent History*. In: Frame, I, (ed.) *Africa South of the Sahara 2017*. Europa Regional Surveys of the World . Routledge (Taylor & Francis) . ISBN 9781857438482

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Recent History

Liberia

Recent History

Quentin Outram

Liberia traces its origins to liberated US slaves who were resettled along the western Guinean coast by US philanthropic organizations from 1821 onwards. The country declared itself an independent sovereign state in 1847 and has remained an independent republic ever since. The new state adopted a Constitution modelled on that of the USA, although citizenship was confined to the settlers, 'Americo-Liberians' or 'Americos', who were then, and have always remained, a small proportion of the Liberian population, never exceeding a few tens of thousands. In 1878 the True Whig Party (TWP) regained the presidency and remained in continuous control of the polity from that year until 1980. During the 19th century a number of serious armed conflicts between the 'Americo' settlers and the indigenous peoples of Liberia occurred; the final revolt of the indigenous population was not suppressed until the early 1930s. By this time Liberia was taking the first steps towards establishing a modern economy. In 1926 agreements were made with the Firestone Tire and Rubber Co of the USA, under which the company leased land for the development of rubber plantations and constructed the necessary infrastructure for their operation. In 1929, however, the USA accused Liberia of running a system of forced labour within the country and supplying labour to the island of Fernando Póo in Spanish Guinea (now Equatorial Guinea) and the French colony of Gabon, in a system barely distinguishable from an organized slave trade. The resulting League of Nations inquiry substantially confirmed these charges. The subsequent reforms, together with the Firestone agreements, represented a transition from pre-modern to modern labour practices in Liberia. However, the issue of Fernando Póo has been remembered in Liberia mainly as a humiliation inflicted by the international community.

The modernization of Liberia progressed significantly with the election of President William V. S. Tubman in 1943. Tubman's 1944 inaugural address initiated two policies that were to guide Liberian politics until 1980. The 'unification' policy sought to assimilate indigenous Liberians to the established 'Americo' society and polity. The indigenous population gained the right to vote in 1946, although this was limited by a property qualification. The Hinterland Regulations of 1949, revised in 2001, have, however, condoned the perpetuation of traditional practices, of socialization and law, including some now judged harmful, among indigenous Liberians. The 'open door' policy reaffirmed Liberia's openness to foreign investment and its commitment to a capitalist economy. Less publicized was the Government's conservative foreign policy, and during the Cold War Liberia maintained its traditionally close relations with the USA. Liberia took a significant role in the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU, now the African Union—AU) in 1961, and in ensuring that it remained only an association of independent states. Liberia's relations with its immediate neighbours took a similarly conservative stance. In 1973 Liberia and Sierra Leone established the Mano River Union (MRU), originally conceived as a customs union, and in 1975 Liberia signed the Treaty of Lagos establishing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

In the early 1970s Liberia presented a remarkable picture of political stability, emphasized by the peaceful succession of Tubman's Vice-President, William Tolbert, to the presidency in 1971, and symbolized by the continuing power of the TWP, the oldest political party in Africa. However, the country was effectively a one-party state which showed little respect for freedom of speech and where the judiciary and the legislature demonstrated little independence of the executive. Despite the US-style Constitution, the 'Americo' élite maintained a political culture based on a presidency with largely unrestricted powers, secured by practices of co-option, incorporation and an extensive, centralized network of patronage. In the 1970s internal discontent and dissent emerged rapidly, generated by the failure of the 'unification' policy to eliminate substantial economic, social and political disparities between the 'Americo' élite and indigenous Liberians, increasing economic

difficulties, and encouraged by Tolbert's experiments with liberalism and the rising expectations of an increasingly educated class of technocrats and functionaries. In 1973 Togba-Nah Roberts (later Togba-Nah Tipoteh), a US-educated professor of economics at the University of Liberia, formed the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), dedicated to radical change in Liberia and throughout Africa. Among its leading members was the US-educated Amos Sawyer, an assistant professor of political science (later to be President of the Interim Government of National Unity). In 1975 the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL) was established among the Liberian diaspora in the USA, with an openly revolutionary programme; its Chairman was Gabriel Baccus Matthews. Liberia's economic difficulties culminated in 1979, when PAL and a number of other groups organized a demonstration against a proposed 36% increase in the government-controlled price of rice, the staple food. The demonstration was suppressed by the armed forces, resulting in a number of deaths. Although an amnesty was soon granted to those arrested, the episode exposed the weakness of Tolbert's administration. In January 1980 PAL was reconstituted as a registered political party, the Progressive People's Party (PPP), and in March the PPP urged a national strike to force Tolbert's resignation. Tolbert ordered the arrest of Matthews and the rest of the PPP leadership on treason charges and the PPP was prohibited. The political atmosphere became increasingly tense and, in April, 17 non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) seized power and assassinated Tolbert.

The Doe Regime, 1980–90

All of the 17 who seized power were indigenous Liberians. They declared a junta, the People's Redemption Council (PRC), and elected Master Sgt (later Gen.) Samuel Doe, a Krahn, as Chairman. Thomas Quiwonkpa, a Gio, became Commanding General of the AFL. Individuals associated with the Tolbert regime and other members of the former 'Americo' élite gradually became prominent in Doe's Government; among these were Charles Taylor who became de facto director of the state General Services Agency. At lower levels, the regime became increasingly staffed by Krahn and Gio, as both Doe and Quiwonkpa sought to gain support within their own ethnic groups. In late 1983 military supporters of Quiwonkpa launched an unsuccessful raid on Nimba County from Côte d'Ivoire. Quiwonkpa fled to the USA and a number of his supporters, including Taylor, left the country at about the same time. After Taylor took refuge in the USA, Doe demanded his extradition, accusing him of embezzlement; he was arrested in May 1984 in Massachusetts and imprisoned. However, in September 1985 he escaped.

A presidential election was held in October 1985. According to the official results, now universally acknowledged as fraudulent, Samuel Doe won 50.9% of the vote; most observers consider that Jackson Fiah Doe (a former Minister of Education under Tolbert, later an adviser to Doe, but no relation of the President) was the rightful victor. Jackson Doe's defeat increased the resentment towards Samuel Doe's regime, especially in Nimba County, from where Jackson Doe, a Gio, originated. (A nominally civilian administration, with Samuel Doe as President, was installed in January 1986.) In November 1985 Quiwonkpa launched another unsuccessful coup attempt, this time prompting Doe to conduct a bloody and, in part, ethnically targeted purge. The human rights abuses perpetrated during 1985–86 brought considerable international attention to Liberia and a previously unknown salience to ethnic identity for Krahn, for Mandingo (a group popularly associated with the Doe regime), for Gio, and for a group closely associated with the latter, the Mano.

In 1987 a group of Liberian exiles, including Prince Yormie Johnson, a former aide to Quiwonkpa and later the leader of one of the warring factions in the 1989–96 Liberian civil war, assisted Capt. Blaise Compaoré's successful coup in Burkina Faso. Another group gradually came under the leadership of Taylor. Compaoré introduced him to Col Muammar al-Qaddafi of Libya and Taylor gained Qaddafi's support. Dissidents under various leaderships, including that of Taylor, undertook military training in Libya and Burkina Faso in the late 1980s. By 1991 Taylor had formed an alliance with another group of Libyan-trained dissidents, the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF), led by a former corporal, Foday Sankoh. On 24 December 1989 some 100 armed members of Taylor's group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), launched an attack on Liberia, entering the country from Côte d'Ivoire near Butuo, in Nimba County.

The 1989–96 Civil War

The civil war initiated by the NPFL incursion followed a highly complex course. Starting as an insurrection against the Doe regime in late 1989, the hostilities degenerated rapidly into a predominantly inter-ethnic conflict, and then gradually transformed into a war between powerful rebel leaders. In this last stage several factions fought not only for control over the state, but also for control over easily exploitable resources. The war became notable for the exceptionally brutal maltreatment of civilians, with numerous incidents of looting, forced labour, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, rape and murder. In response, civilians often fled, and displacements of refugees were often extraordinarily large in relation to the size of the population; it has been estimated that ‘nearly all’ Liberians fled their homes at least once during the wars of 1989–96 and 1999–2003. There is no reliable estimate of the numbers killed during the conflict. A peer-reviewed study of violence against women conducted in the Liberian capital city, Monrovia, in 1994 estimated that 4% of women in Monrovia between the ages of 15 and 70 years at the time of their interview had been raped by a soldier or rebel since the war started in 1989. A further 42% had witnessed a soldier or rebel kill or rape somebody else.

Four phases of heavy fighting can be distinguished: December 1989–December 1990; October 1992–July 1993; September 1994–August 1995; and April–June 1996. The first phase began with the NPFL’s initial offensive in December 1989. The human rights advocacy group Africa Watch described this phase of the civil war as ‘near-genocidal’, with Krahn and, to a lesser extent, Mandingo on the one side and Gio and Mano on the other. Africa Watch also reported the use of child combatants by the NPFL, a practice which continued to be reported until the end of the civil war and one with which all the factions, except the AFL, were associated. The NPFL, supplied with arms by Côte d’Ivoire, made rapid progress and in July 1990 it launched its attack on Monrovia. Prince Johnson broke away from the NPFL, forming the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), and occupied the Monrovia Freeport and some of the outlying areas of the capital. In August forces provided by the ECOWAS Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) arrived in Monrovia. A few weeks later ECOMOG, in alliance with the INPFL, began an offensive against the NPFL and rapidly gained control of the port area of Monrovia. The joint action with the INPFL compromised ECOMOG’s neutrality and established a pattern of ECOMOG collaboration with anti-NPFL factions which continued for the rest of the war. In September, with the aid (witting or unwitting) of ECOMOG, Samuel Doe was captured by the INPFL, tortured and finally murdered. ECOMOG advanced to create a neutral zone, separating the forces of the AFL (already considered to be little more than another faction), the INPFL and the NPFL, and in November a ceasefire was signed in Bamako, Mali. An Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) was installed by ECOWAS, with Amos Sawyer as its President. The IGNU excluded the warring factions and was wholly dependent on ECOMOG for its survival. The Bamako ceasefire continued uneasily for nearly two years. The peace agreements of this period gave no incentive to the NPFL to demobilize, and its disarmament was continually delayed and perfunctorily performed.

During 1991 Mandingo Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone joined with another exile group, the Liberian United Defense Force, comprising both Mandingo and Krahn, and including former members of the AFL, to form the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO). Alhaji G. V. Kromah, a Mandingo who had served in the Tolbert and Doe administrations, presented himself as ULIMO’s leader with increasing success. ULIMO, which received the support of President Joseph Saidu Momoh’s Government in Sierra Leone, opposed Taylor’s attempts to destabilize Sierra Leone through the RUF, and joined counter-attacks by the Sierra Leonean army against the RUF soon after its formation. ULIMO also gained support from Guinea. ULIMO incursions into NPFL territory in north-west and south-west Liberia from late 1991 escalated into serious inter-factional armed conflict in August 1992 with ULIMO gaining control of large areas of Lofa and Grand Cape Mount counties, including their diamond fields.

In October 1992 the NPFL launched an unexpected attack on Monrovia (Operation Octopus), which initiated the second phase of heavy fighting. In November the United Nations (UN) Security Council responded by imposing a mandatory armaments embargo under Resolution 788. In late 1992 Prince

Johnson's INPFL collapsed, and he took no further part in the war. (In September 2014 Martina Johnson, who was alleged to be a former commander of the NPFL, was arrested in Ghent, Belgium, and indicted on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in late 1992 during Operation Octopus. Her arrest was one of the first for crimes against international law allegedly committed in Liberia during the 1989–96 conflict.) In 1993 ULIMO consolidated its hold on Lofa and Grand Cape Mount counties and expelled the NPFL from Bomi County. ULIMO's position prevented the NPFL from receiving RUF support and gave it sole control over the land routes between Liberia and Sierra Leone. In early 1993 ECOMOG regained control of the outskirts of Monrovia and advanced south-eastwards along the coast, eventually capturing the port of Buchanan, Liberia's second largest city and the capital of Grand Bassa County. (In November 2014 Alieu Kosiah, alleged to be a former ULIMO commander, was arrested in Berne, Switzerland, on charges of war crimes charges relating to acts committed during 1993–95 in Lofa County.)

Following its military successes, ULIMO was included in the peace negotiations, and in July 1993 Kromah and the NPFL signed a ceasefire agreement at Cotonou, Benin. The aim of the Cotonou Agreement was to secure peace by yielding a share in a still supposedly civilian interim government to those warring factions sufficiently powerful to insist on representation at the negotiations. The accord provided for the establishment of the Liberia National Transitional Government (LNTG), headed by a five-person Council of State, or collective presidency. The ECOWAS Chairman requested greater support from the UN, and from late 1993 the UN Military Observer Group in Liberia (UNOMIL) was deployed in the country. In November a new faction, the self-styled Liberian Peace Council (LPC), led by George Saigbe Boley, attacked resource-rich areas under NPFL control in the south-east. The LPC's attacks provided Taylor with an excuse to halt NPFL participation in the disarmament process; other factions followed suit, and the peace process was suspended. Nevertheless, Sawyer, in accordance with the Cotonou Agreement, transferred power to David Kpomakpor, the Chairman of the Council of State, in March 1994.

After more than a year of violent dissension among its leadership, ULIMO divided at the end of 1993, resulting in repeated armed clashes in and around Tubmanburg, Bomi County, between the rival groups within the faction. The two groups became known as ULIMO—K, under Kromah, which operated from Guinea in the north, and ULIMO—J, under Roosevelt Johnson, with headquarters at Tubmanburg. A new faction, the Lofa Defence Force (LDF), led by François Massaquoi, emerged in early 1994 and attacked ULIMO—K positions. In August the UN Secretary-General admitted that the disarmament process had 'largely come to a halt'. In the same month a coalition of the LPC, the AFL, ULIMO—J and the LDF began assembling forces for an attack on Gbarnga, the NPFL stronghold. In September, however, the coalition offensive was pre-empted by ULIMO—K forces, which succeeded in taking Gbarnga. Coalition forces immediately launched attacks against NPFL fighters in the north and east of Liberia. This marked the beginning of the third phase of heavy fighting in the civil war. At the end of 1994 forces loyal to Taylor regained control of Gbarnga.

A further series of peace negotiations began under ECOWAS auspices in September 1994. The new Chairman of ECOWAS, Flt-Lt Jerry Rawlings of Ghana, appeared to have added a new pragmatism to ECOWAS deliberations. The principle of a civilian transitional government was abandoned and the NPFL and the other principal factions were allowed representation in the Council of State. The first agreement in this new round of diplomacy was signed in Akosombo, Ghana, in September and a ceasefire was implemented in December. However, armed clashes between the factions continued. In August 1995 a further peace agreement, signed at Abuja, Nigeria, provided for the establishment of a new LNTG, LNTG-II, headed by a six-member Council of State, in which Charles Taylor of the NPFL, Alhaji Kromah of ULIMO—K, and George Boley of the LPC all secured representation. Despite the ceasefire provisions of the Abuja Agreement, intermittent fighting between ULIMO—J and ULIMO—K continued. In December 1995 and January 1996 ULIMO—J forces, possibly assisted by the LDF, attacked ECOMOG positions in Tubmanburg, causing significant ECOMOG and civilian casualties. The fighting was brought to a halt, but the situation remained tense and the peace process was badly damaged.

In April 1996 Taylor and Kromah launched a military assault on Johnson and his supporters in the capital, and, for the first time since 1990, hostilities spread to central Monrovia. This marked the beginning of the fourth phase of heavy fighting. In May 1996 a ceasefire was agreed. However, fighting continued in the south-east and the west of Liberia, especially between the ULIMO factions. In August a revised form of the Abuja Agreement (Abuja-II) was signed. ECOWAS threatened that violators of the Agreement would face charges at a war crimes tribunal, and that other sanctions targeted specifically at the factional leaderships would be imposed. In September a local ceasefire was finally agreed between the ULIMO—J and ULIMO—K factions which had been engaged in hostilities around Tubmanburg. The agreement allowed aid agencies access to the area for the first time in seven months; the levels of starvation discovered among the estimated 25,000 civilians there were among the worst to have been reliably reported at any time during any conflict.

Progress towards demobilization, in accordance with Abuja-II, was achieved in early 1997. At the end of February the three faction leaders on the Council of State, Taylor, Kromah and Boley, resigned from their posts in order to contest the presidential election stipulated by the Abuja Agreement. Each formed a political party as a vehicle for their candidacy: Taylor established the National Patriotic Party (NPP), Kromah the All Liberian Coalition Party (ALCOP), and Boley re-formed Samuel Doe's National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL). Several political parties that had become inactive during the civil conflict re-emerged to present candidates. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf represented the Unity Party (UP), Gabriel Baccus Matthews the United People's Party (UPP), while Togba-Nah Tipoteh, rather than Amos Sawyer, became the candidate of the Liberian People's Party (LPP). Voting took place on 19 July 1997. International observers declared that no serious irregularities occurred. Taylor secured an outright victory in the presidential poll, with 75% of the votes cast. Johnson Sirleaf obtained 10%; no other candidate secured more than 5% of the votes cast. Taylor was duly inaugurated as President on 2 August. His party had also won a significant majority of seats in both the House of Representatives and the Senate at the concurrent legislative elections. As Taylor began his presidency the UN armaments embargo remained in force, but UNOMIL was dissolved following the expiry of its final mandate at the end of September. Refugees began to return to Liberia in significant numbers; by January 1998 the numbers remaining in neighbouring countries had declined to 480,000. In January 1999 it was announced that most of the remaining ECOMOG troops in Liberia were to be relocated to Sierra Leone; they finally withdrew from Liberia in October.

The Taylor Regime, 1997–2003

The new legislature confirmed the Constitution that had been revised under Doe in 1984. This Constitution prescribed a highly centralized state. The counties had no independent revenue-raising powers and were governed by superintendents appointed by the President; these features remain to the present day. The legislature was largely inactive under Taylor's administration. The judiciary remained weakened by inadequate funding and shortages of qualified personnel, and subject to political, social and financial pressures limiting its independence.

Shortly after his election Taylor appointed a number of opposition politicians and the former faction leaders Johnson and Kromah to the Government, allegedly as a gesture of reconciliation. Within a year, however, prominent opposition politicians came under attack from Taylor's regime. Johnson was removed from the Cabinet and Kromah from his post as head of the Reconciliation Commission; both went into exile. In August 1998 Johnson unexpectedly returned and in September Taylor's security forces attempted to capture Johnson and close down his base in Monrovia. After the ensuing fighting, an agreement was reached under which Johnson was allowed to leave the country for Sierra Leone. Some 18,000 Krahn fled to Côte d'Ivoire following the attack. (Johnson was reported to have died of natural causes in Nigeria in October 2004. Kromah eventually assumed a position at the University of Liberia, and in 2012 he was named as an Ambassador-at-Large for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.)

Security agencies proliferated under Taylor's administration; their identities, command structures and financing were often unclear. Two élite paramilitary security forces, the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU) and the Special Security Service (SSS, subsequently renamed the Executive Protection Service), were

created in 1997. Both reported directly to the President; the ATU was headed by the President's son, Charles McArthur Emmanuel Taylor, Jr, also known as Roy Belfast, Jr, but most commonly known as 'Chuckie' Taylor. The director of the SSS was Benjamin Yeaten. He issued an order for the arrest of Samuel Dokie and members of his family in November 1997; their bodies were found shortly afterwards. Dokie was a former supporter of Taylor during the war, but had joined a group of NPFL dissidents in 1994. (In January 2009 Yeaten was indicted for Dokie's murder and the murder of two others in June 2003. Yeaten was reported to be residing in Lomé, Togo, in June 2015.) Reports of harassment by security forces, often unidentified, were frequent during Taylor's administration, and serious abuses of human rights—usually perpetrated by members of the state apparatus—became common.

Liberia's international relations during Taylor's regime were dominated by Taylor's role in fomenting regional instability, particularly in Sierra Leone. The international community made increasingly strong accusations during 1998 and 1999 that Taylor was covertly continuing his support for the RUF. The collapse of the Lomé Agreement in 2000 raised the issue of Taylor's involvement in Sierra Leone to a new prominence. Press reports suggested that Taylor was training RUF combatants under the control of Sam Bockarie, who had left Sierra Leone for Liberia on Taylor's instructions in December 1999. In August 2000 the UN Security Council resolved to establish a Special Court to prosecute war crimes perpetrated in the Sierra Leonean civil war, and it became evident that Taylor could face trial for war crimes committed by the RUF in Sierra Leone.

From late 1999 the issue of 'conflict diamonds' (diamonds illicitly mined and exported by rebel forces) had become increasingly prominent. In June 2000 the British Government once more referred to links between the RUF and 'supporters in Liberia' and urged a UN boycott of unlicensed diamonds from Sierra Leone. In July the UN Security Council adopted a resolution (No. 1306), prohibiting the international sale of diamonds originating with the RUF, and demanded that the Liberian Government comply with the ban. A Panel of Experts established by the UN reported in December that there was substantial evidence that the Government of Liberia was supporting the RUF. UN Security Council Resolution 1343 of March 2001 demanded that the Liberian Government immediately cease its support for the RUF and other armed rebels in the region. The Resolution replaced the 1992 armaments embargo on Liberia, which had never been rescinded, with a revised embargo with immediate effect. The Security Council further threatened to impose an embargo on the direct or indirect import of all rough diamonds from Liberia, whatever their origin, and to place an international travel ban on senior members of the Liberian Government and the armed forces if Liberia did not demonstrably cease its support of the RUF within two months. In May 2001 the UN determined that Liberia had failed to take sufficient measures to comply with its demands and, in particular, expressed dissatisfaction with Liberia's inability to provide evidence of Bockarie's departure from the country. Accordingly, the diamond embargo and the travel ban were imposed. The list of those affected by the travel ban included not only senior government figures and their immediate families, as expected, but also businessmen, arms dealers and figures from the logging industry.

The UN Security Council renewed the armaments and diamond embargoes and the travel ban for a further 12 months, from May 2002, under Resolution 1408. The Resolution also indicated that, should preparation of an effective certificate-of-origin scheme be completed, Liberian diamonds proven to be legally mined would be exempted from the embargo, and it urged Liberia to establish transparent and internationally verifiable audit regimes to ensure that revenue derived from the maritime registry and the timber industry were used only for legitimate purposes.

In October 2002 the UN Panel of Experts reported that some 1,250–1,500 former RUF combatants continued to operate in élite Liberian military units, under the command of Gen. Yeaten, but with continuing loyalty to Bockarie. In March 2003 the Liberian Minister of Foreign Affairs confirmed that Liberia had breached the armaments embargo, citing as justification the country's right to self-defence. Meanwhile, the Sierra Leone Special Court issued indictments against seven former leaders of armed factions in Sierra Leone, including Sankoh, Bockarie and Johnny Paul Koroma, the former leader of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The indictments alleged that Sankoh,

Bockarie and Koroma had acted in co-operation with Taylor, and the possibility that Taylor himself might be indicted for war crimes began to be taken more seriously. In May the UN Security Council adopted a resolution (No. 1478), renewing sanctions for a further 12 months, and also imposed (from July) a 10-month ban on imports of round logs and timber products from Liberia. The death of Bockarie was announced in the same month. Bockarie, together with a group of supporters, had left Liberia for Côte d'Ivoire in 2001 and fought with Ivorian rebels. Bockarie's group included Koroma, Yeaten, 'Chuckie' Taylor and Robert Gaye (or Gueï) Jr, the son of the former Ivorian leader Robert Gueï. Bockarie was killed by Liberian troops as he and his followers attempted to re-enter Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire.

On 4 June 2003, while Taylor was in Accra, Ghana, the Special Court unsealed its indictment of Taylor for war crimes, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international law, and issued an international warrant for his arrest. However, the Ghanaian authorities failed to take any action to arrest Taylor and he returned to Monrovia on the following day.

Resurgence of Civil Conflict, 1999–2003

By this time Liberia was in the midst of a renewed civil war. The conflict first re-emerged in April 1999, when an unidentified armed militia attacked the town of Voinjama, the capital of Lofa County. In August an unidentified group captured five towns in the Foya and Kolahun districts of Lofa County. In both cases AFL troops, operating in conjunction with RUF/AFRC forces under Bockarie, rapidly regained control. There was a renewed outbreak of fighting in upper Lofa County in July and August 2000. Armed rebels took control of several towns, causing the displacement of an initial 30,000 civilians. The dissidents identified themselves as Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a previously unknown grouping. Its political programme was limited to the removal of President Taylor and its leadership was obscure for some time. Eventually, and certainly by 2003, Sekou Damate Conneh, the National Chairman of LURD, became the accepted leader of the group. In September 2000 Taylor, who had charged Guinea with responsibility for the August 1999 attack, staged an offensive, with the RUF supporting Liberian government troops, on Guinean towns near the border with northern Liberia. Guinea retaliated by bombarding the Liberian town of Zorzor with long-range artillery. From this time it became widely accepted that LURD was receiving support and assistance from Guinea. LURD launched further attacks towards the end of 2000; by the end of May 2001 UN intelligence sources considered that Lofa was under LURD control and by March 2002 Bopolu, in Gbarpolu County, was increasingly referred to as a LURD base area.

In late March 2003 reports began to emerge from the east of Liberia of a new armed group—the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). MODEL was reported to comprise principally Krahn former members of the AFL and Doe loyalists who were predominantly based in Côte d'Ivoire. In mid-May MODEL which had already captured Zwedru in Grand Gedeh captured Harper and Pleebo, both timber-exporting harbour towns near the Ivorian border, and later that month began to advance towards Buchanan. By this time only Margibi and Grand Bassa Counties were unaffected by the fighting.

In mid-May 2003 Taylor announced his intention to attend peace discussions, which were convened for early June in Accra. In response to demands from the USA, LURD and MODEL halted their advances on Monrovia and Buchanan and pledged to observe a ceasefire. The peace discussions began on 4 June, but were thrown into chaos by the announcement of Taylor's indictment for war crimes by the Sierra Leone Special Court (see above). Taylor returned to Monrovia on 5 June. On the same day LURD launched a major attack on Monrovia, rapidly reaching the capital's western suburbs, and causing an exodus from refugee camps on the outskirts of the city towards the centre and the eastern suburbs. The US embassy urged Taylor to resign from office. On 7 June a government counter-offensive forced the rebels to withdraw over the St Paul's Bridge which connected the western suburbs and the city centre. On 11 June the Ghanaian Minister of Foreign Affairs and the ECOWAS Executive Secretary arrived in Monrovia to mediate a truce and there was a lull in the fighting as LURD withdrew to the Po River, 20 km west of the capital. The Liberian authorities estimated that about 400 civilians and military personnel had been killed in the fighting around

Monrovia. About 50,000 internally displaced civilians were living in temporary conditions in the national sports stadium and other buildings in central and eastern Monrovia, and the humanitarian situation caused grave concern. Peace talks resumed on 12 June and a new ceasefire agreement was signed on 17 June. The accord required the deployment of a multinational stabilization force and a 30-day period of consultation prior to the adoption of a comprehensive peace agreement, the main provision of which would be the departure of Taylor from the presidency.

Less than one week after the ceasefire was signed, LURD again attacked Monrovia. About 300 civilians were killed before LURD withdrew once more, in early July 2003. On 6 July Taylor announced that he had accepted, in principle, an offer of asylum from the Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, but stipulated that he would not leave the country until a peacekeeping force arrived. On 17 July a third attack on Monrovia by LURD forces prompted the USA to order a naval task force to Liberia. On 23 July a summit meeting of ECOWAS Heads of State in the Senegalese capital, Dakar, agreed to dispatch an initial 1,300 Nigerian peacekeeping troops to Liberia. On 1 August the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1497 authorizing the establishment of a multinational force in Liberia. The deployment of the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL) began on 4 August, when an advanced party of troops arrived in Monrovia. The fighting in Monrovia came to an end on their arrival without ECOMIL having to engage in combat.

On 11 August 2003 the US naval task force entered Liberian territorial waters. On the same day Taylor relinquished power to his Vice-President, Moses Zeh Blah, before leaving Liberia for exile in Calabar, south-eastern Nigeria. Blah was inaugurated as interim head of state, pending the installation of a government of national unity. Taylor's departure fulfilled the main demand of the rebel leadership, and was received with jubilant celebration in Monrovia. On 18 August the Government of Liberia signed a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) with leaders of the LURD and MODEL factions in Accra. The CPA provided for an immediate ceasefire, a disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) programme, a restructuring of the national army to include former rebel combatants, the disbanding of all irregular forces, Blah's departure from office by 14 October, and elections to be held not later than October 2005. On 21 August 2003 the delegations elected Charles Gyude Bryant, a businessman and founder member of the Liberian Action Party (LAP), as Chairman of the transitional administration, later known as the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL). In mid-September the strength of the ECOMIL contingent reached 3,500 personnel. LURD was estimated to number some 5,000 combatants, MODEL some 1,500–3,000 and government forces some 20,000–30,000. There were an estimated 500,000 internally displaced Liberians, about 300,000 Liberian refugees in neighbouring countries and about 50,000 refugees from Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire in Liberia at this time. On 19 September the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1509 establishing the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), designed to take over the functions of ECOMIL, and with an authorized strength of 15,000 military personnel and 1,115 civilian police officers in a component known as CIVPOL. At the end of September the US Department of Defense announced that the naval task force was leaving Liberian waters. On 1 October ECOMIL transferred its troops, role and authority to UNMIL. On 14 October, in accordance with the peace agreement, President Blah transferred power to Bryant and the NTGL was formally installed.

The National Transitional Government, 2003–06

Despite Taylor's departure, fears continued to be expressed that his influence on Liberian politics persisted. In December 2003 the UN Security Council reaffirmed the travel ban on Taylor and his associates, and in March 2004, under Resolution 1532, the Security Council imposed a freeze on the assets of Taylor, his family and his associates. Also in March Taylor's associate, Guus van Kouwenhoven (see Economy), was arrested by Dutch police and charged with war crimes and violating UN sanctions. (He was convicted of the latter charge in June 2006 and sentenced to eight years' imprisonment, but won an appeal against the conviction in March 2008 and was provisionally released; this judgment was itself overturned by the Dutch Supreme Court in April 2010. A retrial was ordered; however, at mid-2016 van Kouwenhoven's whereabouts were unknown.) Demands for the Nigerian Government to extradite Taylor to the Special Court in Sierra Leone gathered strength in

2005. However, Nigeria indicated that it would hand over Taylor only at the request of the new administration in Liberia, to be elected in October.

UNMIL first reached a figure approximating its authorized strength in late July 2004 and completed its deployment. Ceasefire violations became less frequent as UNMIL troops were deployed; none were reported after September. Despite incidents of violent unrest, there was a notable improvement in the observance of human rights in Liberia after the inauguration of the NTGL and the disarmament of the factions. However, high levels of violent crime, especially rape and other sexual violence, continued to cause concern.

Between December 2003 and March 2005 101,000 combatants were disarmed and demobilized and some 28,000 weapons were collected. The disparity between the number of combatants and the number of weapons caused widespread concern and suspicions that armaments had been concealed within Liberia or removed to areas just beyond Liberia's borders. (Continuing discoveries of combat weapons and ammunition by the police and by UNMIL as late as 2014, reportedly 'without much effort' on the part of UNMIL personnel, led the UN Panel of Experts on Liberia to voice the conclusion that substantial arms caches remained.) The armed factions were formally dissolved in November 2004. UN sanctions continued. At the end of December 2003 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1521, which authorized the renewal of the armaments, diamond and logging embargoes imposed on Liberia while revising the basis for these sanctions. Although the previous concern over Taylor's support for the RUF was no longer relevant, the UN Security Council noted that the ceasefire and peace agreement were not being universally implemented and that illicit trade in diamonds and timber remained a potential threat to peace and stability.

Elections to the presidency, Senate and House of Representatives were scheduled for October 2005. Of the 22 presidential candidates approved by the National Elections Commission (NEC), by far the best known was George Manneh Weah, a professional footballer. Other leading contenders included Winston A. Tubman, a former UN envoy to Somalia and nephew of the former President, and Harry Varney Gboto-Nambi Sherman, an adviser to Chairman Bryant, as well as candidates from the 1997 election, notably Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Togba-Nah Tipoteh. Taylor's party, the NPP, was represented by his former Minister of Agriculture, Roland Chris Yarkpah Massaquoi; Alhaji G. V. Kromah was the only faction leader from the 1989–96 conflict and Sekou Damate Conneh the only rebel leader from the 1999–2003 conflict to contest the presidency. Bryant and other members of the NTGL were not eligible to participate under the terms of the CPA.

Legislative and presidential elections were held, as scheduled, on 11 October 2005, and international and local observers agreed that the elections were generally free and fair. In the presidential ballot no candidate secured more than one-half of the votes cast. Weah, representing the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), came first with 28.3% of the votes, followed by Johnson Sirleaf of the UP with 19.8% and Charles Brumskine (Liberty Party—LP) with 13.9%. The elections produced a politically fragmented legislature in which neither of the two leading presidential candidates could command a majority of supporters in either house. Associates or former associates of Taylor to secure legislative seats included Jewel Howard-Taylor, Taylor's then recently divorced wife, and Adolphus Dolo and Saah Richard Gbollie, both former Taylor commanders. All three were on the UN's travel ban list. Prince Johnson, the former leader of the INFPL, who returned to Liberia in 2004 after an 11-year period of exile as a self-proclaimed evangelical Christian, won a Senate seat in his native Nimba County.

In accordance with the Constitution, a second-round ballot between the two leading presidential candidates was held on 8 November 2005. Observers again declared the election to have been free and fair. Johnson Sirleaf won 59.4% of the votes cast, compared with 40.6% secured by Weah, who strongly contested the results, alleging 'massive and systematic' fraud. Nevertheless, on 21 December, following considerable pressure from regional leaders, Weah announced that he would not persist in his challenge and Johnson Sirleaf was sworn into office on 16 January 2006.

The First Johnson Sirleaf Administration, 2006–12

Johnson Sirleaf's inaugural address stressed national reconciliation, political inclusion, sustainable development and economic governance reform. Despite her emphasis on inclusion, her nominations for government appointments were predominantly 'technocrats', most importantly Antoinette Monsio Sayeh, a former World Bank official, who was nominated as Minister of Finance, an appointment widely welcomed by the international community. (Sayeh left the Ministry to become Director of the African Department at the International Monetary Fund—IMF—in 2008.) The nominations of Samuel Kofi Woods, a human rights activist who had fled Liberia in 1999 citing threats to his life, and Tiawon Gongloe, a prominent human rights activist imprisoned by Taylor, as Minister of Labour and Solicitor-General, respectively, indicated a welcome commitment to human rights. (Gongloe replaced Woods as Minister of Labour in 2009, but left the Cabinet in 2010; he has since become a prominent critic of the Government.) Amos Sawyer, the former President of the IGNU, was nominated to head the Governance Reform Commission. Subsequent dismissals and appointments did not alter the character of Johnson Sirleaf's administration.

The election of Johnson Sirleaf to the presidency was widely welcomed by the international community, and Liberia's relations with the USA and other major aid donors improved dramatically. US President George W. Bush awarded Johnson Sirleaf the Presidential Medal of Freedom in November 2007 and paid a visit to Liberia in February 2008, the first by a US President for 30 years.

The first political problem confronting Johnson Sirleaf was what decision to take regarding former President Taylor. Although the new President initially described Taylor's fate as a 'secondary issue', she rapidly ceded to pressure from a number of governments, intergovernmental organizations and human rights groups demanding the transfer of Taylor from Nigeria to the Special Court in Sierra Leone. Liberia formally requested Taylor's extradition on 17 March 2006. At his first appearance before the Special Court on 3 April he pleaded not guilty to five charges of war crimes, five charges of crimes against humanity, and a charge of conscripting children, a serious violation of international humanitarian law. On 30 April the Court requested that the Netherlands allow Taylor's trial be heard at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. In June the United Kingdom agreed that Taylor could serve any custodial term in a British prison and Taylor was transferred to the custody of the ICC with the assent of the UN Security Council in the same month. In December 'Chuckie' Taylor, the former head of the ATU, was charged in the USA with committing torture in Liberia. (He was found guilty in October 2008 and in February 2009 sentenced to 97 years' imprisonment; both conviction and sentence were upheld by a federal appeals court in July 2010. Taylor is now serving his sentence at a federal prison in Kentucky, USA.) The trial of former President Taylor began in The Hague in June 2007 and entered its substantive phase in January 2008.

Meanwhile, in January 2006 President Johnson Sirleaf began to address state corruption. In her inaugural address, she emphasized acceptance of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP—a range of anti-corruption measures forced on the NTGL by the UN, ECOWAS and major donors in 2005), and shortly afterwards she initiated a review of all concessions and contracts signed by the NTGL; all existing forestry concessions were rescinded. (The GEMAP formally ended in September 2009, although the IMF and the World Bank retained advisers with co-signatory powers at the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank of Liberia.) Despite a number of high-profile arrests, the continuing failure of the authorities to prosecute and convict those accused of corruption led to a public perception that the Johnson Sirleaf administration was 'weak on corruption', according to the UN Secretary-General. In 2008 the Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) was established by statute. Short-staffed and hampered by a low budget and an unclear demarcation between its role and that of the Ministry of Justice, it made some impact in 2010 when it recommended former Inspector-General of Police Beatrice Munah Sieh (later Sieh-Brown) for prosecution. The charges against her were later dropped by the Ministry of Justice.

Programmes to address human rights issues, initiated under the NTGL, progressed slowly. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was formally relaunched in February 2006 under the chairmanship of Jerome Verdier, a human rights activist, and its hearings began in February 2008.

The Commission presented its final report in July 2009 and an updated version in December. It recommended that a number of persons, including the leaders of the warring factions during both the 1989–96 and 1999–2003 wars, should be prosecuted for human rights violations, including war crimes, by an Extraordinary Criminal Tribunal for Liberia. The TRC also recommended that those who had associated with or financed the warring factions should be barred from public office; it explicitly included Johnson Sirleaf in this category in the light of her February admission that she had donated US \$10,000 to Taylor's NPFL in 1990. Johnson Sirleaf subsequently announced that she would not resign from office and the TRC's recommendations concerning her did not make progress. In August 2009 the legislature agreed that it would postpone any action on the TRC's final report until January 2010. No significant further action was taken until September 2015 when the President issued a progress report on the implementation of the TRC's recommendations which stated that 142 out of its 207 recommendations had been or were being implemented.

UN sanctions continued in the early stages of Johnson Sirleaf's first administration. The logging ban was allowed to expire in June 2006 and the diamond ban was rescinded by UN Security Council Resolution 1753 of April 2007. (The travel bans and asset freezes remained in place however until rescinded by Resolution 2237 of September 2015. The arms embargo was modified repeatedly but remained in place until finally abolished by Resolution 2288 of May 2016.)

In 2006 Johnson Sirleaf inherited an incomplete DDR programme and incomplete restructuring programmes for the Liberian National Police and the AFL; reform of the justice and prison systems had barely begun. In December 2007 a final group of some 8,800 former combatants were placed in a rehabilitation and reintegration programme. However, violent demonstrations by former combatants continued into 2008 and 2009; some incidents suggested that groups of ex-combatants had significant organizational capacity and retained military command structures. The Government's DDR programmes ended officially in April 2009. However, in the same month a joint mission to western Côte d'Ivoire by UNMIL, the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) to investigate reports that some 1,500 or 2,000 Liberian combatants or ex-combatants had joined Côte d'Ivoire militias found evidence consistent with those reports.

The security situation during Johnson Sirleaf's first administration remained generally calm, though fragile, with the major threats to stability arising from unemployed ex-combatants and land disputes internally and, externally, from the unstable situations in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. Tensions along the border with Guinea eased following the installation of the new Guinean President, Alpha Condé, after democratic elections in 2010. In November 2010 Ivorian refugees, fleeing from the violent unrest following the disputed presidential election held earlier that month, began arriving in Nimba, Grand Gedeh and Maryland counties. Escalating violence in Côte d'Ivoire in March and April 2011 resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of refugees, with an estimated 180,000 crossing the border into Liberia in 2011. In July, in the first of a series of attacks on western Côte d'Ivoire launched from bases in Liberia, work camps near the village of Ponan were attacked and at least eight people were killed. In September a checkpoint of the Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire (FRCI) and the nearby villages of Zriglo and Nigré, about 25 km south of the town of Taï, were attacked by an armed group operating from Liberian territory and some 23 people were killed.

Following the demobilization of the AFL in December 2005, recruitment and training of soldiers for the new national army began in January 2006. The new force was originally intended to have a strength of 4,000, but funding shortfalls led to a lowering of this target to 2,000. The new AFL reached its planned strength in August 2008, but command and control structures remained underdeveloped and the force remained non-operational during Johnson Sirleaf's first term of office.

The UN began planning for a gradual withdrawal of UNMIL in 2006. The first reductions in troop strengths were completed in September 2008, followed by second and third stages completed in 2009 and 2010, at which point UNMIL's authorized strength stood at 7,952. Consideration of further reductions was deferred until after the 2011 elections.

Concerns regarding high levels of violent crime, including rape, have been raised since 2005. In September 2006 the Ministry of Justice issued a statement admitting that the Liberian National Police, despite the assistance of the CIVPOL unit of UNMIL, were unable to cope with the rising levels of crime in Monrovia and its environs, and requesting that citizens form vigilante groups to protect themselves. An additional UN police unit arrived in January 2007, bringing CIVPOL's strength up to 1,201 officers. Johnson Sirleaf described the justice system as 'a cancer' in her 2008 annual address. In August of that year the UN Secretary-General recommended an increase in the size of the CIVPOL unit from five to seven formed police units, despite the planned reduction in the size of the military component of UNMIL, a proposal endorsed by Security Council Resolution 1836 of 2008.

In her annual address of January 2010 Johnson Sirleaf announced that she would seek re-election in the polls scheduled for October 2011. On 23 August 2011 a referendum was held to ratify a number of amendments to the Constitution adopted by the legislature the previous year. The most important of these were, first, a provision to reduce the 10-year residency requirement for presidential candidates to five years and, second, a provision to replace the two-round system for legislative elections with a single-round, first-past-the-post system. The first was rejected; the second, after a Supreme Court ruling in September, was found to have been approved. The candidacies of Johnson Sirleaf and five other candidates for the presidency were jeopardized by the failure to reduce the 10-year requirement. In the event, the NEC allowed the candidates to proceed. Eventually, 16 candidates for the presidency were accepted by the NEC. They included Johnson Sirleaf representing the UP, Brumskine of the LP, Chea Cheapoo of the PPP, Prince Yormie Johnson of the new National Union for Democratic Progress, Dew Mayson of the National Democratic Coalition, Togba-Nah Tipoteh of the Freedom Alliance Party of Liberia, and Winston Tubman, representing the CDC, with Weah standing for Vice-President.

At the first round of the presidential election on 11 October 2011 (in which some 72% of the electorate participated) Johnson Sirleaf was placed first, with 43.9% of the votes cast, Tubman second with 32.7% of the vote, Johnson third with 11.6% and Brumskine fourth with 5.5%. Only one-half of the seats in the Senate were contested, one in each county; the other half were not due to be contested until 2014. The NPP gained three seats and the CDC one. Former Taylor commanders Adolphus Dolo and Saah Richard Gbollie both chose not to seek re-election to the Senate. In the House of Representatives, which comprised 73 seats after the creation of nine additional seats carried out under the 2010 Threshold Act, the National Union for Democratic Progress for the first time secured six seats and the LP increased its representation by two seats. Both chambers remained highly fragmented. In the Senate nine parties and six independents shared 30 seats; the UP remained the largest party, with nine seats. In the House of Representatives 11 parties and nine independents shared the 73 seats, with the largest party remaining the UP with 24 seats. International observers pronounced themselves broadly satisfied with the conduct of the election. Johnson Sirleaf won the second round on 8 November with 90.7% of the votes cast and 39% of the electorate participating. Threats of violence from disgruntled CDC supporters may have been partly responsible for the much reduced voter turnout.

The Second Johnson Sirleaf Administration, 2012–

Johnson Sirleaf's new Cabinet was marked by some continuity, rewards for loyalty, and by some controversial changes. Augustine Ngafuan, hitherto Minister of Finance, was nominated as Minister of Foreign Affairs; Planning and Economic Affairs minister Amara Konneh was appointed as Minister of Finance; Brownie Samukai was returned to the post of Minister of Defence; former Senator Blamoh Nelson received the internal affairs portfolio in place of Harrison Karnwea, who wished to retire; Samuel Kofi Woods was reappointed as Minister of Public Works. (Woods resigned in May 2013 citing 'personal reasons'.) In February 2012 the media voiced criticisms over the appointment by Johnson Sirleaf of various family members: her sons Charles Sirleaf and Robert Sirleaf as a Deputy Governor of the Central Bank and as Chairman of the National Oil Co of Liberia, respectively; Fomba Sirleaf, her step-son, as head of the National Security Agency; and Varney Sirleaf, a nephew, as a Deputy Minister of Administration in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Concerns over presidential nepotism may have been strengthened or, possibly, assuaged by Johnson

Sirleaf's suspension of Charles Sirleaf along with 45 other officials in August for their failure to disclose their assets to the LACC. In October Leymah Gbowee, the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, publicly criticized the President for failing to do enough to reduce corruption and resigned from the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission. Johnson Sirleaf appointed Weah as a 'Peace Ambassador' in December, an appointment that was seen by some as an attempt to weaken the CDC.

The security situation remained peaceful except for a number of small-scale cross-border raids made from eastern Liberia on camps, villages, border checkpoints, FRCI barracks and UNOCI peacekeepers in western Côte d'Ivoire by ex-combatants and mercenaries which took place between 2012 and 2014. By mid-2013 the insecurity in western Côte d'Ivoire had led to substantial flights of refugees and there were nearly 60,000 Ivorian refugees registered in Liberia by mid-2013. The Panel of Experts on Liberia and the UN Group of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire concluded that the attacks of 2014 and, possibly, those of 2012 and 2013, were carried out by the self-styled 'Compagnie Armageddon', a group of perhaps 50 fighters, and were 'planned, financed and ordered' by elite elements loyal to former President Laurent Gbagbo. The number of registered Ivorian refugees in Liberia fell to 38,121 at 31 March 2015 and again, to 22,272, at April 2016.

In April 2012 former President Taylor was convicted of all 11 counts against him by the ICC at The Hague, and in May he was sentenced to 50 years' imprisonment. The Court's ruling was received quietly in Monrovia. Taylor appealed against his convictions and sentence, but without success, and in October 2013 he was transferred to a prison in the UK where he remains.

During 2014 the epidemic of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) that affected parts of West Africa had a major effect on almost every facet of Liberian society. The 'index case' or 'case zero' is thought to have been a child who died in December 2013 in a village in Guéckédou prefecture in Guinea, close to the Liberian border, at Lofa County. It was not initially recognized as Ebola, the symptoms being easily confused with those of malaria which is common in the region. The identification of the first case of EVD in Guinea was on 25 March 2014. By 30 March Liberia reported that three people from Guéckédou prefecture had died after reporting Ebola-like symptoms; pre-mortem samples from these three fatalities later tested positive. In April it was reported that there were suspected or confirmed cases in Lofa, Bong, Nimba, Montserrado, Grand Cape Mount, and Margibi counties. In mid-June nine new cases and five more deaths were reported, all in Lofa or Montserrado counties, and it is from this point that the Liberian epidemic began to accelerate. According to World Health Organization figures, the cumulative number of confirmed cases reached 100 at the end of July with 72 confirmed deaths, and reached 200 by mid-August with 178 deaths, and exceeded 300 with 225 deaths a week later. The peak in the number of new confirmed cases was reached in the first week of September when the number of cases confirmed in the previous three weeks reached 546. By the end of October every Liberian county had experienced at least some cases, although the most intense transmission continued to be in Lofa and Montserrado, while the number of cases in the south-east remained low. From mid-November it appeared that case incidence was falling and a landmark was reached on 10 December when it was reported that there had been no new cases in Lofa for six consecutive weeks. In the week to 1 March 2015 Liberia reported no new confirmed cases for the first time since May 2014. One further case was confirmed on 20 March and this proved to be the last for some months. The epidemic was first declared over on 9 May 2015, some 42 days after the burial of the last confirmed victim. By this date there had been a total 3,151 confirmed cases, another 7,453 suspected infections and 4,769 deaths. It is widely assumed that the inclusion of unreported cases would substantially increase these figures. Flare-ups of EVD occurred in June and November 2015 and in April 2016 but have been quelled rapidly and have involving small numbers of cases.

The Ebola crisis exposed the inadequacy and fragility of Liberia's health care system. In early July 2014 Redemption Hospital, a major facility in New Kru Town, Monrovia, was closed down after the head surgeon and a nurse died from EVD. Later that month four nurses at Phebe Hospital in Suakoko, Bong County, contracted the disease. At this stage of the epidemic and into October, health facilities were often described as 'overwhelmed'. By the time the main epidemic was declared over in May 2015 there had been 378 confirmed cases of EVD among health workers in Liberia and 192 deaths. The crisis was immensely disruptive of everyday life. On 27 July 2014 President Johnson-Sirleaf,

against consistent WHO advice, announced the closure of Liberia's international borders with the exception of international airports and a small number of other crossings where screening for Ebola could be carried out. At the end of July the Government closed all schools and sent all non-essential government staff on compulsory 30-day leave. (Schools did not re-open until February 2015.) A state of emergency was announced on 6 August 2014 and it was lifted only on 13 November. On 8 August the Government deployed troops to prevent the movement of people from Lofa and other western counties into Monrovia for 21 days. On 19 August Foya district and, a few days later, reportedly at the behest of the army, the impoverished West Point area of Monrovia were quarantined, a measure which was criticized by health professionals and which necessitated the delivery of food aid by the UN World Food Programme. (The West Point quarantine was lifted on 30 August.) A nationwide 9:00pm to 6:00am curfew, later reduced to the hours of midnight to 6:00am, was also announced on 19 August. In late February 2015 the curfew was lifted and international borders re-opened.

The UN Panel of Experts reported in November 2014 that the crisis had 'overwhelmed' the Liberian police and armed forces and criticized the 'slow, and subsequently militarized' response of the Government. EVD infected members of the police, the AFL and the Executive Protection Service, resulting in the quarantining at various times of individuals in those services, a Monrovia police barracks and an army barracks. It also noted 'citizens' deep distrust of State authority', demonstrated by a number of violent incidents, widespread attempts to circumvent measures taken to slow the spread of the epidemic and failures to comply with government recommendations on matters such as disease reporting and the safe burial of confirmed and suspected victims. In particular, it criticized the use of excessive force by the AFL on 20 August, while attempting to enforce the West Point quarantine which resulted in the death of a 15-year-old boy. Five officers were later disciplined by the AFL over this incident.

The Ebola epidemic led to the postponement of the 2014 senatorial elections, originally scheduled for October, until 20 December. At the elections in Montserrado County, which includes Monrovia, and which is home to nearly one-third of the electorate, George Weah of the CDC, standing against Robert Sirleaf, a son of the President, won 78% of the vote to Sirleaf's 11%. Prince Johnson was re-elected to his Nimba seat with 67% of the vote, Varney Sherman took Grand Cape Mount for the UP with 62%, Milton Teahjay took Sinoe for the UP with 50%, and Jewel Howard-Taylor was re-elected for Bong with 35%. Notable defeats included those of George Saigbe Boley, the former warlord, and Samuel Kanyon Doe, Jr, son of the former president, both in Grand Gedeh County; Alhaji G. V. Kromah, formerly of ULIMO—K, in Lofa County; and Saah Richard Gbollie, a former commander under Charles Taylor, in Margibi County. The elections showed that neither of the two main parties, the CDC and the UP, had nationwide support. The CDC won shares of the vote ranging from 78% to less than 10% in seven counties; the UP won shares ranging from 62% to less than 10% in four counties. As such, the Senate remains politically fragmented.

Progress against corruption has remained slow. Transparency International ranked Liberia worst out of 28 sub-Saharan African countries for bribery of public officials in a report issued in January 2016. Nevertheless, it awarded Liberia a global ranking of 83rd out of 168 countries in 2016 in comparison with 95th out of 175 countries in 2014.

The constitutional review process, ongoing since 2012, led in 2015 to a controversial proposal that Liberia should be declared a Christian nation. The President made her opposition to the proposal known to the Legislature in August 2015 and the Liberian Council of Churches declared against the proposal in May 2016. Both Prince Yormie Johnson and Jewel Howard-Taylor have campaigned in favour of the proposal however. No legislation to amend the constitution in accordance with this proposal had been submitted to the legislature by mid-2016.

The forthcoming presidential election of 2017 has brought about increasing political activity. The constitution prevents Johnson Sirleaf standing for a third term so that there will be no incumbent candidate. By mid-2016 the following candidates, among others, had already declared their candidacy: George Weah of the CDC; the current Vice-President, Joseph Boakai, for the UP; Charles Brumskine of the LP who also stood for President in 2005; Jewel Howard-Taylor for the NPP; and a

number of independents including Prince Yormie Johnson and Joseph Mills Jones, the Governor of the Central Bank.

The withdrawal of UNMIL poses the greatest security challenge for Liberia in the coming years. UNMIL's mandate has been repeatedly extended, most recently by Resolution 2239 passed in September 2015, which extended the mandate until 30 September 2016; nevertheless, reductions in the strength of the force have continued since 2012. A strategic review was undertaken in February 2014. It did not foresee a military threat but drew attention to a society divided between a narrow élite enriched by corruption, nepotism and cronyism, and the mass of the citizenry mired in poverty. It noted a deep public distrust of the Government and risks posed by civil unrest and mob violence. In view of the presidential elections due in 2017, it recommended that the withdrawal of UNMIL should be complete by 2016. Resolutions 2190 of 2014 and 2215 of 2015 set 30 June 2016 as the deadline for the Government of Liberia to re-assume all responsibilities for domestic and international security. Accordingly, and despite a suspension of the draw-down between October 2014 and April 2015 because of the Ebola crisis, the authorised strength of UNMIL was reduced to a residual 1,240 military personnel and 606 police from 30 June 2016 by Resolution 2239 of September 2015. A public joint appeal to delay the UNMIL drawdown until after the 2017 elections by President Johnson Sirleaf and President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire in January 2016 was ignored.

Domestic unrest in 2015 and 2016 was focused on rising tensions between police and commercial motorcyclists but vigilantism remained a problem. In April 2015 a motorcyclist was killed during an attempt to arrest him for a traffic violation in Monrovia. The ensuing riot involved about 1,000 people and led to the injury of eight police officers and damage to six police stations. The President dismissed three senior police officers a fortnight later. In one amongst a number of incidents of vigilantism, local residents found the bodies of two children in a vehicle in December 2015. Believing that the children had been murdered for ritual purposes residents set on fire the home of the vehicle's owner.

The AFL became operational in early 2014, a development symbolized in February by the succession of the Nigerian Commanding Officer in Charge, Maj.-Gen. Suraj Alao Abdurrahman, by the Liberian Chief of Staff, Col Daniel Dee Ziankhan, in a ceremony before Johnson Sirleaf in her role as Commander in Chief. The strength of the armed forces stood at 2,050 in February 2015. The National Defense Strategy of February 2015 anticipated an increase in personnel to 2,500 by the middle of that year. In June 2013 the AFL, with US support, deployed a platoon of 45 personnel in the Nigerian contingent of the UN's peacekeeping force in Mali; this was the first contribution of Liberia to UN peacekeeping activities since 1961. The AFL platoon remained in place at mid-2016.

Johnson Sirleaf's administrations have achieved successes and endured failures. Ex-combatants remained a destabilizing force for more than a decade after the end of the war, progress towards eliminating corruption has been slow, and the law enforcement and justice systems remain dysfunctional. However, Johnson Sirleaf has successfully resolved the problem posed by former President Taylor's exile; secured the lifting of the UN embargoes on timber and diamond exports; achieved all but complete relief from Liberia's historic external debts; begun the revitalization of the economy; initiated the resumption of basic service delivery by the Government; and regained full control over the country's armed forces. Above all, she has largely maintained peace both internally and externally. These are remarkable achievements. Nevertheless, the challenges confronting Johnson Sirleaf and her successors remain immense.