Religious Leaders, Peacemaking, and the First Liberian Civil War

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On December 24, 1989, a group of rebels operating under the umbrella of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), a warlordist militia under the leadership of Charles Taylor, entered Liberia through Cote d'Ivoire.[1] The group consisted of an amalgam of individuals spanning Liberia's broad ethnic spectrum of sixteen indigenous groups, the settler, and other repatriate stocks. The group's primary objective was to remove the government of President Samuel Doe from power, and establish itself as Liberia's new rulers. Characteristically, the Doe regime responded to the threat with maximum force: It arrested, imprisoned, and murdered "suspected sympathizers" of the NPFL, and sent thousands of troops to the Liberian–Ivorian border to halt the incursion. For example, about 600 civilians, who took refuge in St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Monrovia, the capital city, were murdered by troops from Doe's dreaded Special Anti-Terrorist Unit (SATU).[2] This set into motion a bloody civil war that lasted for about eight years. The resultant effects included, among others, the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians, a refugee crisis, and the destruction of the country's already underdeveloped infrastructure.

When the First Liberian Civil War began, the attention of the international community was focused on two major conflict spots: The civil war in Somalia, and the "gathering storm" that eventually led to the Gulf War. On balance, these two conflicts were considered more important to the national interests of the United States and the other major powers than the Liberian civil war. This was because Somalia's location in the strategic Horn of Africa makes it adjacent to the Persian Gulf region. The Persian Gulf region is a major hub for the supply of oil to the United States and other major industrialized states. Hence, the civil war in Somalia, and the implications of Iraq's invasion and subsequent occupation of Kuwait

had profound ramifications for the supply of oil. In the case of Liberia, the United States, Liberia's traditional neocolonial patron, publicly declared that it had no plans to help end the Liberian civil war, because it no longer had any vital interest in Liberia.

Faced with the neglect of the international community, the Liberian Council of Churches (a Christian organization) and then subsequently the Religious Leaders of Liberia (both Christian and Islamic clerics) made the determination to intervene in the war as peacemakers. The religious leaders were hopeful that given their traditional influence in Liberian politics, the warring parties would be amenable to their intervention, and ultimately accept their proposals for ending the mayhem. Accordingly, the religious leaders devised two major peace plans, and undertook other complementary peacemaking activities that were ostensibly designed to end the war and its attendant adverse human and material consequences.

Against this background, the article has several interrelated objectives. First, the article will examine the nature and dynamics of the religious leaders' peacemaking efforts. Second, it will assess the impact of the peacemaking efforts on the First Liberian Civil War. Third, the article will probe the post-peacemaking environment. In order to address these interrelated issues, the article is divided into several parts. The initial task is to link the study to the scholarly literature on peacemaking. Next, the article provides an overview of the First Liberian Civil War. This is followed by an examination of the religious leaders' peacemaking efforts within the crucible of Liberian politics and Liberian religious dynamics. Then, the study probes the traditional role of religious leaders as mediators in various political crises in the country. The preceding section provides the context for the examination of the nature and dynamics of the religious leaders' peacemaking efforts, which comes next. This is followed by an examination of the post-peacemaking environment, including the state of the First Civil War, the termination of the war, Taylor's ascendancy to the Liberian presidency, the failed post-first conflict peacebuilding project, the second civil war, the end of the Taylor regime, the second post-conflict transition, and the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as president. Finally, the article probes the conditions for building durable peace in Liberia.

Models of Peacemaking Employed by Religious Leaders in Liberia

The religious leaders of Liberia employed two interrelated models of peacemaking—mediation and negotiation—as the frameworks for trying to end the First Liberian Civil War. Drawing from the scholarly literature, the two frameworks are anchored on several theoretical postulations. In The case of the mediation model is based on several pillars. First, a mediator intervenes in a conflict, either on his or her own initiative or based on the invitation of one or more of the parties to a conflict. There are differences in terms of the assets mediators bring to the peacemaking efforts; some mediators have more assets—tangible and intangible—than others.

Second, a mediator formulates and proposes terms for the settlement of the war. However, there is no requirement that the conflicting parties accept the proposal for settling the conflict.[3] Ultimately, each conflicting parties' response to the mediator's proposal is contingent upon the former's assessment of the latter's repository of resources, especially the potential impact and implications.

Third and related, successful mediation is contingent upon a variety of factors. According to Saadia Touval, these factors can be divided into two major categories: the circumstances of the mediator's intervention, and the mediator's attributes and qualities.[4] Ultimately, how the mediator approaches the conflict against the backdrop of the prevailing circumstances and uses her assets plays a pivotal role in the determination of the outcome of the mediation efforts.

In terms of the negotiation model, it is fundamentally different from the mediation model in that the neutral third party plays the role of a facilitator only. This is because the parties to the conflict are the principal forces that drive the process. Specifically, the parties to the conflict meet "face to face" at a site agreed upon by them. The meeting, or meetings, provides the conflicting parties with the opportunity to articulate their respective positions on the conflict, and to listen to the views of their adversaries. As Louis Kriesberg observes, "[the conflicting parties] listen to discover the underlying interests of their negotiating partners."[5] The major determinant of success rests on the changing of the situation in such a way that the conflict of interests is dissolved or transformed.[6]

Another major element of the model is that the failure of the conflicting parties to make progress, and eventually resolve their differences could adversely affect the conflict by

escalating it. That is, having had the opportunity to meet face to face and hear one another's positions, the inability of the parties to reach a compromise diminishes the prospects for resolving the conflict. Thus, the use of negotiation, especially by a third party as a complement to mediation, must be done only if appreciable progress has been made in addressing the most contentious issues that underlie the conflict. In other words, the mediator must make sure that, among other things, tension and suspicion among the conflicting parties have been significantly reduced.

Background to the First Liberian Civil War

The root causes of the First Liberian Civil War transcend the horrendous performance of the Doe regime; they are couched in the dynamics of the development of the Liberian state over the last century and a half. In other words, several major historical junctures need to be examined in order to understand the roots of the civil war. First, when the modern Liberian state was established in the early 1800s by the American Colonization Society (ACS), an American-based organization whose membership included some of the prominent members of the American ruling class, such as Henry Clay (Speaker of the House of Representatives), Bushrod Washington (Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States), and General Andrew Jackson, a political, economic, and social architecture based on the confluence of skin pigmentation and class was developed. That is, during the settler state phase (1822-1926), "white," "light-skinned" and "dark-skinned" were the categories of skin pigmentation, and "ruling," "intermediate" and "subaltern" constituted the class categories. Importantly, there was an overlap between skin pigmentation and class status. For example, from 1822-1839, whites, functionaries of the American Colonization Society (ACS), occupied the upper tier of both the state and class structure. The light-skinned repatriates commonly referred to as the "mulattoes," occupied the middle stratum. The dark-skinned, encompassing the other segment of the African repatriates from the United States, the Congoes (the recaptured who were prevented from being enslaved), and the members of the indigenous ethnic groups who were resident in the settler state, occupied the lowest tier of the state and class structure.

Second, with the advent of foreign investment in the mid-1920s, the underpinnings of the architecture of governance changed from ethnicity to class. That is, class became the major determinant of an individual's status in the power pyramid. This development fueled the

integration of the indigenous population into the body politic, albeit along class lines. The various groups of settler stock formed alliances with their indigenous counterparts on the basis of shared economic interests. Accordingly, three major class clusters emerged. The ruling class consisted of the indigenous managers of the state, local entrepreneurs, and foreign owners of multinational corporations and other businesses that operated in Liberia, such as the Bong Mining Company and LAMCO. This class controlled both state power and the economic life of the country.

The class of intelligentsia comprises artists, doctors, engineers, university professors and other teachers, and the broad gamut of people with technical and other skills. This class does not own or control the major means of production. Instead, the major source of livelihood for its members is derived from the sale of their skills and talents to the members of the ruling class. Traditionally, some of the members of the class have aligned with the lower classes in the struggle for democracy in Liberia; others have joined with, and graduated to the ruling class, and thus worked to maintain the status quo.

The subaltern classes consist of the workers, the farmers and the unemployed. The workers constitute a small, dispersed and unorganized class. This development can be attributed in part to state repression. The farmers constitute a large segment. Their major terrain is the rural area where over 70 percent of the population lives. Their major source of livelihood is subsistent agriculture. They are unorganized and politically uninformed and marginalized. Again, one of the major reasons for this is state-sponsored harassment and intimidation. Finally, the unemployed constitute a sizeable group. Nevertheless, they are also disorganized. The major source of income for most of them is engagement in criminal activities—the sale of illegal drugs and robbery.

In order to ensure the domination of the ruling class, a bureaucratic-authoritarian state based on repression, injustice, and other violations of human rights, was established. Similarly, an economic system hoisted on gross inequalities in income and wealth was developed. For example, in 1980, the ruling class, constituting 4 percent of the population, owned and controlled more than 60 percent of the national wealth. Every Liberian government—from Charles D. B. King to Samuel Doe—maintained this exploitive, oppressive and repressive system.

Third, on April 12, 1980, a class society was replaced by military dictatorship when the

Liberian military ousted the ruling class, and brought Sergeant Doe to power. Initially, the coup d'état received widespread support from the Liberian masses and the various groups that were part of the pro-democracy movement. The rationale was predicated upon the fact that since the military was part of the subordinate classes, it would therefore transform the architecture of governance by laying the groundwork for the building of a new democratic society. Unfortunately, the Doe regime recreated the old system based on political repression, economic inequality, injustice, mismanagement, and social decay. Hence, after ten years of Doe's rule, conditions for the Liberian masses were no better.

Not surprisingly, there was mass dissent and dislike for the Doe regime. Using the legitimate grievances of the Liberian masses as a facade, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) decided to dislodge Doe from power. However, the NPFL's real purpose was to control the government and enrich its members as previous governments had done. In other words, the NPFL misled the Liberian people by giving them the impression that the *raison d'etre* for the civil war was to "liberate them from years of tyranny." Nothing could be further from the truth.

An Overview of Religion and Politics in Liberia

Any discussion of the role of religious leaders as "peacemakers" in Liberia must first look at the role of religion in the country's politics. From the genesis of the repatriation project in the 1820s, Christianity has been, and remains a mainstay of the Liberian political landscape. Why has this been the case? First, under the project, freed African-Americans, who had been subjected to the vagaries of slavery in the United States, were sent to the "Grain Coast" (now Liberia) by the American Colonization Society (ACS) with the financial and material support of the United States government. Both the functionaries of the ACS and the repatriated African-Americans took Christianity with them to the "Grain Coast." This was done based on the belief that the various African religions that predominated in the area were intrinsically inferior, paganistic and heathenistic.[7] Hence, one of the major purposes of the repatriation project was to "Christianize" the members of the Grain Coast's various traditional ethnic groups.

Second, given the "Christianizing mission" of the repatriation project, several major Christian churches based in the United States organized branches in Liberia. These included the Baptist, Episcopal, Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian, African Methodist, and Lutheran

Churches.[8] Subsequently, these Christian sects established schools throughout the country. For example, the Baptists established Lott Carey and Ricks Institute (high schools); the Episcopalians established Cuttington University, St. John's High School, Bishop Ferguson High School, and B. W. Harris High School; the Methodists founded the College of West Africa (high school), Gbarnga Methodist School and Ganta Methodist School; the Lutherans established the Lutheran Training Institute (high school). Subsequently, the Catholics also established several churches and schools throughout the country as well. Significantly, through the various Christian churches and schools, thousands of Liberians were converted to Christianity. As Amos Beyan aptly observes, "The effects of the roles of the various Christian denominations on Liberia cannot be underestimated, especially if one is to understand the social characteristics of the country. As noted, the activities of these Christian denominations in Liberia were not only limited to the promotion of the gospel, they also included preparation for the secular world."[9]

Third, there was a fusion between the church and the state at various levels from the colonial period in 1822 to the coup d'etat in 1980. At the administrative level, for example, during the early days of the Liberian colony, the government was administered by protestant ministers.[10] In addition, those David Barrett calls "churchmen" occupied legislative, executive and judicial positions.[11] Similarly, during the state consolidation phase (1944-1980), several government officials simultaneously held political positions in the state bureaucracy and various positions in the church. For example, during the Tubman regime (1944-1971), William R. Tolbert, Jr., simultaneously served as the Vice President of Liberia and President (equivalent to a bishop) of the Liberian Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention and Pastor of the Zion Grove Baptist Church. Also, Vice President Tolbert served as the President of the World Baptist Alliance for several years. When he ascended to the Liberian Presidency in 1971 (he served from 1971-1980), following the death of President Tubman, President Tolbert retained his positions in the church as the denominational head of the Baptists and Senior Pastor of the Zion Grove Baptist Church. Similarly, during the Tolbert administration, Bennie Warner served for several years as the Vice President of Liberia while occupying the position of Bishop of the United Methodist Church of Liberia. Also, E. Reginald Townsend served as the Minister of State for Presidential Affairs and later as National Chair of the ruling True Whig Party, and simultaneously as the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Liberia. In terms of the

legal, constitutional architecture of Liberia, Christian precepts provide the foundation. Particularly, during the formative years of the state, all of the laws and regulations were crafted based on Christian principles.[12] Also, since the founding of the Liberian state, the government has required the observance of the Christian Sabbath and all major Christian events as national holidays. For example, on Sundays, government offices and businesses are closed in observance of the Christian day of worship. Similar action is taken by the state in observance of Easter and Christmas. Clearly, this has been, and continues to be in contravention of the provision in the Liberian Constitution that requires that the state and religion be separated.

Importantly, the dominant role of Christianity in Liberian polity has led to the development of the popular belief among Liberians that the country is a "Christian state." However, the data shows that despite the suzerainty of Christianity, traditional African religions collectively had the largest number of adherents. In 1986, for example, 75 percent of the population of Liberia had membership in various traditional African religious groups compared to 15 percent for Christian groups.[13] Thus, the ubiquity and enormous influence of Christianity in Liberia are attributable to historical, social, and political factors rather the number of the adherents.

Despite the hegemony of Christianity in the Liberian polity, the church, with few exceptions, has historically been a defender of the status quo. That is, with the exception of a few Christian leaders, such as the late Bishop George Brown of the Episcopal Church of Liberia, the late Bishop Roland J. Payne of the Lutheran Church, and Archbishop Michael K. Francis of the Catholic Church, the church has not been an advocate of social justice and human development. In other words, amidst Liberia's perennial crises of underdevelopment, evidenced by abject poverty, mass unemployment, inadequate and poor public health and educational facilities, the church socialized Liberians to accept their respective lots in life as so-called "acts of Providence."[14] Clearly, the church compromised and abdicated its role as a "citadel of social justice and human development" as is enshrined in what I refer to as the "great responsibilities—helping to feed the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, caring for those who are sick, and visiting those who are in prison" (Matt. 25:35-45). In this text, Jesus Christ, the founder and Lord of Christianity, instructed Christians to perform these great responsibilities as essential criteria for obtaining eternal life. As Paul Gifford correctly observes, "Liberian Christianity—far from being a force for justice and human advancement

—diverted attention from the causes of Liberia's ills, left change to God's miraculous intervention, encouraged obedience and acceptance of the status quo, and thus served to entrench [the ruling elites'] power."[15]

On the other hand, despite steady growth in terms of the number of adherents (in 1978, Muslims constituted 15 percent of the population, and 19 percent in 1980), Islam had negligible influence on Liberian politics until the ascendancy of Samuel Doe to the Liberian presidency.[16] Unlike Christianity, which was a fundamental of the repatriation project that culminated in the establishment of the Liberian state, Islam penetrated the Liberian landscape conterminously with the spread of commercial activities undertaken by Islamic traders.[17] That is, as Islamic traders established various trading posts throughout Liberia, especially in the western and northwestern regions of the country, they correspondingly built mosques and conducted religious activities. Having established a foothold through these twin activities, Islamists then engaged in prostelyzing and the "winning of souls for Allah." However, this did not translate into political influence during the "First Republic" (1847-1980). This was because, as has been discussed, Christianity was the "hegemonic religion" against the backdrop of its pivotal role in the state formation process. Also, Islam was treated with suspicion and mistrust by various regimes, the preponderant majority of whose executive, legislative, and judicial officials were Christians. Convinced that the ubiquity of Christianity in both the public and private spheres made it the state religion, various Liberian governments and their officials were concerned that if Islam gained political influence, it would undermine the stranglehold the Liberian brand of Christianity had on the state.

Significantly, Islam's political fortunes in the Liberian polity changed with Samuel Doe's ascendancy to the leadership and subsequently the presidency of Liberia. Faced with criticisms from the progressive wing of the church (Liberian Christianity) for the horrendous performance of his regime, including its horrific human rights record, and detached from the traditionally "pro-status quo" segment of the church, President Doe made the determination that Islam could serve as a countervailing religious force. Accordingly, President Doe cultivated an opportunistic relationship with some of the unprincipled leaders of Islam, akin to what previous regimes did with a similar group of Christian clergy—the "pro-status quo" wing of Liberian Christianity. The pro-status quo Islamic clerics served as a bulwark for the Doe regime against the criticisms emanating from the progressive

Christian leaders, and as a vehicle for legitimation. Based on the partnership, the Doe regime, among other things, appointed several Muslims to various positions, especially in the executive branch.

Importantly, one of the adverse consequences of the opportunistic partnership between the Doe regime and pro-government Islamic clerics was the emergent practice among non-Muslim Liberians to brand all members of the Mandingo ethnic group, Islam's principal constituency in Liberia, as "collaborators" with the Doe regime. This troubling and unfair characterization, which was based on the maxim "guilt by association," eventually made members of the Mandingo ethnic group targets for recrimination by the Taylor-led National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), and the Prince Johnson-led Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) warlordist militias, which were determined to oust the Doe government from power. Consequently, scores of innocent Mandingos were maimed or killed, and the properties of several others were destroyed. Interestingly, the duplicity of blaming Mandingos and, by extension, Muslims as collaborators of the Doe regime was reflected in the fact that Liberian Christians were not collectively blamed for the sordid performance of the various Christian-led regimes that preceded Doe.

Religious Leaders as Peacemakers during National Crises

Liberians are very religious; hence, Liberians hold religious leaders in high esteem. Traditionally, the mass deference for religious leaders made clerics (particularly Christian ones) important players, especially during various national crises. That is, recognizing the influential role of religious leaders, various Liberian regimes relied on them to serve as peacemakers during various national crises. For example, after the April 14, 1979, mass uprising, the Tolbert regime relied on a group of influential Christian clerics to mediate a truce with the reform movement led by the All People's Freedom Alliance (APFA), Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), and the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL), the country's three national social movements. APFA, MOJA and PAL played pivotal roles in organizing the mass uprising against the excesses of the Liberian ruling class. The uprising was triggered by the decision of the Tolbert regime to increase the price of rice, Liberia's staple food. Amidst deteriorating domestic economic conditions, as evidenced by, among other things, spiraling unemployment (precipitated in part by the closure of the Liberian Mining Company [LMC] and LAMCO, two major multinational corporations in the mining

sector), abject poverty and overall malaise, the Tolbert regime decided to increase the price of rice. After the failure of several meetings between the reform movement on the one hand and the Tolbert regime on the other to amicably resolve the issue, the reform movement decided to organize various mass demonstrations throughout the country.

Angered by the challenge posed to its power base by the mass uprising, the Tolbert regime mobilized the full battery of the state's coercive instruments—the military, police and various security units. Operating under a "shoot to kill" order from the Tolbert regime, the various paramilitary units opened fire on, maimed, or killed several demonstrators throughout the country, including bystanders.[18] Subsequently, thirty-three leaders of APFA, MOJA, PAL, the University of Liberian Student Union (ULSU), and the Student Unification Party (SUP, the ruling student-based political party at the University of Liberia) were arrested and imprisoned on the charge of treason for about three months.[19] Through the intervention of a group of religious leaders, among others, the Liberian government decided not to prosecute the accused leaders of the various organizations belonging to the national pro-democracy movement. The clergy's major argument was that holding a treason trial would further increase tensions and adversely affect the existing tenuous security situation in the country. Consequently, the Tolbert regime requested the clergy to prevail on the pro-democracy movement and its constituent organizations to abandon protest action, such as the April 14, 1979 uprising. Because of the respect the pro-democracy movement had developed for the progressive Christian leaders, it agreed to engage the government in ongoing dialogue about various national issues without agreeing to abandon totally protest activities when they became exigent.

The Religious Leaders' Peacemaking Efforts During the First Liberian Civil

The failure of the international community to intervene earlier in the First Liberian Civil War created a void. This situation was particularly critical given the complete break-down of "law and order" and the resultant enabling environment it provided for the Doe regime and the NPFL to engage in both the targeted and indiscriminate killing of civilians. Amidst the deteriorating security situation, coupled with the reluctance of the international community to intervene, the clergy made the determination that it had to intervene in the conflict in order to mediate a settlement. Given the high esteem in which religious leaders have been held traditionally in Liberia, and their past role as peacemakers, the societal

expectation was that the warring parties would have been amenable to the clergy's effort to resolve the conflict peacefully.

Against this background, the clergy intervened in the First Liberian Civil War in two major phases. The first phase was launched under the auspices of the Liberian Council of Churches, an exclusively Christian organization. Given the small ambit of the organization vis à vis the need for a much broader and inclusive, cleric-led peace initiative, Islamic clerics were incorporated. In turn, this led to the second phase of the peacemaking efforts under the banner of the Religious Leaders of Liberia. In the next two sections, the nature and dynamics of each of the phases of the peacemaking efforts will be examined.

The Liberian Council of Churches (LCC). On January 20, 1990, Christian clergy under the banner of the Liberian Council of Churches issued a statement expressing its concern about the military situation and the killings in Monrovia, the capital city. Accordingly, the LCC appealed to both the Doe regime and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), the rebel group, to resolve their differences peacefully. However, surprisingly, the two warring factions rejected the clergy's appeal; this action was unprecedented. Several factors accounted for the belligerents' rejection of the LCC's appeal. For its part, the Doe regime, which had been distrustful of the church, especially its "progressive wing," saw the LCC as a "partisan body" that was using peacemaking as an effort to weaken and eventually topple his regime. In other words, given the adversarial relationship between his government and the church, President Doe therefore saw the LCC as being sympathetic to the cause of the NPFL. Another reason was the Doe regime's belief that it could have won a military victory against the NPFL; thus, the LCC's peacemaking effort was seen as an obstacle to the achievement of this objective. On the other hand, the Taylor-led NPFL rejected the LCC's appeal because it made the determination, given the dynamics of the civil war at the time, that it could defeat and oust the Doe regime militarily; hence, it saw the LCC's peacemaking efforts as an impediment to the removal of the Doe regime and its subsequent replacement by a government led by Charles Taylor, the leader of the warlordist militia.

Despite the rejection of its initial peacemaking efforts, the LCC decided to continue its intervention. Accordingly, on May 30, 1990, the LCC issued another appeal to the disputants to bring the escalating violence and bloodletting to an end; and to peacefully resolve their differences through myriad methods for resolving conflicts. Specifically, the statement emphatically declared that "the church [was] ready to mediate."[20] Interestingly,

this time the appeal was accepted by the traditionally intransigent Doe government, but was rejected by Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia. The former accepted the LCC's appeal for two major reasons: based on the mass support for the insurgency at that juncture of the civil war, the Doe regime became finally convinced that its legitimacy was now virtually nonexistent; secondly, the Doe regime was experiencing incessant defeats at various fronts in the war, thus, by accepting the clergy's request to mediate the conflict, the Doe junta was hopeful that the consequent "peace agreement" would enable President Doe to remain in power for the duration of his term of office, which was to end in January 1992, following the October 1991 presidential and legislative elections.

Conversely, the Taylor-led NPFL rejected the clergy's appeal for two major interrelated reasons. First, the peaceful resolution of the conflict was antithetical to its primary goal of seizing control of the state machinery and installing itself as the new government. Furthermore, Taylor and his compatriots calculated that the peace talks would open the proverbial Pandora's box by bringing in other parties. The result would be the establishment of an interim government that would include the various political parties and interest groups in the country, thus the power and influence of Taylor would be diluted. Second, the NPFL saw negotiations as a conduit that would facilitate President's Doe's departure from the country, without the opportunity to investigate his regime and personally subject him to physical violence.

Amidst the impasse in the peacemaking process, the LCC decided that given the scope and magnitude of the conflict and its resultant war, the Christian clergy alone through the LCC could not serve as the sole mediator. Also, given the harmonious relationship between the Doe regime and some Islamic clerics, the determination was thus made that the latter could influence the former, especially in light of the fact that the peacemaking process would clearly involve the making of hard and difficult choices for the Doe regime and the NPFL. Based on these realities, the LCC initiated talks with the Muslim Council of Liberia (MCL), the umbrella organization of Islamic clerics, regarding the need for both Christian and Islamic religious leaders to collaborate in shepherding the peacemaking process. For their part, the Islamic clerics accepted; and thus, a new organization, the Religious Leaders of Liberia (RLL) was formed as the mediatory successor to the Christian-based Liberian Council of Churches (LCC).

The Peace Plan. Given the stage of the war, the Religious Leaders of Liberia (RLL)

decided to increase their involvement in the conflict in several ways. At the core was the recognition that the Christian clergy could not attempt to make peace between the belligerents without the inclusion of Islamic clerics. Another way was the decision to transcend the issuance of appeals to the belligerents. Also, the religious leaders decided to formulate a peace plan ostensibly designed to end the war and its attendant carnage.

On June 5, 1990, the clergy unveiled its peace plan. The plan covered a broad range of issues, including the imperative of establishing a ceasefire; the need for the intervention of a neutral peacekeeping force, to, among other things, monitor compliance with the ceasefire; and the urgency of a peace conference. The major tenets of the plan can be summarized viz:[21]

1. Ceasefire: That the government of Liberia and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia agree to an immediate ceasefire to be monitored and supervised by an acceptable peacekeeping force.
2. Roundtable Conference:

    A. That a round-table conference be convened immediately after the ceasefire at a neutral and acceptable place.

    B. That President Doe's decision that he will not participate in the 1991 elections and his willingness to make any sacrifice in the interest of his people, and the demand of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia that the President should resign immediately, be considered priority agenda items for the peace conference.
3. Internal Security:

    A. That the government of Liberia takes the necessary steps to provide protection for all its citizens and foreigners within its borders, especially the members of the Mano and the Gio ethnic groups.

    B. That the National Patriotic Front of Liberia also takes the necessary steps to provide protection for all persons within its reach especially the Mandingo and the Krahn ethnic groups.

    C. That the government of Liberia prevents the continuous killings, harassment, sexual molestations and intimidation of citizens and foreign residents.

    D. That the government of Liberia takes the necessary steps to ensure discipline in the Army, so as to prevent soldiers, and/or armed men from intruding into individuals' homes, institutions and other premises, arresting, abducting and killing defenseless

citizens and residents. Also, the plan called for the holding of a peace conference.

In order to concretize its peace initiative, the Religious Leaders of Liberia (RLL) established a committee called the "Inter-Religious Mediation Committee." The RLL's Mediation Committee presented the organization's peace plan to both the Doe Government and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia. The Doe regime accepted the peace plan and its attendant call for a peace conference. Clearly, the Doe regime's acceptance was propelled by the exigencies of the war and its attendant military calculus: given the mass public support, the NPFL was "winning" the war. Importantly, the NPFL's military victories over the various units of the Liberian army gave it strategic advantage as it took control of various territories. With most of the country under its control, the NPFL was poised to engage the Liberian military in the final battle for Monrovia, the capital city and the seat of the government. Being cognizant of these realities, the Doe regime had no choice but to cooperate with the peacemaking efforts of the RLL. As has been indicated, these efforts provided the Doe regime with the last opportunity to avert outright military defeat and the attendant imminent recriminations from the NPFL. However, for its part, the Taylor-led NPFL rejected the peace plan, the reason being that the plan did not call for the decisive removal of Doe, which presented a conundrum for the NPFL in its quest for military victory, the removal of the Doe regime, and the consequent assumption of power. However, after several consultations and appeals made by the RLL, Taylor and his war-lordist militia agreed to attend the peace conference.

The Freetown Peace Conference

The peace conference commenced on June 12, 1990, in Freetown, the capital city of neighboring Sierra Leone. Both the Liberian government and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia sent delegations. The Mediation Committee of the Religious Leaders of Liberia served as the mediator. The RLL's peacemaking strategy consisted of two major phases. The first phase involved meetings between the RLL's Mediation Committee on the one hand, and the warring parties on the other. These meetings were designed to review the RLL's peace plan, and to subsequently set the stage for the next phase of the peacemaking efforts. Thus, the second phase was framed as direct negotiation between the representatives of the belligerents. The RLL's intent was to provide both parties the opportunity to discuss the peace plan and to offer counter-positions or new elements for consideration by the RLL

and the two parties.

After four days of intense and serious discussions, the conference failed to make significant breakthroughs. The major obstacle was couched in the diametrically opposed positions of the Doe regime and Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia. On the one hand, the Doe regime argued that it should stay in power until the scheduled national elections were held in October 1991.In addition it promised that President Doe would not be a presidential candidate. On the other hand, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia insisted that the *sine qua non* for ending the war was anchored in "the immediate resignation of Mr. Doe and his regime, and the consequent handing of power over to the National Patriotic Front of Liberia."[22]

Amidst the emergent impasse, the conference adjourned with the agreement to reconvene in two weeks, after the various delegations had consulted with their respective leaders. As part of the consultation process, the Inter-Faith Mediation Committee met with both President Doe and Charles Taylor. Both leaders agreed to continue their participation in the peace conference; however, Taylor emphatically told the committee that the only way there could be a ceasefire was for President Doe to resign immediately.

The Break-down of the RLL's Peacemaking Efforts

After the two week interregnum that followed the first consultation between the RLL's Mediation Committee, President Doe, Charles Taylor, and the delegations of the two respective principals, the peace conference was slated to resume on July 1, 1990. However, characteristically, the Taylor-led National Patriotic Front of Liberia issued a statement indicating that it would no longer participate in the peace conference, hours before its scheduled resumption. From the perspective of Taylor and his militia, the peace talks posed a hindrance to the NPFL's goal of using military might to dislodge the Doe regime and install itself as the new government of Liberia. This position was explicitly articulated by Taylor during his meeting with the members of the Inter-Faith Mediation Committee. As Charles Taylor noted, "It was only a matter of hours for him to take Monrovia, and overthrow Mr. Doe. … He would take Monrovia even while the peace talks were still taking place."[23]

With the failure of the peace initiative by the Religious Leaders of Liberia (RLL), the civil

war escalated between Doe's military and Taylor's NPFL. Subsequently, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), a breakaway faction from the NPFL (led by Prince Johnson, an erstwhile confidant and top commander of the NPFL), emerged as the third belligerent in the war. With a three-way war, the collapse of the state, and the failure of the Religious Leaders of Liberia's (RLL) "peace plan," Liberia became analogous to the Hobbesian "state of nature,"[24] where "life was short, brutish and nasty."[25] In this environment, the three warring factions visited destruction and death on Liberia, as innocent civilians became the primary targets of the bloodletting.[26]

An Assessment of the Peacemaking Efforts

So why did the peacemaking efforts of the Religious Leaders of Liberia (RLL) fail to terminate the First Liberian Civil War? Three major reasons accounted for the outcome. First, both parties—the Doe regime and the Taylor-led NPFL—had irreconcilable agendas. For its part, the Doe regime wanted to leave power at the expiration of its constitutional term of six years. More importantly, the regime saw capitulation to the NPFL's "resignation demand" as weakness; thus, the Doe government was quite resistant to resigning. In effect, President Doe wanted to exit the theater of political power on his own terms. Against this background, the regime was not really interested in peace per se. Rather, it wanted to use the peacemaking efforts of the Religious Leaders of Liberia (RLL) as a vehicle for terminating war and allowing President Doe to remain in power; however, given the "credibility deficit" that underlay the activities of the belligerents, there were doubts on the part of the NPFL that even had it agreed to end the war and accept the Doe regime's promise to vacate the presidency at the end of the term of office, it was not convinced that President Doe would do as he promised.

For its part, the NPFL saw the RLL's peacemaking efforts as a hindrance to its ultimate objective of removing the Doe regime from power through the use of military force and installing Charles Taylor as the new President of Liberia. This orientation on the part of the NPFL reflected the warlordist militia's true motivation for waging the war against the Doe regime: the NPFL simply took advantage of the mass grievances against the Doe regime for its horrendous performance as a vehicle for achieving its leader's goal of becoming the president of Liberia. Also, Taylor saw a peaceful resolution of the war under terms that would had given President Doe an "honorable exit" as a threat to his power base.

In fact, Taylor had promised his fighters from Nimba County, the core of his militia, that they would have the opportunity to exact revenge against the Doe regime. They had a vendetta against the Doe regime for killing thousands of their kin during the notorious "Nimba raid" of November 1985. The "Nimba raid" took place following an abortive military coup led by General Thomas Quiwonkpa, one of the principal leaders of the 1980 coup and a former confidant of President Doe. In a classic display of "guilt by association," the Doe regime decided to hold the people of Nimba County responsible for the action of one of their kin. Also, deprived of mass legitimacy, the Doe regime used the Quiwonkpa-led abortive coup as an opportunity to mobilize the members of the President's Krahn ethnic group. That is, the Doe regime portrayed the coup attempt as part of a broader strategy of the people of Nimba led by General Quiwonkpa to wrestle political power away from President Doe and his Krahn ethnic group. In short, the Doe regime couched the failed coup in the ethnic crucible as the *deus ex machina* for mobilizing support from his kin for his illegitimate regime.

Second, the RLL did not have the proverbial carrots and sticks that were crucial to inducing compliance, especially from the NPFL. In other words, beyond its major asset—the esteem in which it was held by the Liberian people—the RLL did not have other critical sticks and carrots, such as the power to punish and reward. Thus, it entertained the hope that its traditional high standing in Liberian society would be enough to pressure the belligerents, especially the Taylor-headed NPFL, to acquiesce to its peacemaking efforts, particularly the contours of its peace plan. Clearly, while the long–standing esteem that the Liberian people had for its religious leaders was a critical asset in previous successes at resolving various national crises, the civil war presented a new challenge in which the clergy's "reputation" was not sufficient to induce compliance. Particularly, unlike other national crises, the civil war was an epic battle for the control of political power. Thus, the NPFL was not going to give up what it saw as a glorious opportunity to capture state power, especially since the prevailing military landscape was tilted in its favor.

Third, the RLL took Charles Taylor at face value. That is, the religious leaders were trustful that Charles Taylor could be convinced to accept their peace plan because he appeared to be a reasonable person. Thus, the religious leaders failed to take cognizance of the various signals they got from Taylor that demonstrated he was not interested in the termination of the civil war. Alternatively, the religious leaders should have clearly known that they were

dealing with a mercurial warlord whose words could not be trusted. This recognition would have helped the religious leaders to tailor their peacemaking efforts to the exigencies of the war, especially the agendas and motives of Taylor and President Doe. Accordingly, one possible strategy would have been to open a "back door channel" to some of Taylor's top military commanders like Prince Johnson. The purpose would have been to convey to them the need to terminate the war against the backdrop of the adverse consequences. In turn, they could have been encouraged to bring pressure on Taylor to accept the RLL's peace plan.

Efforts by the Religious Leaders of Liberia after the Failed Bid for Peace

As has been discussed, the failure of the Religious Leaders of Liberia to terminate the war removed the modicum of constraint that helped moderate the activities of the government and NPFL forces. Without such constraint, the level of violence increased precipitously as the NPFL attempted to oust the Doe regime from power. This led, in part, to an escalation of targeted killings, as each faction went after the other's perceived sympathizers in the civilian population. In addition, both sides engaged in the indiscriminate killing of civilians, irrespective of their perceived loyalties.[27]

Additionally, the level of violence continued to increase as other warring factions joined in, such as the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) led by Prince Johnson, the Liberian Peace Council (LPC), the Lofa Defense Force of Francois Massacois, and ULIMO, initially led by Albert Karpeh, but which subsequently splintered into two groups: ULIMO-J led by Roosevelt Johnson and ULIMO-K headed by Alhaji Kromah. Intergroup violence was exacerbated by the fact that the warring factions shared a culture of military indiscipline and brutality in which they engaged in both the targeted and the wanton killing of civilians. In mid 1990, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a sub-regional economic group, intervened in the war through a combination of peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts. In the case of the former, fifteen peace accords were brokered. The need for a series of agreements was created by the failure of the Taylor-led NPFL to honor the peace accords. That is, each time a peace agreement was brokered and signed, including by the Taylor-led NPFL, Taylor reneged. This created a vicious cycle that began with a brokered peace agreement, followed by repudiation by the NPFL, ending with a new round of peacemaking talks.

In the case of the peacekeeping force, it succeeded in some measure in reducing the level of violence by, among other things, establishing security corridors, especially in the capital city region. However, given the limited size of the peacekeeping force in relation to Liberia's territorial expanse, it was not possible to establish security corridors throughout the country. Hence, thousands of civilians, especially those who lived in the rural areas, remained vulnerable to attacks by the various warring factions. By the time the civil war ended in 1997, more than 200,000 people had been killed, and another million were displaced in refugee camps in neighboring countries.[28]

War Termination and the First Post-Conflict Election

In July 1997, the First Liberian Civil War officially ended under the terms of the Abuja II Peace Accord. Two major factors accounted for the termination of the war. First, suffering from "intervention-fatigue," ECOWAS made the determination that it needed to find a graceful exit from Liberia. Thus, leaders of ECOWAS pledged they could induce compliance from the Taylor-led NPFL by assuring Taylor that steps would be taken to ensure he would win the ensuing presidential election.[29] Second, the peace accord stipulated that those factional leaders who did not cooperate in the termination of the war would be charged with, and tried for, the commission of war crimes.

Accordingly, an election was hastily organized by ECOWAS. It was poorly handled, as were other critical transitional activities.[30] For example, the disarmament, and demobilization exercises were done in an incomplete manner.[31] One of the major resulting effects was that Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) militia remained effectively intact.[32] Also, Taylor had a distinct advantage in terms of financial and material resources. Having plundered and pillaged the country's natural resources for about eight years, Taylor was able to accumulate millions of dollars.[33] Thus, Taylor's political party had more resources than all the other political parties combined. Additionally, given his faction's comparative military superiority *vis a vis* the other factions, Taylor threatened to restart the war if he was not elected the president of Liberia.[34]

With the electoral playing field tilted in his favor, Taylor "won" the presidential election in a landslide with more than 75 percent of the votes. Also, the Taylor-led National Patriotic Party was allotted twenty-one of the twenty-six seats in the Senate, and forty-nine of the

sixty-four seats in the House of Representatives, based on the proportional representation system that was used for the legislature. Thus, Taylor and his political party had complete control of the government.

Failed Peacebuilding and the Second Civil War

Having "won," the presidency, Taylor was faced with providing the requisite leadership for addressing the underlying causes of the conflict and designing and implementing measures to address them. However, as Hizkias Assefa observes, "However, as soon as the [first] war was over, and a new government was installed, things quickly reverted to the way they were before the war."[35] For example, the Taylor regime became very repressive, as evidenced by the recurrent violations of political rights and civil liberties. Economically, the Taylor regime failed to establish propitious conditions for employment as reflected in the unemployment rate of more than 75 percent by 2000.[36] Socially, for example, only 40 percent of the population had access to education.[37]

Amidst growing political and socio-economic crises, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a rebel outfit consisting primarily of exiled Liberians based in neighboring Guinea, launched an insurrection in 1999. The ostensible goal was to remove the Taylor regime from power. Fearing the consequences of the rebellion for its hold on power, the Taylor regime responded, setting into motion the second civil war. Initially, the war was confined to the northwest and western portions of the country. However, by mid 2003, the LURD forces were on the outskirts of Monrovia, the capital city. During the same period, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) emerged as the second insurgent group that quickly took control of the eastern and southeastern portions of the country where the Taylor government's forces were spread thin.

Importantly, with civilians being killed en masse, especially in the capital city region, the international community decided to intervene. One of the major outcomes of the intervention was the brokering of an agreement under which Taylor agreed to resign the presidency and accept political asylum in Nigeria. Thereafter, a peace accord was brokered under which the war ended, a transitional arrangement was established, and presidential and legislative elections were held in 2005. After two rounds, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf became the President of Liberia in January 2006. In early 2006, Taylor was handed over to the Liberian government, which in turn sent him to the Special Court of Sierra Leone to face trial for the

alleged commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity during the Sierra Leonean civil war, 1991-2002. Presently, Taylor is on trial in The Hague.

The Second Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Project

With the assistance of the international community, Liberia embarked upon a second post-conflict peacebuilding project with the goal of addressing the underlying causes of its two civil wars and, subsequently, establishing durable peace. Accordingly, several activities were set into motion, including sectoral reforms in the economic, political, security, and other spheres, and the search for "truth and reconciliation." After more than three years, some gains have been made in addressing the vagaries of authoritarianism, as evidenced by the increased exercise of fundamental political freedoms, such as the freedom of speech and of the press. However, much work stills remains to be done in the political arena. In the economic arena, there has not been significant progress, as reflected in the increasing levels of poverty and overall economic hardship for the vast majority of Liberians. Socially, the overwhelming majority of Liberians still lack access to adequate education and health care. One of the major obstacles to post-conflict peacebuilding is rampant corruption. Over the last three years, there have been several cases of embezzlement of public funds by various officials of the Sirleaf regime.[38]

Interestingly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was established under the provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the second civil war in 2003, has issued its report. Among its many recommendations, the TRC is calling for the criminal prosecution of President Sirleaf and several others for allegedly committing war crimes during the country's two civil wars. It would be interesting to see whether President Sirleaf, one of the accused, would establish the special criminal court to prosecute war criminals.

Conclusion

Based on this discussion, several major conclusions can be drawn. First, the failure of peacemaking efforts by the Religious Leaders of Liberia underscores two major challenges. The core lacuna was that the religious leaders lacked the capacity to induce compellence from the Taylor-led NPFL. That is, the religious leaders did not have the requisite resources

for "sticks and carrots." The other problem was that religious leaders underestimated Taylor's determination to be a "spoiler." Placed in the broader context of the literature, successful peacemaking requires, among other things, that the third party possesses critical resources that it can use to both reward and punish. While the reputation of the peacemaker is important, it is insufficient to ensure successful peacemaking. Also, ultimately, peacemaking can only succeed, if the belligerents are willing to resolve their differences. Hence, "spoilers" make it very difficult for peacemaking to succeed, unless the peacemaker has the capacity to induce compliance from the spoilers.

In terms of the peacebuilding project currently underway in Liberia, it will only succeed if the underlying cultural, economic, political, security, and social problems that caused the war are adequately addressed. For example, concrete steps need to be taken to address the critical issues of massive unemployment, abject poverty, class inequalities, access to education, health care, clean drinking water, acceptable sanitation, and gender equality, among others. In this vein, while transitional justice, as is being advocated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is a major step forward, a more comprehensive and integrated approach to peacebuilding is required as the precondition for setting into motion the building of durable peace, and the establishment of a democratic and prosperous country.

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5. 5. Louis Kriesberg, *International Conflict Resolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 125.
6. 6. Hugh Midall, *The Peacemakers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 51.

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9. <u>9.</u> Amos Beyan, "The American Colonization Society and the Socio-Religious Characterization of Liberia: A Historical Survey, 1822-1900," *Liberian Studies Journal* 10, no. 2 (1984/1985): 2.

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11. <u>11.</u> David Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, A.D. 1900-2000 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 457.

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15. <u>15.</u> Paul Gifford, *Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ix.

16. <u>16.</u> For statistics on the number of Muslims in Liberia, see Religion by Location Index, "Liberia," <u>www.adherents.com</u>. The data for 1978 and 1980 were extrapolated from these statistics.

17. <u>17.</u> For a comprehensive discussion of the role of commerce as a conduit for the spread of Islam in Liberia, see Augustine Konneh, *Religion, Commerce and the Integration of the Mandingo in Liberia* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996).

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22. 22. Archbishop Michael Francis, "Statement to Liberians in Sierra Leone," October 7, 1990.

23. 23. Archbishop Michael Francis, "Statement to Liberians in Sierra Leone," October 7, 1990.

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30. 30. Terence Lyons, *Voting for Peace: Post-Conflict Elections in Liberia* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 1.

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