WEST AFRICA:
PROBLEMS & PROSPECTS FOR STABILITY
IN THE MANO RIVER STATES

By Tom Kamara

Independent Researcher, The Netherlands

October 2001

WriteNet is a Network of Researchers and Writers on
Human Rights, Forced Migration, Ethnic and Political Conflict

WriteNet is a Subsidiary of Practical Management (UK)
E-mail: writenet@gn.apc.org

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ISSN 1020-8429
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1. Introduction

The continuing process of destabilization in the West African subregion consisting of the Mano River Union states - Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone - together with their neighbour, Côte d’Ivoire, typifies the fragility of state and security structures within Africa despite the abundance of good intentions and plans for political-economic integration.

Convinced in the early 1970s that socio-economic opportunities would follow from integrating their fragile economies, leaders of this West African subregion, now ranked among the poorest of the poor, sought closer political ties. Divided primarily by amorphous European-carved borders, enthusiasm among the political elites for integration was overwhelming, even if concrete programmes to achieve their objectives were lacking. The Mano River Union treaty (named after the river that runs through the three states), signed in 1973, was envisioned as a mechanism to address problems of economic and security cooperation, calling, *inter alia*, for the creation of a customs union. Other projects intended to break trade barriers included an interstate highway linking the three countries, so as to accelerate freedom of movement, of people, goods and services. Despite his Marxist ideological leanings, in conflict with his capitalist-oriented counterparts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Guinea’s President Ahmed Sékou Touré opted for pragmatism by declaring that they were all convinced that economic integration was “one of the essential conditions and dynamic factors” enabling emerging states to leap towards economic independence, while meeting the aspirations of their people.¹

Three decades later, these high hopes would be buried in antagonisms and suspicions, leading to cross border wars among states so dependent on one another, and connected by multiple ethnic links. And to a significant extent, the prevailing political climate, submerged in allegations of plots and counterplots from beleaguered leaders, has contributed to a crisis of confidence unlikely to be solved without major compromises among elites and a fundamental departure from a political culture that has contributed to the anarchy. To a large part, the current political-security malaise is rooted in authoritarian and corrupt political structures, which established the basis for belief in violence as a viable option for change, making a smooth transition to democracy problematic. In all three states, the absence of democratic traditions would leave the army as the only instrument of change, however disastrous, with Guinea, until recent cross border attacks, far ahead in terms of national cohesion and stability, because of its entrenched monolithic political and security institutions. As armies became politicized, rebel movements of the underclass have emerged to challenge their monopoly on violence as a means for political change in a brutal contest for power and therefore resources. Moreover, however optimistically the elites viewed the prospect of integration, the undercurrent of restlessness of the marginalized, resulting from decades of neglect and misjudged politico-economic policies, presented all the ingredients for collapse. Stability and democratization would be the obvious casualties in the scramble for dwindling resources. Thus when the explosion

of discontent came, it was swift and disastrous, as traditional political hegemonies crumbled.

Liberia’s True Whig Party, the exclusive political machine of the descendants of freed American slaves who had ruled the country since 1822, faded under a bloody military coup d’état in 1980. Its replacement, the People’s Redemption Council (PRC) junta, and subsequently its camouflaged civilian offshoot, the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) would equally vanish in confrontation with Charles Taylor’s Libyan, Ivorian and Burkinabe backed National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Samuel Doe, the first Liberian native to rule the country since its founding as a nation-state, was captured, tortured, and executed, but the cause of humane governance and resource redistribution, which the rebels claimed to champion, remains as elusive as ever.

Similarly, Guinea’s Partie démocratique de Guinée (PDG) collapsed following the death of its architect, Sékou Touré. Its successor, Lansana Conté’s Comité militaire de redressement national (CMRN) junta, also metamorphosed into a “civilian” Partie de l’unité et du progrès (PUP), but with indications that it, too, may wither once the strongman Conté disappears.

Sierra Leone’s attempts at democratic, but managed, transition from the profoundly corrupt regime of the All People’s Congress (APC) failed to arrest the threatening anarchy, resulting in a succession of coups d’état and a brutal rebellion of the underclass, as the post-independence Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) was returned to power in an election steeped in violence and breeding more disorder. Its fate rested on massive international involvement, leaving the government’s survival in the hands of one of the UN’s largest peacekeeping forces in history.

Likewise, in neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire, which in effect became a springboard for subregional destabilization by providing territory and diplomatic backing for the NPFL, Félix Houphouët Boigny’s exit from the scene exposed the fragility of the party that had championed independence and transformed the country as the third largest economy in sub-Saharan Africa, with stability as its pillar. Ethnic differences, rivalry among the elites, and the crumbling economy led to demands for change. It, too, would join its poorer neighbours in instability.

The fragile political groupings emerging in this aftermath, with agendas not fundamentally different from those of their predecessors both in practice and in theory, would face monumental tasks in ensuring stability in the midst of economic decay. Explosive waves of rebellions would herald a new era, that of anarchy, sweeping away traditional authority structures in a continuing contest for power. Rising political and ethnic intolerance, leading to greater polarization, meant the crumbling of social structures once serving as cornerstones of fragile stability. Despite claims to democratic elections in Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea, key opposition leaders are either exiled or intimidated into submission. Sierra Leone’s fate hangs in the balance as another election looms, with lingering uncertainty about the country’s fate after the UN pulls out.

Thus, after decades of hopes pinned on regional economic integration, the subregion finds itself still searching for an elusive peace, rather than the desired objective of
economic development. Mutual suspicion and the harbouring of armed rebels within national borders remain factors providing the basis for regional collapse, resulting in one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises. But as the former UNHCR High Commissioner, Mrs. Sadako Ogata, noted, the challenge facing African states is “not building societies from the narrow perspective of nationalism, but through a broader approach which focuses internally on civil society, and externally on creating or strengthening regional mechanisms”.

2. Regional Alliances, the Security Environment, and the Spiralling Rebel Movements

2.1. Regional Political Concerns and International Linkages

To a significant extent, the prevailing security-political climate, submerged in conflicts and allegations of conspiracies from subregional leaders, has contributed to crises unlikely to be solved without major compromises.

The end of the Liberian war created optimism for regional security since, the logic went, the most powerful of the country’s multiple warlords, Charles Taylor, was now President. But this was disproved by the 1997 military coup d’état in Sierra Leone, with the complicity of the rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), where the crisis was further complicated by the presence of a sympathetic President Taylor in the neighbouring country, providing the RUF with an open corridor for operations, arms supplies and training opportunities. This in turn was further enhanced by the rebels’ control of the diamonds needed to pay foreign military “trainers”. Nevertheless, one of the early signs of the possibility of peaceful co-existence, although laden with suspicion, came in November 1998 when the former American African peace envoy, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, convened a summit in Conakry that yielded pledges of commitment to observe non-aggression and “to rejuvenate the [Mano River] Union” for economic integration.

These were laudable objectives, coming from leaders sunk in distrust. But such political enthusiasm would quickly surrender to unsettled problems coming out of the Liberian war. It became clear that Liberia’s President Taylor had not forgiven Guinea’s President Conté for a number of reasons, among them the alleged backing Guinea offered anti-NPFL rebels during the Liberian war. On the other hand, caught between unfriendly states (Guinea and Sierra Leone) President Taylor increasingly felt insecure, opposing any political settlement in Sierra Leone that would marginalize the RUF rebels, his allies. In a series of letters to the UN, following allegations that he was backing the RUF, President Taylor contended that his “legitimate concerns” about “the large groups of Liberian combatants” allegedly “training with the un-

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3 Mano River Union, Final Communiqué, 12 November 1998 (unpublished document)

restructured Sierra Leonean army” and posing “a direct threat to Liberia’s national security”, were being ignored.5

But reports and allegations that Liberia was the epicentre of subregional rebel movements moved Guinea and Sierra Leone closer to form a common axis against Monrovia. In a joint communiqué issued in Conakry, Presidents Ahmed Tejan Kabbah and Lansana Conté vowed to work against those bent on destabilizing the sub region, and Liberia was the clear culprit. President Conté further told a Liberian women’s peace group that his desire was “to stop evil”.6 International sanctions were seen by some as an attractive possible means of halting what many regarded as Liberia’s regional mischief. Concerned over the regional implications of sanctions and further collapse in Liberia, the regional organization, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), found itself in another marathon of peace initiatives, which increasingly seemed tilted in favour of Liberia. Nigeria’s President Olusegun Obasanjo, among others, lobbied to avert UN sanctions, and advanced dialogue as the preferred option since, he argued, “ECOWAS was doing its best to achieve peace throughout the region”.7 But the “best” was not enough. ECOWAS’ earlier peace initiatives in Sierra Leone had failed to end the war despite offers of “unconditional” and “guaranteed” amnesty to mutinous soldiers and intransigent rebels as contained in the 1997 Conakry “peace plan”.8 Instead, like many other regional peace programmes, the “peace plan” only intensified the fighting, necessitating greater international involvement to arrest the ensuing calamities.

Such an appeasement posture was less satisfactory to Sierra Leone as its foreign minister warned that the UN’s failure to implement threats of sanctions would affect the organization’s reputation.9 The country’s UN representative urged West African states to rethink the bounds of solidarity with Liberia, asking, “how long should the identities of those directly and actively involved in ‘blood diamond’ and illicit arms transactions across our borders be concealed under the cloak of African brotherhood?”10 Guinea argued that sanctions against Liberia should be comprehensive, and not limited to diamonds.

Several reports, including a comprehensive UN investigation, endorsed the concerns about Liberia’s alleged destabilizing role within the subregion, with international opinion now indicting President Taylor as the prime force behind the suffering of the

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5 President Taylor’s Formula for Peace in the Mano River Union: A Response to the Concerns of the International Community, n.d. (unpublished document)

6 BBC Monitoring, President Conté Receives Mano River Women’s Assoc., 26 July 2001, quoting Radio Guinée

7 Jolayemi, M. A., Liberian Expels Guinean, Sierra Leonean Envoys, The Guardian [Lagos], 21 March 2001

8 Economic Community of West African States, Ecowas Six-month Peace Plan for Sierra Leone, 23 October 1997 to 22 April 1998, Conakry, 23 October 1997


region. Thus an increasingly vulnerable Charles Taylor began to see an “imperialist and colonialist” conspiracy. “We cannot be trying to solve the crisis in Sierra Leone while others are trying to support a new war in Liberia”, he said, adding that the “British presence in Sierra Leone is a continuous threat to Liberia”. He warned that the crisis in relation to Guinea was a prelude to a larger regional war, a warning that the UN Special Representative to Sierra Leone, the Nigerian Oloyemi Adeniji, endorsed, arguing for the containment of the crisis in individual countries. Monrovia’s fears of a full-scale Guinean military retaliation led to intense diplomatic activities featuring “civil society” and women’s groups sent on lobbying missions. Addressing one of the “Mano River Union peace” organizations in Conakry, President Conté said he had “changed his mind” on the crisis with Liberia, but added with ambivalence that he could not explain what he meant. “I know it will be difficult; since I want to solve the problem, I will not explain further.”

This worsening of relations and accentuation of rivalries came just three years after Liberia and Sierra Leone had signed a communiqué reaffirming their commitment to non-aggression, promising “to coordinate their border security activities, and to cooperate with ECOMOG forces and UN observers, with the view of creating a mechanism to enhance border security” while pledging to seek assistance for deployment of troops along their borders. Frantic ECOWAS peace initiatives yielded little result as President Conté remained adamant never to meet with President Taylor. Fears and security uncertainty prevailed.

2.2. The Security Environment

Threats of war, the ensuing scramble for arms, and the stampede to mobilize unemployed youths, while appeasing national armies in anticipation of deteriorating security conditions, all exposed the fears of leaders determined to rescue their fragile regimes from collapse in an uncertain political-security environment.

The rapidity with which state and traditional authority has collapsed (particularly in Liberia and Sierra Leone), demonstrates the absence of the resilient security structures needed for ensuring stability. Institutions, once serving as centres of authority, have become significantly enfeebled in the struggle to arrest the spreading anarchy now a common phenomenon in many African states. As one analyst noted:

The fact is that the process of regression is already under way, hitting whole countries, regions, social and ethnic groups, disrupting the

12 Ibid.
13 Guinean President Changes Mind ...Women Delegation Returns Today, The Inquirer [Monrovia], 30 July 2001
This trend of state disintegration, a Liberian observer noted, saw many institutions succumbing to the regime of lawlessness, now that former combatants and rebel leaders were authority figures in most institutions, including the church. In the case of Sierra Leone, further collapse would be imminent without the massive presence of UN troops, a fact that Kofi Annan acknowledged when he said the presence of UN troops remain “the key element for peace…” in the country.

As the security crisis deepened, various ad hoc measures for containment proliferated, with UN officials advancing ideas for the development of a joint plan of action with ECOWAS, and the establishment of a UN West Africa office responsible for taking preventive action to avert the impending crisis within the subregion, while managing and resolving conflicts. Kofi Annan, suggesting the establishment of a “regional observation mechanism”, warned of the threat of further crisis not only within the Mano River states, but in the entire region. Uncertainty about the continuation of the US role in the region came when American officials disagreed on future crisis containment programmes. While the State Department suggested an ongoing US commitment to military training programmes costing US$120 million per annum, Pentagon officials questioned the viability of the Clinton-inspired programmes, among them the US$20 million per year African Crisis Response Initiative, a pan-African force geared towards peacekeeping and disaster relief.

But by August 2001, a new optimism about the containment of the wars emerged as the three counties pledged to arrest and repatriate dissidents and paramilitary groups, while a joint security committee was scheduled to convene in Conakry to map out modalities. Although concrete results were lacking, regional leaders announced they had come to the end of the conflict. The crucial factors in generating these high hopes seemed to be the massive UN involvement and the sanctions against Liberia which would cut off the RUF source of arms, as well as the sight of presidents

16 Agence France Presse [Monrovia], Liberia’s War-scarred Youth a Growing Social Problem, 6 July 2001
20 Pentagon Role in Africa May End, Training Programs under Review, Washington Post, 3 July 2001
22 MRU States Aware of Dissidents - Foreign Ministers, The News [Monrovia], 27 August 2001
Obasanjo of Nigeria and Alpha Omar Konare of Mali accompanying President Kabbah into once inaccessible rebel strongholds to declare the “war over”.  

The new solidarity, while not in any sense institutionalized, was nevertheless a welcome change from the complex and fluid setting that had forced ECOWAS, relying on donor largesse, to approve the deployment of 1,700 troops within the region barely three years after their expulsion from Liberia. But this scheme, lost in disagreements on mandate and lack of funding, only signalled the dismal state of internal security within this theatre of conflict. With peaceful negotiations yielding little result, the emphasis had been on buttressing internal security via military build-up. Moreover, in the case of Guinea, there were indications of Liberian-backed rebel infiltrations with the objective of pushing deeper into the country. Hence already in the first months of the incursions, Conakry had spent US$61 million out of its total annual budget of US$71 million. Likewise the British Government had intensified their training of the Sierra Leone army, bringing in new equipment. Liberia meanwhile discovered it could barely muster 4,000 soldiers of the documented army strength of 14,000, and ordered investigations and the withholding of pay.

Confronted with fragile internal security environments, regional leaders sought internal scapegoats linked to external conspiracies, as in the case of President Conté, who charged opposition leader Alpha Condé with hiring mercenaries and threatening national security. Liberian security forces invaded the University of Liberia claiming that students were backing dissidents of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) fighting to topple the government. In his fury, the President accused opposition politicians, who did not condemn the dissidents, of backing them. Intensification of the fighting resulted in President Taylor threatening, amidst protests from opposition parties, to impose a state of emergency, which many believed would be a pretext for further clampdown on dissent. He announced the mobilization of a 15,000 strong army, mainly his former rebel fighters and those of disbanded rival armed groups. Despite the economic malaise, President Taylor announced he needed a force of 60,000 men to arrest internal security decay. Reports emerged of logging companies hiring private militias for protection and to strengthen government troops.

A similarly fluid security climate prevailed in Guinea, where reports of a planned army insurrection linked to attacks from Liberia and Sierra Leone resulted in financial appeasement offers for the army. In Sierra Leone on the one hand President Kabbah, emphasizing the loyalty and professionalism of the army, paid tribute to Britain’s

23 Associated Press, Sierra Leone President Says War Is Over, 3 September 2001
24 Reuters [Freetown], Mike Collett-White, UK Sources Say Sierra Leone Rebels Infiltrating Guinea, 31 January 2001
25 Agence France Presse [Conakry], Guinea Announces Defence Budget for 2001, 3 February 2001
26 Reuters [Monrovia], No More Wages for Soldiers, 7 August 2001
27 Reuters [Abidjan], Silvia Aloisi, Fleeing Liberians Tell of Forced Conscription, 19 June 2001
29 Englebert, p.576
leading role in transforming the army, and promised to “enhance the welfare” of the armed forces.30 At the same time there was a strong sense that the army would still hold the key to the country’s stability even after peace was concluded. “The first [objective] is to have a strong, professional and loyal army with a first class intelligence network, to serve as a deterrent…” to further warfare, noted one Sierra Leone cabinet minister.31

President Conté of Guinea for his part turned to an old Cold War ally, Russia, to replenish his arsenal. But any ideological alliance was far less a factor than economic opportunities, as was indicated by the grant to a Russian company of a 25-year contract to exploit one of Guinea’s aluminium mines. Nevertheless, a confident Guinean ambassador in Moscow announced that it was time all Africa pin their hopes on Russia for material and moral support.32 Liberia, too, seemed to occupy a key position in President Conté’s search for arms, and when a French journalist asked if this was in fact the case, he replied: “Is that what you fear, because you are there?” The significance of the answer lies in France’s role in Liberia from the onset of the war. French officials became frequent visitors behind NPFL rebel lines, and France was crucial in opposing the imposition of a temporary ban on Liberian timber, which the UN lists as contributing to regional wars.33

As the US increasingly isolated its former ally Liberia, President Taylor sought to purchase arms from the black market which had developed as a result of UN sanctions, and appealed for a temporary lifting of the embargo in the name of self-defence. Reports nevertheless emerged of an arms smuggling ring along the Liberian-Ivorian border, with details of ships offloading weaponry at Liberia’s seaports.34

Meanwhile, Guinea, with President Conté assuming the defence minister portfolio, adopted an offensive military posture, taking the war into Sierra Leone and clearing its borders. Concentrated Guinean air raids on RUF positions, with civilian casualties, led to the setting up of a joint Guinean/Sierra Leonean committee to find ways of protecting the civilian population and limiting the effects of the raids. On Guinea’s Liberian flank, dissidents allegedly operating from Guinean territory battled Liberian government troops and claimed that they had seized large tracts of land.35

Allegations that Côte d’Ivoire acted as a base for arms smuggling surfaced, as thousands of Liberian refugees fled back into Ivorian refugee camps. There were warnings that the country was fast losing its status as one of the “anchors of stability in the region”.36 Liberian officials in Washington described media reports linking

32 Guinea President to Visit Russia, BBC News, 26 July 2001
33 BBC Monitoring, Guinea: President Denies Rumoured Ill-health, Arms Purchase Talks with Putin, 28 July 2001, quoting Radio France Internationale
34 Fighting Flares in Liberia and Threatens Ivory Coast…., Washington Post, 6 August 2001
35 Associated Press, Liberia Asks UN to Lift Arms Embargo, 9 June 2001
36 Fighting Flares....
President Taylor to the deposed Ivorian leader General Guei as “mischief”, calculated to unjustly punish their country.\(^37\)

The security situation in the surrounding region was becoming increasingly uncertain, as relations between Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso, once solid, deteriorated due to Ivorian fears that Burkina Faso, with three million plantation workers in Côte d’Ivoire, was plotting to destabilize the country. Libya’s Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, with allies from within the West African region, became involved in the search for solutions, inviting presidents Gbagbo and Compaoré to Tripoli.\(^38\) But the animosity against Burkinabe citizens remained, forcing many to conceal their Muslim origin in order to escape from xenophobia.

The changing regional alliances saw the US offering military assistance to Guinea against its former Cold War partner Liberia. Against Liberian protests, the British Government continued to be engaged in re-arming and re-training Sierra Leone’s shattered army. The British defence minister, visiting Sierra Leone, defended this military engagement as “an important contribution to stability” in the country, adding that, “British units have done splendid work building up the Sierra Leone army. We now need to complete this job by making them self-sufficient and by ‘training the trainers’.”\(^39\) But even as the British were preparing their former colony for stability, the spectre of military political intervention was looming, evidenced by the arrest in Freetown of several newly trained officers for hoarding weapons allegedly intended for use in a planned coup d’état. Whether professional armies, regardless of their training, are the best guarantors of political stability and democratization remains to be seen. Africa’s post independence history, and the present, dominated by soldiers as political elites in endless and at times bloody coups d’état, offers little hope.

2.3. Transnational Fortune Hunters & Regional Security

The massive hunt for diamonds, and timber, meant regional security could no longer be guaranteed within the confines of regional politics. The interests of transnational actors determined to reap the benefits of chaos became intertwined with any solution. Lucrative financial ties between regional political leaders or rebel leaders, on the one hand, and transnational fortune hunters on the other, further complicated regional security. The RUF rebels were earning an estimated US$300 million per annum, with possible training facilities, from private security firms operating in the areas where they controlled the diamond trade. Furthermore, states within and outside the region, such as Libya, France and Burkina Faso, based their interest on the potential for economic benefits. Indeed it might be suggested that although Libya was the training centre for both Liberian and Sierra Leonean rebel leaders, it was economics, not ideology, that determined Tripoli’s regional alliances.\(^40\) It was clear that diamonds

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\(^37\) Liberia, Embassy of Liberia, Washington DC, Liberia: Victim of Mischief and Misconception, 8 August 2001 (press release)

\(^38\) Reuters, Gaddafi Intervenes to Resolve Ivorian, Burkina Row, 3 July 2001


\(^40\) Pratt, D., Sierra Leone: The Forgotten Crisis, Report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, P.C., M.P., Ottawa, 23 April 1999, [http://sierra-leone.org/pratt042399](http://sierra-leone.org/pratt042399) [accessed 10 October 2001]
would remain of fundamental importance to regional security, since what was at stake was the millions of dollars that the rebel groups were gaining.\textsuperscript{41} A UN sanctions list, which named 130 individuals barred from travelling to the region due to their alleged complicity in the wars, included Lebanese and European “businessmen”, among others.\textsuperscript{42} The extensive nature of financial interests impacting on regional security and the desire of beneficiaries to circumvent sanctions was revealed in a report suggesting that a number of those banned from travelling were acquiring Sierra Leone passports.\textsuperscript{43} The links between arms dealers and regional politicians have also attracted underworld figures with regional political connections, as illustrated by the arrest of Leonid Efimovich Minin, a Ukrainian weapons dealer, and his subsequent indictment in Italy on charges of smuggling arms into the region to, as one observer notes, fuel “the trade in weapons that has prolonged one of Africa’s most serious conflicts”.\textsuperscript{44} About 1,500 documents seized from Minin detailed his links to diamonds and timber, as well as to 113 tons of weapons destined for Côte d’Ivoire.\textsuperscript{45}

Rocked by violent uprisings, and fearing the spillover of conflicts, Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo announced plans to strengthen his armed forces for the country “to be completely secured as far as borders are concerned”.\textsuperscript{46} Concerned by this Burkina Faso announced troop reinforcements to secure its own borders with Côte d’Ivoire and others. But to achieve completely secured borders for countries adjacent to spreading wars, and responsible in large part for these crises, would be a very ambitious objective, particularly as reports emerged of an arms smuggling ring involving the deposed General Robert Guei, who had moved his headquarters close to the Liberian border under the protection of 400 armed militias.\textsuperscript{47} The increasing internationalization of the conflict, and the difficulty in finding solutions, is further compounded by the role of mercenaries, among them a number of Europeans and former South African Defence Force officers, such as Colonel Fred Rindle, a former trainer for Jonas Savimbi’s Unita rebels in Angola, who became Charles Taylor’s prime trainer, in charge of his forces and those of the RUF.\textsuperscript{48}

The labyrinth of operators was uncovered in the report produced by a UN Panel of Experts on Sierra Leone, which detailed arms smuggling rings and mercenary recruitment, attracting a myriad of foreigners interested in minerals in exchange for arms.\textsuperscript{49} This network of fortune hunters in search of local allies has become one of the prime forces sustaining the conflicts, and remaining far beyond the reach of regional organizations such as ECOWAS. While ECOWAS had established a regional

\textsuperscript{41} Hall, T.P., and De Wire, M., Diamonds Key to Halting Wars in African Nations, \textit{The Columbia Dispatch}, 14 August 2001


\textsuperscript{43} Global Witness, \textit{Taylor-made}, p. 12

\textsuperscript{44} Swain, J. and Follain, J., Sierra Leone Arms Ring Broken, \textit{The Sunday Telegraph}, 8 July 2001

\textsuperscript{45} Taylor, I., Where Weapons Originate, \textit{The Guardian} [London], 8 July 2001

\textsuperscript{46} Reuters [Abidjan], Ivory Coast President to Recruit Extra Soldiers, 7 August 2001

\textsuperscript{47} Fighting Flares …

\textsuperscript{48} Godfather to the Rebels, \textit{Africa Confidential} [London], 23 June 2000

\textsuperscript{49} Minimal Contacts, \textit{Africa Confidential} [London], 29 June 2001
moratorium on the sale of small arms, many reports indicated that the region was awash with various types of weapons. The UN report noted serious problems with weapons not only in countries in the immediate region, but also in major cities across the whole of West Africa. “The rapidly increasing incidence of armed violence is a consequence. The outbreak of civil conflict in Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Liberia and Sierra Leone during the past decade has increased the demand for light weapons”, the Panel reported.50

Rights and environmental organizations, such as Greenpeace and Global Witness, stepped up their campaigns against sources providing arms. “Unless a total embargo is placed on the export and trade in Liberian timber, the deadly collusion between the timber industry and the Liberian government means that arms trafficking with the RUF in Sierra Leone will continue unchecked”, said Global Witness.51 Concern grew over the scale of the arms influx, estimated globally at US$500 million, with the easy availability meaning that an AK-47 could be had for just US$15.52 Demands for a concerted international effort against traffickers led a number of countries (including Switzerland, Russia, Brazil, Ukraine and Canada) to take action individually against Liberia, with the aim of stopping arms supply. However, at least in the case of Canada, raising the issue of Liberian arms smuggling for the RUF in exchange for diamonds did not generate a “satisfactory response”.53

While a regional consensus on the destabilizing nature of the trade in small weapons was now obvious, the political will and material means to reduce or end it were lacking. Sierra Leone’s deputy defence minister, and handler of the Kamajor militias, Sam Hinga Norman, told a UN conference on the trade in small arms that without creating “concrete programmes and projects to control and ultimately combat the illicit flow of weapons in Sierra Leone and neighbouring states” the problem would persist.54

But, as the Liberian experience has shown, while it might be politically convenient to concentrate on superficial disarmament and demobilization schemes, and to confine the addressing of regional security problems to conflict countries, this approach has failed to work. The weak security and political structures within the region create very real problems in any search for stability, as evidenced by the economic and humanitarian crises sweeping across the region. Nigeria’s Defence Minister, General T.Y. Danjuma, illustrated the socio-economic risks created by the arms trade by

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52 Annan, K., Global Effort to Stem Flood of Small Arms, The International Herald Tribune, 10 July 2001

53 Agence France Presse [Ottawa], Canada Begins Implementation of UN Sanctions on Liberia, 16 July 2001

noting that resources are being bartered for arms, thus at the same time endangering stability and worsening the economic situation for many developing states.\footnote{55 Danjuma, T.Y., Statement by Lt. Gen T Y Danjuma (RTD) Honourable Minister of Defence of Nigeria to the United Nations on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, New York, 9 July 2001 (unpublished document)}

Both the US and the EU issued warnings directly addressing Liberia. The US warned that RUF/Liberian activities were “direct challenges to the United States’ foreign policy objectives in the region as well as a direct challenge to the rule-based international order, which is crucial to the peace and prosperity of the United States”.\footnote{56 United States, President, \textit{Executive Order Prohibiting the Importation of Rough Diamonds from Sierra Leone}, Washinton, 5 July 2000} At the same time the EU, Liberia’s biggest donor, although assistance had been cancelled because of President Taylor’s alleged regional schemes, issued a set of demands in order to address the worsening situation as regards human rights and corruption.\footnote{57 Agence France Presse [Brussels], EU Commission Calls for Human Rights Talks with Liberia, 26 June 2001}

\textbf{2.4. The Proliferation of Rebel Movements}

It was always likely that unsettled questions in the Liberian conflict, such as guarantees for the safety of ethnic minorities with ties in neighbouring countries, and of military-political groupings that had lost the political battle, would lead to the rise of new armed groups willing to resume the war in the contest for power. Moreover, some of the actual policies adopted by the new Liberian regime both in terms of internal reconciliation and external ties, only provided justification for continued conflict. Large-scale displacement and non-existent economic opportunities provided a reservoir of disaffected youths ready to be recruited into rebel armies and state-backed vigilante groups.

The Liberian war had provided the decisive impetus for the rise and proliferation of regional rebel movements, ever since Charles Taylor’s NPFL became an all-embracing home for various nationalities with their own agenda of seizing power in their respective countries. The Liberian central town of Gbarnga, home of the NPFL, became a congregating point for self-styled revolutionaries with dreams of transforming their societies. It was from these roots that the RUF grew from a disorganized group of 400 to an estimated 25,000 well-armed force, an inconceivable development without the Liberian corridor. “We entered Sierra Leone through Liberia and enjoyed the sympathy of Sierra Leonean migrant workers some of whom joined us to cross the border to start our liberation campaign…,” the RUF declared in their manifesto.\footnote{58 Revolutionary United Front/SL, Manifesto: Footpath to Democracy, Towards a New Sierra Leone (unpublished document)} Thus even as cheers greeted the rapid disarmament of the RUF, there were fears that the rebels were melting into Liberia. “My worry”, said a Sierra Leone official, “is that with the Liberian crisis on, these guys will disarm but not demobilize. They will keep together in numbers in Liberia where they have a use for them and as
soon as the Liberian crisis is under control, who knows?" 59 Such fears were genuine, for President Taylor’s role in the release of 461 captured UN troops, after the failure of several regional and international attempts, indicated his immense influence over the RUF. International security sources also claimed “credible reports”, with “serious concern for the stability of West Africa”, linking ex-RUF commander Sam Bockarie to an arms smuggling regime along the Liberia-Ivorian border on President Taylor’s behalf. 60

Furthermore, the role of Liberia as a reservoir for recruits for all sides became evident in that hundreds of soldiers of the late President Samuel Doe, mainly ethnic Krahs and Mandingos, congregated in Sierra Leone as they lost the war in Liberia. As the RUF and the NPFL stormed Sierra Leone, many found themselves fighting alongside the beleaguered Sierra Leone army in self-defence, fearing repercussions from a RUF/NPFL victory. Under the umbrella of the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) as they advanced into Liberia, they soon aligned with soldiers of the West African peacekeeping troops on the basis of control over diamond areas in Liberia. 61 Meanwhile, there were reports of key ECOMOG officers placed on Taylor’s payroll. On the other hand, the Guineans were training units of the ECOWAS-backed interim government. 62 It became a balancing act, and despite the key role of diamonds in his ties with the RUF, Taylor’s fear of a power structure in Sierra Leone without the RUF has significantly influenced his policy. The RUF became a second tier Liberian army, constantly rushing to the rescue of President Taylor against Liberian dissidents in cross border wars that threatened his political survival. 63 A similar marriage of convenience was repeated in Sierra Leone, where ECOMOG teamed up with local tribal militias - the Kamajors and the Donos - against the RUF. 64 Such alliances, built on temporary common interests, put into question the lofty ECOWAS’ ideals of peace building and democratization.

Moreover, just as regional rivalries between Anglophone and Francophone states, with Côte d’Ivoire and Nigeria as the two poles of contest, became another driving force in prolonging the Liberian conflict and determining its outcome, the regional power struggles in the Guinean and Sierra Leone conflicts would not be significantly different. With his influence among Francophone states, President Houphouët Boigny had succeeded in winning friends for President Taylor while at the same time alerting Guinea of its endangered position within a region in which the country had few friends. Guinea’s fears were significantly confirmed when leaders of its 1996 mutiny fled to Burkina Faso, then considered an appendage of Côte d’Ivoire. As Guinea came under siege from rebel offensives, its President, Lansana Conté, accused a “syndicate of heads of states”, among them Mali’s Alpha Omar Konare, Côte d’Ivoire’s Laurent

59 Reuters [Freetown], Thompson, A., Sierra Leone Limps Towards Peace, Pitfalls Abound, 7 August 2001
60 Fighting Flares …
62 Idem., p. 96-9
63 Liberian Regime under Threat, The Guardian [London], 26 May 2001
Gbogbo and Senegal’s Abdoulaye Wade, of designs to destabilize his country because of its natural resources.\textsuperscript{65} Hence the extension of the crisis into Guinea was hardly surprising.

For years, West African political and military leaders had known of the interconnections between Liberia and rebel movements in the region, and it is surprising to note their apparent inability to predict the spread of regional wars once Taylor was entrenched as President in Liberia. Confident of his ties with rebel movements, and believing that his expansionist policies, such as taking the war into Guinea, would provide him with a safety net, his fortunes would nevertheless shift from “rebel sponsor to rebel target” as Conté’s military machine threatened his survival.\textsuperscript{66} Guinea, too, found allies among Liberian dissidents, which resulted in allegations - denied by Guinea - that it was arming anti-Taylor/RUF groups.

With sanctions imposed against Liberia, the illicit diamond trade became more dangerous and less attractive. The motivation to fight, therefore, was reduced.\textsuperscript{67} On the other hand, reports of an alliance between Sierra Leone’s pro-government militia, the Kamajors, and the Guineans were filtering through. According to Liberian sources, the special representative of the UN Secretary-General to Sierra Leone confirmed the Guinea-Kamajors alliance against the Liberian Government and the RUF.\textsuperscript{68} The threat of rebel activity spread further, with Côte d’Ivoire, previously insulated from the anarchy among its neighbours, now experiencing its consequences. The Ivorian authorities in May 2001 arrested a number of Liberian rebels in the border town of Danane, once a virtual NPFL base.\textsuperscript{69} General Robert Guei’s rise to power has fostered links between Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire, partly due to ethnic considerations. General Guei’s Yakuba tribe is an extension of Liberia’s Gios, one of President Taylor’s main ethnic allies now and during Liberia’s war. Reports indicate that 400 militiamen, most of them English-speaking, protect the elusive general in his home village near the Liberian border.\textsuperscript{70}

That Liberia was the base for regional rebel movements was a widely held view based on many accounts, although the Liberian authorities insisted on their innocence. The presence of one of the RUF’s main commanders in Monrovia, Sam Bockarie, became a central issue in determining Liberia’s guilt. President Taylor persistently argued that the rebel commander had left the country for an unknown destination, an explanation that the UN doubted. “As soon as Liberia has any clue [to his whereabouts] it will be supplying it to the rest of ECOWAS”, President Taylor insisted.\textsuperscript{71}

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\textsuperscript{65} Mawuri, J., Guinea: Behind the Crisis, \textit{West Africa}, 22-28 January 2001, p.10

\textsuperscript{66} Sierra Leone: Precarious Calm, \textit{Africa Confidential}, 29 June 2001

\textsuperscript{67} Gberie, L., Reflections on the UN Sanctions on Liberia, \textit{The Independent} [Banjul], 13 July 2001

\textsuperscript{68} BBC Monitoring, UN Said to Confirm Sierra Leone Militia Operating from Guinea, 1 June 2001, quoting \textit{Pro-Charles Taylor Radio Liberia International}

\textsuperscript{69} BBC Monitoring, Ivorian Security Reportedly Arrest Liberian Dissidents, 1 May 2001, quoting \textit{Pro-Charles Taylor Radio Liberia International}

\textsuperscript{70} Minimal Contacts...

\textsuperscript{71} Pan African News Agency, UN Envoy Ponders Whereabouts of Former Rebel Commander, 30 May 2001
\end{flushleft}
Whatever the ambitions behind the rebel expansionist plans, Guinea proved a difficult terrain. The intensity of Guinean military attacks on RUF/Liberian positions swiftly resulted in calls from Liberia for dialogue, with President Taylor insisting that Liberia has no intention to militarily engage Guinea. But President Taylor’s pacifist tune, after underestimating “Conté’s ruthlessness”, was linked to his failed strategy of regionalizing the war with multiple fronts in Guinea, thus complicating diplomacy in ECOWAS, where, according to Africa Confidential, “Conté has fewer friends than Taylor”.

By mid 2001, Guinea’s rebel movement fighting along the Liberian-Sierra Leonean border, Union des Forces pour une Guinée nouvelle (UFGN - Union of the Forces for a New Guinea), announced a leader, N’Faly Kaba, a Mandingo, along with a list of demands including President Conté’s resignation. Kaba confirmed that the leader of the 1996 military mutiny who had fled to Burkina Faso, Gbagbo Zoumanigui, was now the head of their military wing. More significantly, he left no doubts of their links to President Taylor. “If we have personal relations with Charles Taylor, this is our own business”, adding, “we have friends, relations, alliances and affinities … military advisers, logistical support” for a force of about 1,800 armed men in the Mano River region. Hinting at the identity of possible sympathizers, he listed presidents Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, Omar Bongo of Gabon and Yahya Jammeh of the Gambia, as their choices for negotiators with President Conté.

3. Obstacles and Prospects in the Search for Conflict Resolution

3.1. Regional Rivalries and International Linkages

As discussed in preceding sections, the prospects for peace and any sort of guaranteed stability rest on the building of mutual trust among regional leaders and addressing their fears. The diagnosis of the regional crisis offered by Canada’s Special Envoy to Sierra Leone emphasized the fluidity of the situation, which he linked to the fears and perceptions of President Taylor and his alleged scheme of creating instability along his borders to generate international sympathy that could lead to the lifting of sanctions.

If he [Taylor] believes that it is no longer in his interest to support the RUF, and if he acts accordingly, the conflict could well be at an end. There are worrying signs, however. Government-sponsored human rights abuse in Liberia is escalating… There are reliable reports that Liberian troops have fired their weapons near villages - simulating firefight - to cause panic forcing residents to flee. The result is more


73 Precarious Calm...

74 Pan African News Agency [Dakar], Guinean Rebel Leader Lays Down Conditions for Talks, 3 July 2001

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.
refugees and more internally displaced people. Taylor’s strategy appears to be intended to generate sympathy for Liberia.\(^77\)

As the violence shifted from Guinea and Sierra Leone to Liberia, President Taylor intensified his lobbying and diplomatic offensive for a peaceful settlement, lifting an expulsion order on the Guinean and Sierra Leonean ambassadors, who had been charged with acts unbecoming to their status. Despite President Conté’s earlier statement that he would never meet with President Taylor, the foreign ministers of Guinea and Sierra Leone visited Monrovia in August, amidst high hopes for peace, declaring that they were satisfied with the outcome of the talks with Taylor, who had promised full cooperation.\(^78\)

In any case, the earlier search for a regional solution to the spreading conflict was doomed, from the onset, by the elites’ scramble for power, as different contestants interpreted regional interventions from different perspectives. In Liberia, Taylor insisted on the dilution of Nigeria’s influence within the regional peacekeeping force ECOMOG. Likewise there were some who greeted Nigeria’s Sierra Leone interventions with suspicion. Abbas Bundu, the Sierra Leonean ECOWAS Secretary-General during the Liberian crisis, who later became the foreign minister of the Valentine Strasser junta, accused the late Nigerian ruler Sani Abacha of having had a “penchant for unilateralism”, and contended that, “peaceful solutions however protracted”, have proved generally more enduring.\(^79\) On the other hand, ECOWAS leaders, in a communiqué acknowledging the shortcomings of endless negotiations, urged the UN to alter its Sierra Leone mandate from peace keeping to peace enforcement.\(^80\) The consensus, backed by developments, was that forceful international action, along with military preparation, had paid off. This was emphasized by the Catholic Bishop of Makeni, the RUF northern stronghold:

> It has dawned on them [RUF] that their chances are getting smaller. Liberia is under international pressure. Guinea is a hard bone to chew. The [Sierra Leone] national army is being well trained, local militia are at a greater state of preparedness, and UNAMSIL is present.\(^81\)

However, events in Liberia, where about 13 peace agreements were signed, with the war subsiding only after Nigeria endorsed the most powerful warlord, Taylor, question the validity of such a prognosis. Sierra Leone’s march to peace has been equally fraught, with countless peace agreements, supposedly strengthened by a series of significant political concessions, but which have only collapsed, with ghastly consequences for the population and for humanitarian agencies. As long as rebels


\(^78\) Associated Press [Monrovia], Liberian President Meets Guinea, Sierra Leone Foreign Ministers, 14 August 2001

\(^79\) The Suffering of Sierra Leone, *New African* [London], July/August 2001, p. 48

\(^80\) United Nations, Security Council, *Fifth Report*

have free movement across borders, there can be no guarantees that simply turning in the guns is the answer. Guns will be made available across the border.

Despite the enormity of crimes attributed to the RUF, and their refusal to endorse a democratic formula, they have enjoyed some support for their anti-British crusade, with the London-based African publication *New African* linking British-American interests in the crisis to economic interests.\(^{82}\) Writing in the same publication, now overtly against an international solution, another observer contended: “The fate of Sierra Leone and the prospect of a resolution of the ... conflict have become inextricably linked to the perceived British interests...”\(^{83}\) International resolve was however unrelenting, as conservative members of the US Congress called for a shift in Clinton’s policy of appeasement, which had been significantly influenced by Jesse Jackson. In finally releasing US$50 million for peacekeeping operations in Sierra Leone, a Republican Senator claimed that his determination to withhold funding had forced President Clinton to abandon what the Senator called a policy of “surrender in the face of criminal violence” in Sierra Leone.\(^{84}\)

The same regional alliances that had prevailed during the Liberian conflict manifested themselves again in Guinea, particularly within ECOWAS, with predictions that regional leaders would remain neutral in a Taylor-Conté conflict.\(^{85}\) Libya was to assume a high profile role in the search for peace in the region, and although Nigeria and Mali welcomed Colonel Gadafi’s peace initiatives, US Secretary of State Colin Powell, on a recent regional tour, stated that he saw the Libyan leader as a destabilizing force.\(^{86}\) Regional alliances and perceptions would in fact continue to hinder security, and although officials in Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire denied arms smuggling charges, the volume of weapons passing through the two countries was significant. The expulsion from Burkina Faso of an investigator of the illicit diamond trade certainly did not indicate a regime willing to subject itself to scrutiny. But President Compaoré dismissed findings linking him to regional wars, and argued that Sierra Leone was “foreign” to Burkinabes.\(^{87}\) However, reports of presidents Taylor and Compaoré’s links with regional rebel movements defied such explanations. Among the regional RUF operatives that the UN Security Council listed for expulsion from Liberia one was President Compaoré’s representative to the RUF.\(^{88}\) In another indication of President Compaoré’s complicity in the regional wars, Burkinabe soldiers who had been sent to Liberia to fight alongside NPFL rebels, spoke openly of their former service and demanded payment of arrears of pay from the Burkinabe government.\(^{89}\)

\(^{82}\) Sierra Leone: The Foreign Connection, *New African* [London], July/August 2000, p.10

\(^{83}\) Why Peace Has Been so Elusive, *New African*, July/August 1999, p.30


\(^{85}\) Precarious Calm...


\(^{87}\) BBC Monitoring, Burkina Faso: President Denies Helping Sierra Leone Rebels, 3 July 2001, quoting *Radio France International*

\(^{88}\) United Nations, Security Council, UN Security Council Committee Names RUF Members ...

\(^{89}\) Associated Press [Ouagadougou], Liberia War Vets Take Out Ad to Demand Back-pay for Services Rendered in Liberia’s Civil War, 24 August 2001
The principal focus remained on President Taylor, however, with the US ambassador to the UN, Richard Holbrooke, declaring him “the Milosevic of Africa with diamonds”, and saying that he was “the primary source of instability in the region”.90 Now increasingly isolated, President Taylor embarked upon a campaign reminiscent of the African nationalist years of the 1960s and 1970s, accusing Britain and the United States of “colonial imperialism”,91 and stating:

We believe that Britain is on a secret war in West Africa and West Africa should not be complacent about it…. The British troops should be under the command of the United Nations and not outside its operations. Everybody should be concerned about the British presence in Sierra Leone.92

But international sentiments spoke otherwise, as Kofi Annan thanked the British for their bilateral military agreement with Sierra Leone.93 President Taylor, however, was adamant about the dangers of international solutions, warning West African leaders of the inherent possibility of regional destabilization if they ignored his conflict with Guinea, and emphasized his fears of British presence in Sierra Leone.94 He opposed any Western solution to the crisis, arguing that, “ECOWAS could solve the problem if given the chance”.95 When pressed, President Taylor further warned that, the “entire region could be in flames” without urgent action.96 Jingoism prevailed: “We survived 7-year of war and the President gets bored with presidential routine. Now he knows who the enemy is and he can figure out how to fight. He is a master at that and a man of action”, said a Liberian government official.97 As the attacks into Liberian territory intensified, so did the defiance: “No matter how hard Guinea tries”, declared Liberia’s Defence Minister, “this is our country and we are going to fight to the last man.”98

With the Liberian threat looming, presidents Conté and Kabbah held a series of meetings, one in the burnt-down border town of Pamalap, to devise a common strategy presumably against Liberia, with pledges of restoring past ties.99 The threats of war left Freetown very aware of Guinea’s military muscle in forcing the RUF to adopt a more peaceful posture, as Sierra Leone tied her changing security fortunes to

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94 Liberia, Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, Press Release, 5 May 2001
95 Sierra Leone Problem Is Not about Diamonds, Taylor Tells Canadian Delegation, *The Inquirer* [Monrovia], 30 May 2001
96 Taylor Foresees Danger, *The Patriot* [Monrovia], 30 May 2001
98 Guinea Blocks ECOWAS Deployment, Says Defence Minister, *The News* [Monrovia], 28 May 2001
99 BBC Monitoring, Guinea, Sierra Leone Leaders Hold ‘Historic’ Meeting, Discuss Ties, 4 June 2001, quoting *Radio Guinée*
“friendly governments like Guinea”.\textsuperscript{100} It seemed like a renewal of ties with a common objective, resulting in pledges of ending the war to revive the Mano River Union “if Liberia puts an end to its aggression”.\textsuperscript{101} President Taylor, in one of a series of letters to the UN, expressed regret about the war in Liberia while Sierra Leone was approaching peace.\textsuperscript{102}

4. A Humanitarian Nightmare and Protection Problems

4.1. Factors Behind Refugee Movements and Internal Displacement

A decade of indicators consistently point to the fact that an end to the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe is inconceivable without a real end to the conflicts and the emergence of credible political leadership and institutions that can begin the process of building the foundations of sustainable security, upon which a result-yielding humanitarian aid programme can be based. But, as observed by Canada’s Special Envoy to Sierra Leone, without the foundations of sustainable security, there is “virtually no hope for viable relief delivery or development”.\textsuperscript{103}

More than a decade of conflict has left an estimated 2.3 million people displaced, in refugee camps and in dire need.\textsuperscript{104} Once part of a self-sustaining economy, many are now constantly on the move within a region in which safe places are disappearing. Internal displacement has burgeoned, with Sierra Leone registering 400,000 internally displaced at one point. Displacement in Liberia reached 60,000, with 120,000 refugees in the Ivory Coast along with 2,000 Sierra Leoneans.\textsuperscript{105} Internal displacement within the region has resulted in about 15,000 lost children, separated from their parents through the violence.\textsuperscript{106}

One facet of the nature of the prolonged conflicts has been that peace has become increasingly dependent on humanitarian aid. International non-governmental organizations in Liberia, committed to providing services that are traditionally the responsibility of the state, issued an SOS in early September calling for help to cater for the growing needs in the face of donor neglect.\textsuperscript{107} Resumption of war in Sierra

\textsuperscript{100} Agence France Presse [Conakry], Guinean President Heads for Talks with Sierra Leone Counterpart, 3 June 2001

\textsuperscript{101} BBC Monitoring, Guinean President, Sierra Leonean Envoy Discuss Mano River, 26 April 2001, quoting \textit{Radio Guinée}

\textsuperscript{102} Letter from the Permanent Representative of Liberia to the UN Secretary-General, 23 May 2001 (unpublished document)

\textsuperscript{103} Pratt

\textsuperscript{104} United Nations, Security Council, Integrated, Regional Approach Needed ... 

\textsuperscript{105} Associated Press, Annan Urges Leaders of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea to Tackle Wars and Refugees, 29 May 2001


\textsuperscript{107} For Liberia: INGOs Plead for More Support, \textit{The Monrovia Guardian} [Monrovia], 7 September 2001
Leone, noted a Canadian report, was “inevitable”, if donor neglect and withdrawal of funds follow after the emergency abates.\textsuperscript{108}

The relocation of large numbers of people from their traditional homes into unknown areas increased as the crisis intensified. In July 2001, UN agencies reported transferring about 54,000 from the Parrot Beak, the war front, deeper into Guinea.\textsuperscript{109} Life in this area, close to both Liberia and Sierra Leone and home to an estimated 180,000 people, among them 70,000 refugees, was one of continuous movements in fear within a country of a total refugee population of 450,000.\textsuperscript{110} The exodus from Liberia continued, with aid agencies reporting 16,000 new Liberian arrivals into safe areas in Sierra Leone.\textsuperscript{111} About 60,000 Sierra Leone refugees in Liberia were reported preparing to return home, an indication of shifting security conditions.\textsuperscript{112}

This unprecedented uprooting of people, with the prospect of serious long-term consequences, led UN Secretary-General Annan, holding rebel groups responsible, to say that it was “one of the most serious humanitarian and political crises facing the international community…”, and that a solution could only come if there was improvement in the political and security situation in the three West African nations.\textsuperscript{113} And this was precisely the case. As in Liberia, RUF targeted relief and humanitarian agencies, raided refugee camps, abducted civilians and aid workers.\textsuperscript{114}

As the security scenario worsened, aid agencies reduced staff numbers in dangerous areas, while the UNHCR High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers, face to face with a human sea of about 15,000 to 20,000 frightened people at the Katkama refugee camp, could only appeal for peace and “safe corridors”, while urging regional leaders to move towards peace so as to avert further calamity.\textsuperscript{115}

In Sierra Leone the massive UN deployment, and the British training of the national army, resulted in improved security conditions and improved freedom of movement. These positive gains were attributed to the fact that, “the UN and NGO system [had] been mobilized to pump money into Sierra Leone and made sure that this time around, the UN does not fail to end an African war”, as one journalist noted.\textsuperscript{116} In Guinea in early 2001 the situation was the opposite. With nowhere to run, aid agencies in the Parrots Beak area evacuated 34,000 refugees following behind their convoys on foot, some pleading, “we want to go home”, while some were brandishing

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{108} Sierra Leone: Danger and Opportunity in a Regional Conflict: previously cited and queried
\item \textsuperscript{109} Associated Press, UN Agency Says Refugees Have Left Guinea for Sierra Leone, 13 July 2001
\item \textsuperscript{110} Agence France Presse [Conakry], Fresh Fighting in Guinea Holds Up Transfer of Trapped Refugees, 12 February 2001
\item \textsuperscript{111} Pan African News Agency [Monrovia], 16000 Liberian Refugees in Kailahun, 10 July 2001
\item \textsuperscript{112} 60,000 Sierra Leone Refugees Eye Home, \textit{The Monrovia Guardian}, 11 June 2001
\item \textsuperscript{113} Associated Press, 29 May 2001
\item \textsuperscript{115} Agence France Presse [Massakiundou], Catherine Rama, Guinea: UNHCR Commissioner Appeals for Peace, 11 February 2001
\item \textsuperscript{116} Doyle, M., Sierra Leone Road Trip: Makeni to Yengema, \textit{BBC News}, 9 August 2001
\end{itemize}
placards begging, “take us to a safe country, if possible to Sierra Leone”.117 Conditions within Liberia were similarly deteriorating, as NGOs reported 60,000 persons fleeing from the war front, and about 700-1000 per day arriving in Côte d’Ivoire in extreme need.118 NGOs reported gang rapes, conscription among boys, and disappearances.119 Meanwhile UN officials launched calls for a peaceful settlement of the new Liberian conflict to avert a wider catastrophe.120

4.2. Resources and Donor Constraints

One of the long-term effects of ongoing conflicts is the gradual decline of capacity building to cater for fluctuating populations, along with the now almost total dependence on donor agencies. In 1999, the US contributed US$55 million in humanitarian assistance for Sierra Leone, while allotting US$3.9 million in logistical support for the West African peacekeepers (ECOMOG). In 2001 Germany offered US$250,000 to a new West African force yet to be deployed in the conflict zone.121 “NGO economies”, relying on donor largesse, carry the potential of creating vacuums difficult to fill once donors pull out. Liberia’s Lofa County, once the country’s agricultural belt, is now a no-man’s land, divided between rebels and government troops. Large parts of Sierra Leone remain under rebel control. Although the Guinean army has captured all areas once under rebel control, re-establishing authority and confidence poses problems. Thus the task of providing basic help for survival rests on international agencies, themselves subjected to insecurity and donor cutbacks in funding. The UN Under Secretary for Peacekeeping, following a tour of the region, reminded the Security Council that, “there is a crucial need to empower the authorities to govern, and to extend aid beyond humanitarian assistance, towards a more sustainable approach of supporting development and governance”122 NGOs have become prime providers of basic social services in post-conflict states. Unicef stated that it needed US$1,865,000 for water sanitation, US$481,450 for education, and US$525,000 for protection in its Guinea operations.123 The uncertainty is what will happen next after the departure of aid agencies that, in many cases, have taken over functions of governments.

Constraints limiting the delivery of humanitarian help have been obvious - lack of funds, poor security, and insufficient capacity to conduct emergency operations. In

117 Agence France Presse, UNHCR Commissioner Appeals for Peace…


120 Pan African News Agency [Monrovia], Kahler, P., UN Official Fears Prospect of Increased Fighting, 25 May 2001


122 United Nations, Security Council, Integrated, Regional Approach Needed ...

the midst of the paranoia, which insecurity has engendered within the region, not even relief agencies are above suspicion. The spreading hysteria within Liberia was evident when President Taylor accused NGOs of spying:

One of the big programs we have in Liberia now is that everybody wants to come in and feed our people. We are trying to make our people grow food and they have all kinds of NGOs for food. We probably may force out some of these NGOs, because we know they are not food NGOs, these are intelligence people trying to collect information.124

The hysteria led to the restriction of relief workers and diplomats to the capital. “There should be no sour feelings within the diplomatic community over the order”, a Liberian foreign ministry official declared.125

4.3. Regional Xenophobia and the Impact of Collapsed Economies

Intractable wars, crumbling economies and the attendant scramble over scarce resources have all contributed to increasing regional xenophobia, as the flight out of expanding conflict zones continues. Refugees have become a plague no one wants, and the hospitality that greeted the outbreak of the Liberian war has receded into hostility, as fear of conflict spillover becomes the basis for abuses against refugees.

The rejection of a wandering Liberian ship in Benin, Togo and Ghana, despite an ECOWAS law that allows all regional citizens residence in any member state for a period of time, was a clear signal that safe havens of refuge were rapidly disappearing within the region. Liberian officials accused states that rejected the ship of being “callous”, and “inhumane”, astonishingly contending that the ship carried ordinary travellers, not refugees.126 But the exodus is linked to insecurity and disappearing economic opportunities that have made the scramble for resettlement packages for families an attractive business option. Nigeria’s humanitarian gesture of accepting the ship was greeted with local protests. Ghanaian officials, rejecting the refugees, argued that Liberia was safe following the presidential and general elections of 1997, which had been completed peacefully. Their real fears, however, concerned potential social and economic strain, with internal security implications. “We already have thousands of Liberian refugees here and we’re under a lot of pressure already”, said a Ghanaian official.127 Similar concerns influenced the rejection of hundreds of Liberian and other refugees on a Nigerian ship, which landed in Accra only after donors promised assistance. Faced with increasing internal tensions linked to rising numbers of refugees, Guinea closed its southern border with Liberia, where the UNHCR was handling about 80,000 Liberian refugees.128 But as UNHCR officials noted, without

124 Pan African News Agency [Monrovia], Taylor Accuses NGOs of Spying in Liberia, 7 June 2001
125 Associated Press [Monrovia], Liberia Restricts UN Workers, Diplomats to Capital, 14 May 2001
126 Pan African News Agency [Lagos], Envoy Says Stranded Liberians Are Not Refugees, 3 July 2001
127 Ibid.
addressing the fundamental problems behind the refugee flows within the region, closed borders and seaports are no barriers. Fleeing people will rush anywhere in search of safety. “Until we can say that things are okay in Guinea, in Liberia, in Sierra Leone and in Ivory Coast it will be very difficult to say that we are out of the tunnel.”

Ethnicity and religion are fast becoming the basis for further disintegration. Côte d’Ivoire’s military coup d’état in 1999 may have been a response to the country’s political xenophobes, but the widening of the ethnic divide after questionable elections resulted in human rights groups calling for international condemnation, detailing “several outbreaks of violence against foreigners”. The Liberian influx into Côte d’Ivoire, reminiscent of the early days of the Liberian war, resulted in reports that Ivorian security forces were harassing refugees at border crossing points. Nigeria, the supposed regional powerhouse expected to take a lead in halting the collapse, was itself embroiled in ethnic and religious violence resulting in thousands of deaths. President Conté’s claims that refugees were causing Guinea’s problems unleashed a wave of attacks on Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees, with reports of the police, the army and vigilante groups subjecting refugees to rape, extortion and other inhumanities, signalling the end to Guinean hospitality.

5. Conclusion

Events over the last decade clearly show how intertwined the conflicts in the Mano River region are. Faced with hardly distinguishable borders, cross-border ethnic groupings, crumbling economies and growing political dissent, the spread of conflicts has been an easy affair. The ongoing crisis in the region is largely the result of unsettled issues in the Liberian civil war, a conflict that accentuated regional alliances and enmities. Guinea and Sierra Leone had backed the West African intervention force against Charles Taylor’s NPFL. Taylor’s election only solidified justified fears that Liberia would be a staging post for incursions into the two countries.

Moreover, the regional intervention in Liberia, ostensibly to halt the crisis, ended in widening the divide between Francophone states, under Côte d’Ivoire’s direction, and Anglophone West Africa, led by Nigeria. Traditional rivalries between these two poles of regional influence significantly helped define friends and foes in Liberia while ignoring the clear dangers of mushrooming rebel movements. Although Nigeria’s initial objective was to put an end to Charles Taylor’s ambitions, Lagos found itself endorsing a President Taylor (whose ties with regional rebel groups were well known) and therefore inadvertently extending the conflict into Sierra Leone, where Nigerian soldiers have been bogged down for over a decade, and thereafter

131 In Ivory Coast, Soldiers Harassing Liberians, The Monrovia Guardian 8 May 2001
Guinea. Thus the NPFL’s success in Liberia became an impetus for rebels in Sierra Leone and Guinea to wage similar wars and expect similar rewards.

External intervention, such as that of the UN in Sierra Leone, may be essential in fostering regional stability. But without establishing a basis of trust among political elites, it is difficult to see how the current spread of anarchy can be halted. Fear of internal coups d’état, long after the withdrawal of external forces, remain high in all three countries, as a direct result of ignoring the fundamental problems of good governance in the peacebuilding efforts.

The test in Sierra Leone will be the peacebuilding process, which now largely rests on the wheels of an NGO-based economy. Democratic elections have not brought the expected stability and prosperity in Liberia. Guinea is at the crossroads, dangerously moving from an authoritarian political structure to perhaps a more resilient multi-partyism. Côte d’Ivoire has lost its enviable place as the centre of regional stability and therefore prosperity. “We are looking at a region that risks failing. Even in the better off countries there is poverty and frustration. There is poverty of leadership.”

Unless there is a dramatic change in the prevalent concepts of governance, rescuing this crumbling region from further collapse is a daunting task.

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