

# Scorched Ether: Radio Broadcasting in the Liberian Civil War

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## **ABSTRACT**

The National Patriotic Front of Liberia's long-term scorched earth and denial-of-resource tactics made it possible for its leader, Charles Taylor, to build, maintain, and ultimately profit from an unparalleled wealth of broadcast media facilities and equipment. In the initial phases of the Liberian civil war, the speed of the NPFL advance maximized its territorial gains, and by extension its access to a network of rural radio stations installed under the Doe regime. At the same time, lacking any proprietary broadcast capability, its chief spokespeople aggressively pressed their cases in the BBC and other foreign media, a ploy that raised their international profiles and resulted in internal consequences for the rebel group. The general brutality of the civil war and the violence of rebel attacks facilitated a scorched earth campaign, minimizing the potential for the NPFL's enemies to acquire similar media assets. As the war progressed and the NPFL consolidated its media resources at its Gbarnga headquarters, it embarked on a concerted propaganda campaign against ECOMOG and ECOMOG nationals. Later, working from a position of weakness and with unprecedented access to the capital, Taylor took the opportunity to destroy competing media outlets, pillage their equipment, and reestablish his own propaganda machinery, part of it from the relative safety of his rural headquarters. By the time of the 1997 elections, Taylor's enemies were unable to mobilize political constituencies or project themselves in anything resembling the manner in which the NPFL leader had done. They were thus in no position to compete, and external attempts at equalizing uneven access to campaign resources failed to adequately address the situation.

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The National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) had been percolating in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire since survivors of a failed coup attempt against the regime of Samuel Doe fled there in 1985. On Christmas Eve, 1989, its members crossed the border into Nimba County in north-eastern Liberia, initiating a barbarous seven-year spree of revenge killings, factional fighting, and regional unrest. The rebel group, trained in Libya, accompanied by foreign mercenaries, and backed by neighbouring Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, was led by Charles Taylor, a former Doe government official and Quiwonkpa supporter. It quickly snowballed into a sizeable army bloated with Gio and Mano survivors of Doe's Nimba County repression. The NPFL made rapid inroads against the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), quickly seized control of over ninety per cent of Liberian territory and provoked resistance from ethnic foes and disenfranchised supporters alike. The Liberian state ceased to exist as such. Reduced to a rump political core located in the capital city, Monrovia, it was administered by an impotent Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) until 1993, when it was replaced with the power-sharing Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG). A Nigerian-dominated Ceasefire Monitor Group of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOMOG) prevented rebels from taking Monrovia in 1990. A failed experiment in regional peacekeeping, ECOMOG's poor performance mandated further external intervention in 1993 in the form of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL). NPFL forces remained in control of most of Liberia until 1992-94, establishing the National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly Government (NPRAG), its answer to the IGNU, in Gbarnga, Bong County. By 1994 the NPFL was suffering severe military setbacks, and by the end of the year was rolled back into pockets of territory covering Nimba, Bong, Maryland, Grand Kru, and parts of Bassa, Sinoe, and Grand Gedeh Counties.<sup>1</sup> Runaway factionalism left Monrovia surrounded by a territorial patchwork of armed belligerent groups.

Regional and international efforts at mediating the conflict were frustrated by the hidden agenda and wanton violence of a veritable rogue's gallery of ethnic warlords. Foremost among them was Taylor, a ruthless, oleaginous leader who was party to countless scuttled peace talks and fractured what little remained of the country's ethnic solidarity. The leaders of ECOWAS states begrudgingly considered Taylor to be the conflict's single most important player. Strategically, his ultimate goal was to rule Liberia; today he sits as its democratically elected president. He showed a tactical sense unmatched by any of his rivals. He eliminated internal competition for the leadership of the NPFL, stamping it with his imprimatur and usurping authority over what had originally been a communally driven movement. He manipulated popular sentiment, spread disinformation, fostered divisions among and between his enemies, and exploited every available opportunity to undermine his opponents. Central to all this was his much acknowledged but little explored manipulation of news and radio broadcasting. Stephen Ellis, a scholar at Leiden University's African Studies Center and an authority on the Liberian civil war, has acknowledged Taylor's early reliance on the BBC to craft a public image for himself that would play a key role in his claim to NPFL leadership. "Revealing a fine talent for public relations," Ellis writes, "Taylor used the media to build a national

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<sup>1</sup> "After Akosombo," *Africa Confidential* 35, no. 22 (4 November 1994), 2-4.

and international profile which gave him a vital advantage over other leaders of the NPFL in the early months of the war.”<sup>2</sup> Terrence Lyons, a conflict management specialist at George Mason University, suggests that Taylor’s superior media resources helped win him the presidency in an internationally supervised democratic election in July 1997. “Taylor controlled the formerly state-owned shortwave radio station,” he notes, “and thereby dominated the airwaves through which most Liberians outside of Monrovia received their news.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the rebel leader underwent a radical conversion from brutal warlord to effective politician in the months preceding the election. He had a record of de facto governance over large stretches of Liberian territory and had accumulated sufficient resources to mount an effective political campaign. Just as importantly, he employed a prolonged propaganda program in which he aggressively promoted himself as “presidential”, deliberately subverted obstacles to NPFL victory such as ECOMOG and the peace process, and incited ethnic hatred en route to his ultimate goal, absolute control of Liberia.<sup>4</sup>

Taylor’s media campaign, however, did not simply bracket the civil war – it was an integral component of NPFL strategy throughout the conflict, requiring a substantial investment in broadcast resources and planning. It is the contention of this paper that the NPFL deliberately engaged in a long-term scorched-earth policy in which broadcast media facilities were denied to Taylor’s opponents and consolidated under his banner. In the midst of the mad scramble for control of Liberian resources, radio facilities continued to be the prized assets they were under the Doe regime.<sup>5</sup> Unlike Doe, however, Taylor was a charismatic and savvy political operator, a master of self-promotion and subterfuge who utilised such capabilities to good effect, from the time he first crossed the Ivorian frontier into Nimba until he was elected President in July 1997. In what has generally been considered the first of Africa’s post-Cold War “failed states”, radio was a highly valued commodity, providing an invaluable layer of infrastructure where services and supplies of any kind were at a premium. Certainly, other political entities had rudimentary broadcasting capabilities. Taylor’s forces, however, displayed a singular interest in maintaining and controlling radio facilities and resources, destroying those that they could not, thereby leaving the country exposed and vulnerable to rebel media saturation.

## Factions and Frequencies

At the height of the conflict, there were nine distinct armed groups actively involved in the fighting, including the NPFL, ECOMOG and the government’s own Krahn-dominated Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). The Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), led by Prince Yormie Johnson, split off from Taylor’s NPFL,

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Ellis, "Liberia’s Warlord Insurgency," *African Guerrillas* Christopher Clapham, Ed. ( Oxford: James Currey; Kampala, Uganda: Fountain Publishers; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 159.

<sup>3</sup> Terrence Lyons, *Voting For Peace: Post-Conflict Elections in Liberia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 58.

<sup>4</sup> Which I will argue in the following chapter.

<sup>5</sup> "Enemies of the Revolution : Radio, Propaganda, and National Development in Samuel Doe’s Liberia, 1980-1989." Paper presented to the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies, Concordia University, Montreal, 29 November 2002 ([http://migs.concordia.ca/workshop/MIGS\\_Innes\\_Nov29.pdf](http://migs.concordia.ca/workshop/MIGS_Innes_Nov29.pdf)).

challenged it for control of the capital city, and was ultimately responsible for Samuel Doe's gruesome killing in September 1990. In 1994, following much internal dissent over Taylor's leadership, several of his high-ranking officials broke away to form the NPFL – Central Revolutionary Council (NPFL-CRC). Early in the war refugee Krahn and Mandingo soldiers and political leaders, who fled to Guinea and Sierra Leone following the NPFL invasion, established the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO). In 1994 it split into two factions, the Krahn dominated ULIMO-J, led by Roosevelt Johnson, and ULIMO-K, a Mandingo group headed by Alhaji Kromah, Doe's former information minister. Also in 1994, disaffected members of ULIMO-J and the AFL formed the Liberian Peace Council (LPC), led by George Boley, himself a Krahn and former Doe minister. Abuses perpetrated by ULIMO-K helped spawn the Lofa Defence Force (LDF), led by Francois Massaquoi. Some groups, such as the LPC and LDF, were fairly insubstantial forces numbering only a few hundred fighters. The AFL, ULIMO-J, and the LPC constituted a rough Krahn axis that fought off the NPFL, but the chaotic nature of the civil war and the endemic opportunism that characterised factional leadership meant that alliances were fluid and subject to a great deal of treachery. ECOMOG, for example, first manipulated the Krahn militias, using them as proxies to counter the much stronger NPFL menace, then later used the same tactic against them, providing assistance to Taylor and his allies. Taylor, likewise, sought first to fracture ECOMOG's multinational cohesion, before attempting similar tactics against Liberian opposition groups when they were aligning themselves under the to NPFL-CRC to attack his stronghold in Gbargna. Others claimed allegiance with ECOMOG, the AFL, or one another as chances for political, military, territorial, and commercial advancement arose.<sup>6</sup>

ECOMOG, for its part, would play a significant role in the civil war. A Standing Mediation Committee of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), consisting of Nigeria, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, and Togo, was formed in Banjul, Gambia in May 1990 to address the Liberian situation.<sup>7</sup> In August it established ECOMOG, ostensibly a neutral peacekeeping force. It deployed to Liberia that same month under the command of a Ghanaian, General Arnold Quainoo.<sup>8</sup> The mission, which lasted the better part of a decade, from 1990 to 1999, was fraught with problems. At the strategic level, West African states were apprehensive over Nigeria's hegemonic ambitions in the region as well as its role in the peacekeeping force. ECOWAS itself was divided by the persistent rivalry between Anglophone<sup>9</sup> and Francophone<sup>10</sup> West African states. Family

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview of these groups and their origins, see Ellis, "Liberia's Warlord Insurgency," 155-171; and Abiodun Alao, John Mackinlay, and 'Funmi Olonisakin, *Peacekeepers, Politicians, and Warlords : The Liberian Peace Process* (Tokyo, New York, and Paris : United Nations University Press, 1999), 99.

<sup>7</sup> "ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government," Decision A/DEC. 9/5/90, Relating to the Establishment of the of the Standing Mediation Committee, Banjul, Republic of Gambia, 30 May 1990 ; and "ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government," Extract From the Final Communiqué, Establishment of a Standing Mediatoin Committee, Banjul, Republic of Gambia, 30 May 1990 ; documents in Mark Weller, Ed., *Regional Peace-Keeping and International Enforcement : The Liberian Crisis* Cambridge International Document Series Vol. 6 (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1994), 38-40.

<sup>8</sup> "ECOWAS Standing Mediation Committee," Decision A/DEC.1/8/90, on the Cease-Fire and Establishment of an ECOWAS Cease-Fire Monitoring Group for Liberia, Banjul, Republic of Gambia, 7 August 1990 ; document in Weller, *Regional Peace-Keeping and International Enforcement*, 67-69. See also pages 69-75.

<sup>9</sup> Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Gambia.

<sup>10</sup> Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Guinea.

ties linking victims of the Doe regime with Ivorian and Burkinabe leaders further heightened existing tensions. ECOMOG's role as a disinterested outside party, and hence its effectiveness as an impartial peacekeeping force, was thus in question before the first contingent landed, under rebel fire, on Liberian soil. Its officers and men became embroiled in the country's maelstrom of regional and tribal politics, corruption, criminality, and human rights abuses.<sup>11</sup> ECOMOG's problems did not end there. Tactically, it lacked both a clear mandate and adequate funding and equipment to carry out an effective military operation. Poor logistics and administrative capabilities, an order of battle inappropriate to the conflict, a dearth of maps and intelligence, and little if any internal communications capability, were just some of the mission's inadequacies.<sup>12</sup> Plagued with both macro and micro level deficiencies, it is no wonder that ECOMOG has since been characterised as a failed experiment in regional peacekeeping.

In contrast, the NPFL consistently remained the largest, most powerful, and best equipped of Liberia's warring groups. According to 1994 disarmament statistics compiled by the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL), all other factions combined still did not match it in terms of manpower, weaponry, and resources – despite heavy battlefield and territorial losses between 1992 and 1994.<sup>13</sup> The NPFL first attacked the towns of Butuo, Karnplay, and Longuatu, killing a number of customs officials and security personnel. The Doe government responded, dispatching elements of the AFL, notably the Krahn-dominated Special Anti-Terrorist Unit (SATU), to quell what were initially perceived to be but mild regional disturbances.<sup>14</sup> The violence that ensued was a replay of Doe's 1983 and 1985 attacks on the Gio and Mano populations of Nimba County. Survivors were quick to join the rebels. The ranks of the NPFL swelled from a handful to 6,000 in short order; by 1994, troop strength was estimated at 35,000, compared to ULIMO's 10,500 and the AFL's 8,037.<sup>15</sup> Bent on vengeance the NPFL engaged in ethnic slaughter of its own, targeting the Krahn and their Mandingo allies. Charges of genocide emerged from all quarters.<sup>16</sup> Cyclical ethnic slaughter and repression of this kind continued through the civil war: according to U.S. State Department estimates, "The human costs of the war were immense." It estimated "200, 000 war-related deaths, 1.2 million persons displaced internally, and approximately 750, 000 refugees in neighboring countries."<sup>17</sup> By the time of the 1997 presidential elections, an overwhelming majority of the population had suffered abuses of one kind or another, and

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<sup>11</sup> Kenneth L. Cain, "The Rape of Dinah : Human Rights, Civil War in Liberia, and Evil Triumphant," *Human Rights Quarterly* 21, No. 2 (1999), 265-307.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Howe, "Lessons of Liberia : ECOMOG and Regional Peacekeeping," *International Security* 12, No. 3 (Winter 1996/97), 145-176 (167-173).

<sup>13</sup> Alao *et al.*, *Peacekeepers, Politicians, and Warlords*, 61, 99.

<sup>14</sup> Africa Watch, *Flight From Terror: Testimony of Abuses in Nimba County* (London, New York, Washington : Africa Watch, May 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Alao *et al.*, *Peacekeepers, Politicians, and Warlords*, 61, 99.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, "Cabinet Cites 'Genocide' on Liberian Border," *FBIS-AFR-90-012* (18 January 1990), 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Liberia Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 1998). Hereafter *1997 Report on Liberia*.

[http://www.state.gov/www/global/human\\_rights/1997\\_hrp\\_report/liberia.html](http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1997_hrp_report/liberia.html), Accessed January 17, 2003.

the NPFL was arguably responsible for perpetrating the lion's share of them.<sup>18</sup> Yet when Liberians, exhausted by seven years of fratricidal bloodshed, were finally allowed to go to the polls in July 1997, they voted overwhelmingly for Taylor in an election deemed free and fair by international observers.<sup>19</sup>

This is best understood when one considers that the NPFL and its leader consistently dominated the military and political scene throughout the civil war, displaying a degree of sophistication unmatched by any of the other factions or their leaders. Taylor was able to deploy the requisite firepower to enforce his rule, establishing a parallel Liberian "state" with himself as its titular head. He capitalized on the country's natural resources and negotiated international commercial access to them, enabling him to sustain his military campaign, enjoy the material support of external states, and challenge the legitimacy of the Monrovia government.<sup>20</sup> Within NPFL territory, living conditions were horrendous – freedom of movement was severely curtailed and human rights violations were legion. A rudimentary state structure was nonetheless maintained featuring schools, medical clinics, currency, transportation, and a communications system. The NPFL's para-statal infrastructure was co-ordinated by the secretive G-2, dubbed "the point of no return" by one author.<sup>21</sup> It was linked to numerous executions and disappearances, but it was also responsible for running Taylor's communications system – although given the extent of Liberian territory under NPFL control, communication between Taylor and his field commanders remained poor.<sup>22</sup> The NPFL was particularly adept at intelligence gathering. Abroad, Taylor had agents operating within the U.S. State Department.<sup>23</sup> Domestically, NPFL cells were infiltrated into Monrovia, and the group used small, mobile detachments of guerrilla fighters to keep track of ECOMOG and IGNU activities, to a far greater extent than they were able to monitor the NPFL.<sup>24</sup> In the hinterland Taylor's troops were familiar with the lay of the land and spoke the local languages, although NPFL atrocities limited the extent to which such advantages could be exploited among the civilian population.<sup>25</sup>

What Taylor claimed to lack in direct command and control capability he more than compensated for with access to and control of mass media. At the beginning of the war, he was equipped with little more than a satellite phone, a tool that proved instrumental in shaping international perceptions of the NPFL and his relationship to it. Taylor was aggressive in his pursuit of international media attention, regularly calling

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<sup>18</sup> Former UNOMIL human rights officer Kenneth L. Cain points out that these statistics, in addition to countless incidences of rape, torture, and other human rights abuses, amount to a victimisation rate of 85 per cent of Liberia's pre-war population of 2.5 million. See Cain, "The Rape of Dinah," 268.

<sup>19</sup> See Terrence Lyons, *Voting For Peace: Post-Conflict Elections in Liberia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999); and David Harris, "From 'Warlord' to 'Democratic' President: How Charles Taylor Won the 1997 Liberian Elections," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 37, 3 (1999), 431-455.

<sup>20</sup> William Reno, "The Organization of Warlord Politics in Liberia," chapter in Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 79-111.

<sup>21</sup> Brehun, *The War of Horror*, 54, 56.

<sup>22</sup> "The Forces in Contention," *Africa Confidential* 33, no. 23 (20 November 1992), 6-7

<sup>23</sup> "Spy Under Arrest," *West Africa* 3960 (16-22 August 1993), 1438; "Intrigue in Washington," *West Africa* 3969 (18-24 October 1993), 1871; "In Prison Without Trial," *West Africa* 4001 (6-12 June 1994), 999-1000; "Espionage Journalist Pleads Guilty," *West Africa* 4005 (4-10 July 1994), 1187.

<sup>24</sup> "The Forces in Contention," *Africa Confidential* 33, no. 23 (20 November 1992), 6-7; "The Battle for Gbarnga," *Africa Confidential*, 34, no. 11 (28 May 1993), 1-2.

<sup>25</sup> "The Battle for Gbarnga," *Africa Confidential*, 34, no. 11 (28 May 1993), 1-2.

the BBC and demanding to be interviewed. He was notoriously jealous of his personal power, and communications technology of one kind or another allowed him to micromanage his people.<sup>26</sup> The satellite phone was an especially useful link between the rebel leader and faction members: fearful of assassination, capture, or simply of having his location pinned down, it allowed him to manage events from a safe distance. He thus used it to project his physical presence. He maintained contact with the BBC's popular *Focus on Africa* program when his whereabouts were in doubt and rumours abounded, dissimulating on his location and the disposition of NPFL forces to the show's host, Robin White.<sup>27</sup> White acknowledges that at least during the opening salvos of the civil war, Taylor was constrained by legitimate operational security concerns from identifying his location too precisely. Still, the British journalist suggested that Taylor was well rehearsed before making contact: he "was very clever at picking his moments", and he would only call "if something was happening."<sup>28</sup> Taylor's Defence Minister, Tom Woewiyu, soon emerged in early 1990 as the NPFL's chief spokesman, appearing on BBC and West African media to trumpet the rebels' cause.<sup>29</sup> Despite the NPFL's initial military success in the war, its broadcast resources were limited to such surviving foreign and independent outlets that would host them,<sup>30</sup> suggesting one reason for the sustained contact with the BBC.

The Liberian press came to resemble the broken state it purported to inform: caught on either side of the Monrovia-Gbarnga divide, journalists were drawn into the propaganda war being fought over the airwaves by proponents of the Monrovia-based government and the NPFL.<sup>31</sup> According to Liberian journalist Suah S. Deddeh, "As the competing parties traded insults, journalists became the conduit through which their verbal attacks were publicised and amplified. It is no wonder that some people held the press responsible for helping to fan the flames of war during that period."<sup>32</sup> Woewiyu's counterpart in the government was Minister of Information Emmanuel Bowier; the two quickly became the "stars" of the early stages of the civil war.<sup>33</sup> While the former made certain that news of NPFL battlefield successes reached the outside world and were in turn picked up by local media, the latter used the government's proprietary broadcast resources to paint quite a different picture of rebel defeat. But both Doe and Taylor had a vested interest in controlling the flow of information: by May 1990, rebroadcasts of

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<sup>26</sup> "Peace Looms in Liberia," *West Africa* 3957 (26 July – 1 August 1993), 1292-1293.

<sup>27</sup> "Opposition Leader predicts Uprising," *FBIS-AFR-90-001* (2 January 1990), 10-12; "Taylor Views New Rebel Offensive," *FBIS-AFR-90-010* (16 January 1990), 40-41; "BBC Interviews Rebel Leader Charles Taylor," *FBIS-AFR-90-021* (31 January 1990), 13-14; "Taylor Interviewed on Current Situation in Gbarnga," *FBIS-AFR-94-188* (28 September 1994).

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Robin White, 3 February 2003.

<sup>29</sup> "The Plot Thickens" *West Africa* 3812 (17-23 September 1990), 2478; "Rebels Establish Firm Foothold," *FBIS-AFR-90-005* (8 January 1990).

<sup>30</sup> For example, the "Voice of Mid-Liberia", a Christian station run by Baptist missionaries, hosted an NPFL conference in late May 1990. See "Taylor Talks," *West Africa* 3796 (28 May – 3 June 1990), 879-880.

<sup>31</sup> Suah S. Deddeh, "Pushing For Press Freedom in Liberia," *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 2 (April 2000), 161.

<sup>32</sup> Deddeh, "Pushing For Press Freedom in Liberia," 161-162.

<sup>33</sup> "The Liberian Way," *West Africa* 3801 (2-8 July 1990), 2020-2021.

BBC news coverage were dropped from the government's Radio ELBC, and were eventually banned as treasonous behind NPFL lines as well.<sup>34</sup>

The effect on perceptions of the war was predictable. In Liberia, radio was "king of the media": shortwave HAM radio sets facilitated communication with the outside world,<sup>35</sup> and personal, hand-held radio receivers were ubiquitous, allowing residents, at least for a time, to sidestep authoritarian control of the airwaves.<sup>36</sup> William Ardill was an Irish American medical doctor and member of the evangelical Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) who was stationed at the campus of Radio ELWA, SIM's Christian missionary station that had been in operation since 1954. In his memoir of the war he noted that the confusion generated by contradictory media messages could still be overcome by access to foreign media:

On May 19 we heard Taylor's army had reached the city of Buchanan about 45 miles southeast of Monrovia. It was a major port city and was a key victory. On the BBC we heard from Taylor that he was now in control of the port. On the government news reports, the AFL said they had firm control of Buchanan and defeated the rebels. We had learned to question the government reports. We knew that Taylor was also a master propagandist, so we listened several times a day to the VOA and BBC reports and tried to sort out what was really happening only a few miles from where we lived.<sup>37</sup>

The late G. Henry Andrews, a Liberian journalist who would go on to supervise the 1997 election as chair of the Independent Elections Commission, decried the "double-talk and twisted logic" of government information.<sup>38</sup> In a diary entry dated July 1, 1990, he questioned the veracity of government media reports as the NPFL seemed ever closer to its goal of capturing Monrovia:

The NPFL is now on the city's doorstep. Reports say the fighting is only five miles from the heart of the city. Is this true? Rumors abound. Our only sources are the BBC, VOA, and ELWA. People learned long ago not to believe anything on ELBC and ELTV. Since the start of this conflict, the government has never admitted the loss or capture of any town or city, except by implication or reference. As each city or county has fallen to the NPFL, the government has denied the news and told us that everything was under control, that there was nothing to worry about, and that there was no need to panic. The first mention that the government made of the NPFL being in Buchanan, for instance, was when it announced that the army had launched a counterattack to retake Buchanan. But the government had never admitted that Buchanan had fallen in the first place, instead, denying all the time NPFL claims to have taken the city.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> James Butty, "Doe Wants to Talk," *West Africa* 3793 (7-13 May 1990), 781; James Butty, "A Year of Terror," *West Africa* 3827 (7-13 January 1991), 3149-3150.

<sup>35</sup> William Ardill, *Where Elephants Fights* (Jos, Nigeria : Fab Anieh Ltd., 1997), 163.

<sup>36</sup> G. Henry Andrews, *Cry, Liberia, Cry!* (New York: Vantage Press, 1993), ? ? ?.

<sup>37</sup> Ardill, *Where Elephants Fight*, 174, 196-197.

<sup>38</sup> Andrews, *Cry, Liberia, Cry!*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Andrews, *Cry, Liberia, Cry !*, 19.



## Consolidating NPFL Radio

NPFL troops seized control of existing radio facilities as they moved south and outwards from Nimba to encompass most of the country. Indeed, the evidence suggests that in the course of the rebels' military operations, they deliberately set out to eliminate enemy broadcasting capabilities while supplementing or expanding their own. Sceptical Liberians, mistrustful of the competing propaganda messages dominating the airwaves, had turned to other sources of information. Ardill wrote:

The daily ELWA broadcasts about the war and reports about the safety of various people were a vital link to those caught behind the rebel lines. With the mail service stopped, there were no new radio programs being aired because programs produced in other studios never arrived. The unchanging Christian message still was a comfort to those trapped and saddened by the horrors of war.<sup>40</sup>

For one Liberian observer, "The educated people have Voice of America and BBC," but "Radio ELWA is our people's BBC."<sup>41</sup> Hard news was evidently becoming less important than survival and solace from the chaos. Eventually, however, the NPFL's scorched earth tactics and totalitarian methods within its own territory left Liberians with little other than officially mediated information. During the rebel assault on Monrovia in early July, 1990, state radio, short on fuel for its generators, was reduced to intermittent broadcasts during the rebel siege of the city.<sup>42</sup> In the hinterland, the Liberian Rural Communications Network – a Doe-era rural development project partially funded by the United States Agency of International Development, with a network of satellite stations in Gbarnga, Zwedru, and Voinjama – represented a wealth of broadcast resources and was thus a natural target for the rebels.<sup>43</sup> BBC Worldwide Monitoring picked up a broadcast at 2100 GMT on July 17 from a station identifying itself as "Radio Number Two, the Voice of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, broadcasting from Gbarnga, Liberia."<sup>44</sup> On August 2 at 2110 GMT, another station, this time in Voinjama, was heard identifying itself as the "Voice of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia Radio Number Four".<sup>45</sup> The Voinjama station broadcast intermittently into 1991,<sup>46</sup> but by 1992 it and the Zwedru station had been picked clean, all three of the hinterland LRCN facilities

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<sup>40</sup> Ardill, *Where Elephants Fight*, 153.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Ardill, *Where Elephants Fight*, 153.

<sup>42</sup> "Doe's Resignation," *West Africa* 3802 (9-15 July 1990), 2066.

<sup>43</sup> See Institute for International Research, *Final Report of the Rural Information Systems Project: A Report to the United States Agency for International Development*, Project No. 669-0134 (Arlington, Virginia: Institute for International Research, March 1989).

<sup>44</sup> "Liberia Fighting in Monrovia; NPFL Takes Control of Local Radio Station," *SWB*, ME/0825/ii (July 25, 1990).

<sup>45</sup> "Liberia NPFL Radio Warns of 'Invasion'; Doe Seeks Medical Aid For Ministries," *SWB*, ME/0834/ii (August 4, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> "Sierra Leone Troops Reportedly Halt NPFL 'Advance'; Nigeria Pledges Help," *SWB*, ME/1041/ii (April 9, 1991); "Liberian Cabinet Resigns; 'Hundreds' of NPFL Rebels Killed in Sierra Leone," *SWB*, ME/1064/ii (May 6, 1991).

consolidated at Taylor's headquarters in Gbarnga and supplemented by a mobile broadcasting facility likely located for a time at the Harbel Firestone plantation.<sup>47</sup> Resources outside of core territory were thus systematically stripped of spare parts or destroyed as the NPFL sought to deny similar media to its enemies. Taylor's troops overran, shut down, and eviscerated the Liberia Relay Station of the Voice of America in Careysburg in September 1990; the site became a camp for internally-displaced persons thereafter.<sup>48</sup> Elimination of the LRCN satellite stations and consolidation of the NPFL's broadcast equipment and facilities at Gbarnga limited the capabilities of NPFL opponents in Grand Gedeh and Lofa counties. Other Liberian Broadcasting Service facilities, "from Bomi County to Careysburg", were similarly pillaged. In Paynesville, the NPFL dismantled the government's ELBC FM radio and television site, gutted it of equipment, and set it ablaze.<sup>49</sup>

By the summer of 1990, Taylor's forces had taken most of Liberia and were engaged in heavy fighting in Monrovia with the AFL, INPFL, and by August, ECOMOG. At stake during the NPFL's effort to capture the city was control of the ELWA facilities. Continued broadcasting would have drawn fire from the fighting factions, and Taylor wanted the station intact. It ceased regular programming on July 6 at his urging, ELWA staff unwilling to risk the destruction of the facility that would surely result if they did not comply.<sup>50</sup> When Taylor's forces briefly took the area around the ELWA campus three weeks later, they retrieved ELWA staff who had fled to surrounding refugee camps, and brought them back to the studio so that they could prepare the station for a staged broadcast.<sup>51</sup> Although the site had survived the fighting largely unscathed, they were initially unable to summon the requisite electrical power needed to reactivate the transmitter. According to William Ardill, rebels ordered one of the staffers "to turn on the generators but he couldn't because the emergency tower lights had been left on and the batteries...were flat."<sup>52</sup> The problem was eventually resolved when "One older generator [was] started manually with an air compressor and we all sighed in relief."<sup>53</sup> The rebels provided ELWA staff with a taped message from Taylor, who was not physically present for the broadcast.<sup>54</sup> On July 27 they transmitted his "special message" which proclaimed "the Doe government is hereby dissolved and it is replaced by the government of the National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly under my leadership."<sup>55</sup> The move was premature, as Taylor's troops were routed within days. Before leaving they looted what they could, and set fire to what they could not.<sup>56</sup> Forces loyal to Doe added to the destruction afterward.<sup>57</sup> In 1991 SIM dispatched an assessment

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<sup>47</sup> "New Radio Station Commissioned," *SWB*, ME/0924/ii (November 17, 1990).

<sup>48</sup> Patricia A. Holmes, "The Voice of America in Liberia: The End of the Road," *Liberian Studies Journal* 17, no. 1 (1992), 79-93.

<sup>49</sup> "Liberia Broadcasting System Comments on Equipment Destruction by NPFL," *SWB*, ME/1326/B/1 (March 11, 1992); see also "Radio 'Vandalism'," *West Africa* 3890 (6-12 April 1992), 600.

<sup>50</sup> Ardill, *Where Elephants Fights*, 139.

<sup>51</sup> "Liberia," *SWB*, ME/0940/E1/1 (December 6, 1990); Ardill, *Where Elephants Fights*, 210.

<sup>52</sup> Ardill, *Where Elephants Fight*, 210.

<sup>53</sup> Ardill, *Where Elephants Fight*, 213.

<sup>54</sup> Ardill, *Where Elephants Fight*, 214.

<sup>55</sup> "Doe Government 'Dissolved'; Charles Taylor Leads New Government," *SWB*, ME/0829/ii (July 30, 1990).

<sup>56</sup> Ardill, *Where Elephants Fight*, 227.

<sup>57</sup> "Liberia," *SWB*, ME/0940/E1/1 (December 6, 1990).

team to evaluate conditions at the site.<sup>58</sup> It had been flattened; ELWA only resumed operations, limited to English language-only programming, between August 1993 and May 1996, when it went off the air again due to intense fighting in Monrovia.<sup>59</sup>

Although the Doe regime retained some broadcasting capability, was just as familiar as Taylor with foreign media, and even targeted the rebels in a short-lived campaign of propaganda and disinformation, the government's Radio ELBC was effectively shut down by July 20, 1990.<sup>60</sup> ELWA was reduced to rubble less than a fortnight later. For Taylor and the NPFL, this meant unparalleled control of the airwaves. For ECOMOG, the NPFL's media monopoly was a serious threat, especially given that Taylor's propaganda machinery was relentless in its targeting of the intervention force and nationals of some of its contributor-states residing in Liberia.<sup>61</sup> At the behest of ECOWAS, Nigeria deployed a mobile broadcasting unit from its Federal Radio Corporation to Monrovia on October 23. Its mission was to establish a new radio station, which began broadcasting on November 14 under the government of Liberia's former call sign, ELBC. Radio Nigeria reported that ECOMOG's field commander, Maj-Gen Joshua Dogonyaro, had initiated the project to "serve [Liberia's] internal administration". According to the Radio Nigeria correspondent, the move was a "significant step to counter the propaganda machinery of rebel leader Charles Taylor, who operates a mobile radio station."<sup>62</sup> Despite Taylor's attempts to have the station destroyed in November, the "Monrovia Press" was restored under ECOMOG protection.

The NPFL's radio facility in Garnga operated intermittently until 1994. Radio ELBC, Voice of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, continued broadcasting until December 1993, when it was last heard.<sup>63</sup> On February 27, 1994, an English-language station, identifying itself as both "Radio Liberia, the Voice of Liberia" and "Radio ELRL, the radio service of the Liberia Communication Network" was heard by BBC Worldwide Monitoring on the same frequency previously used by Radio ELBC, Voice of the NPFL. It broadcast a test message at 1053 GMT on March 2:

Good morning Liberia. You are in tune to Radio ELRL, the radio service of the Liberia Communications Network with studios in Gbarnga, Liberia, West Africa. Radio ELRL broadcasts on the frequency 6.090 MHz, in the 49-metre band shortwave. This is the test transmission of Radio Liberia. Radio ELRL is owned and operated by International Promoters and Associates, and licensed under the NPRA government. I am your Wednesday morning announcer, Joseph Ato, welcoming you on behalf of the management of Radio Liberia to [several] hours of broadcast for today, Wednesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1994. I will be in your company until two o'clock this afternoon, at which time I will leave you in the hands of Patrick Okai, who will be with

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<sup>58</sup> Ardill, *Where Elephants Fight*, 229-230.

<sup>59</sup> "Liberia," *SWB*, AL/2252/AS1 (March 16, 1995) ; "Clandestine and Other Selected Broadcasts," *SWB*, WBI/0032/WB (August 8, 1997).

<sup>60</sup> "Clandestine, Unofficial, and Satellite Broadcasts," *SWB*, ME/1748/E1 (July 23, 1993).

<sup>61</sup> For example, see "Another Bend in the Road," *Africa Confidential* 33, no. 11 (5 June 1992), 4-6.

<sup>62</sup> "NPFL Agrees Cease-Fire; ECOWAS Summit Plan; Nigerian Radio For Monrovia," *SWB*, ME/0904/ii (October 23, 1990); "New Radio Station Commissioned," *SWB*, ME/0924/ii (November 17, 1990); "Liberia," *SWB*, ME/0940/E1/1 (December 6, 1990).

<sup>63</sup> "Liberia," *SWB*, AL/2252/AS1 (March 16, 1995).

you until six o'clock this evening. For the very best your radio can give you in entertainment, education, and information, stay tuned to Radio Liberia.<sup>64</sup>

At 1500 GMT the following day, the station announced "We now go over to our FM service of the Liberia Communications Network for the news. We'll be right back after the news." The news bulletin was interrupted by another announcement: "This news broadcast comes to you over station ELFM, the FM service of the Liberia Communications Network with studios in central Liberia, broadcasting on 89.9 MHz."<sup>65</sup>

Why the NPFL broke from its original Radio ELBC "Voice of the NPFL" to the newer formats is difficult to determine. Radio ELFM and ELRL were still Taylor propaganda organs. Given the context in which he operated his broadcast resources, it is fair to assume that ELBC may have simply run out of the necessary fuel, replacement parts, or technical expertise to operate the Gbarnga facility. The NPFL had suffered serious military setbacks in late 1992 and 1993, losing key terrain such as the port of Buchanan, the Roberstfield airport, and the Harbel Firestone plantation. "Taylorland" was reduced to fifty percent of the country's territory and the NPFL leader's external commercial support had evaporated.<sup>66</sup> ELRL and ELFM were online within two months of ELBCs' last monitored broadcast, however, suggesting alternate possibilities. Throughout the conflict, gaps in Taylor's radio broadcasts and media appearances were nothing unusual, so the gap may be insignificant. Or the NPFL may have been able to seize the necessary equipment from a rival faction.<sup>67</sup> The consolidation of Taylor's resources under a more ambitious-sounding "Liberian Communications Network", the title of the Monrovia government's former bureau of communications, certainly points to a possible shift in broadcast policy. In any event, the new call-signs did not last long. In 1994 the NPFL was riven with internal dissent and under siege from a coalition of forces formed and led by the NPFL-CRC. Thus weakened and vulnerable to attack, Taylor lost his Gbarnga headquarters in September, and with it his core broadcast capability. According to the reports of a Liberian print journalist, the fight for Gbarnga had turned it into a ghost town, its streets littered with corpses, buildings reduced to rubble, stores looted, and the inhabitants evacuated. The radio transmitter, of course, remained standing.<sup>68</sup>

## Broadcasting Victory: Towards the 1997 Election

The NPFL retook Gbarnga by the early months of 1995, but it was militarily weakened, its territorial base had shrunk considerably, and Taylor was facing a panoply of armed opponents. All parties to the conflict were becoming visibly exhausted and peace talks beckoned. Bargaining from a position of weakness, Taylor changed tactics. With remarkable alacrity, he allied with ECOMOG and Nigeria, apologized for past misunderstandings, and transformed himself into a consummate politician. There was a corresponding shift in allegiances among the remaining factions. A power sharing

<sup>64</sup> "Note on Liberian Radio," *SWB*, AL/1942/A (March 10, 1994)

<sup>65</sup> "Note on Liberian Radio," *SWB*, AL/1942/A (March 10, 1994)

<sup>66</sup> "The Battle for Gbarnga," *Africa Confidential*, 34, no. 11 (28 May 1993), 1-2.

<sup>67</sup> The LPC's George Boley, for example, was known to operate his own station "Radio Liberty". See "Clandestine and Other Selected Broadcasts," *SWB*, WBI/0032/WB (August 8, 1997).

<sup>68</sup> "Gbarnga Destroyed," *West Africa* 4022 (31 October – 6 November 1994), 1877.

agreement was finally signed at Abuja in 1995, bringing Taylor, Boley, Kromah, and Johnson into the LNTG Council of State. Tensions remained high as disputes arose over the distribution of government posts, disarmament, and control of natural resources. In late 1995 and early 1996 violent clashes erupted in Monrovia between the realigned factions.

One of the remarkable features of Liberian civil society during the civil war was that any existed amid the chaos and destruction. Liberia had traditionally enjoyed a vibrant independent press that had challenged the autocratic tendencies of previous regimes.<sup>69</sup> A restrictive Media Law enacted under Doe “remained in force and provided the Ministry of Information with wide discretion in regulating journalists,” but an independent press persisted, at least within the confines of Monrovia.<sup>70</sup> With the warlords’ newfound access to the capital, however, it was living on borrowed time. According to a 1996 U.S. State department human rights report,

The independent press was among the first targets when fighting broke out in Monrovia. Only 1 of 13 independent newspapers escaped destruction, as it had changed its offices 2 weeks prior to the outbreak of fighting, but had not moved its trade sign. The independent press lost almost all of its equipment and supplies as did the two printing houses in Monrovia. No newspapers were printed for almost 4 months. Although by December six independent newspapers were publishing sporadically in Monrovia, they were financially weak. The other independent newspapers were still trying to reopen, but one, the Daily Observer, discouraged by the destruction and intimidation, remained closed until January 1997.<sup>71</sup>

Broadcast facilities in the capital suffered the same fate:

Although there once were three regional television stations in addition to one in Monrovia, television broadcasts ceased when the war started and have not resumed. Prior to the April and May destruction in Monrovia, there were six radio stations. With the exception of the NPFL-owned station, the others were looted or destroyed. In December only the government radio station, ELBC, the NPFL station, KISS-FM, and the independent Radio Monrovia were broadcasting regularly.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Carl Patrick Burrowes, *Modernization and the Decline of Press Freedom: Liberia, 1847 to 1970*, Journalism and Mass Communications Monographs No. 160 (Columbia, SC : Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, 1996); Momo K. Rogers, "The Liberian Press: An Analysis," *Journalism Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (1986), 275-81, and Rogers, "The Liberian Press Under Military Rule," *Liberian Studies Journal* 21, No. 1 (1996), 7-32.

<sup>70</sup> U.S. Department of State, *1997 Report on Liberia*.

<sup>71</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Liberia Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997* (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 1998). Hereafter *1996 Report on Liberia*. [http://www.state.gov/www/global/human\\_rights/1996\\_hrp\\_report/liberia.html](http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1996_hrp_report/liberia.html), last accessed February 9, 2003.

<sup>72</sup> U.S. Dept.of State, *1996 Report on Liberia*.

Media facilities were not circumstantial victims of the fighting, but rather they were deliberately targeted. One of the reasons for the fighting in Monrovia had been Taylor's publicly stated goal of arresting and prosecuting Roosevelt Johnson for war crimes. Johnson had been in hiding at the Barclay Training Centre, while the violence aimed at media facilities took part in another section of the city altogether.<sup>73</sup> NPFL troops were responsible and Taylor, not surprisingly, was the main beneficiary: his propaganda organs, which included a newspaper, *The Patriot*, as well as the radio outlets, were well guarded and survived the destruction.<sup>74</sup>

The NPFL had destroyed the site of Radio ELCM, a Catholic station, and seized the transmitter of another independent radio broadcaster, DC101 FM. The NPFL was thus undoubtedly flush with radio equipment, but as long as Taylor's media was restricted to the Monrovia area, he was vulnerable to the same sort of denial-of-resource tactics that his own forces had employed. In early July, shortwave listeners in Europe picked up test transmissions on 5000kHz in the 60-metre band, and between July 4-9, BBC Worldwide Monitoring reported hearing the service identify itself as the Liberian Communications Network.<sup>75</sup> On July 24 at 2003 GMT, it reported monitoring the following English language test broadcast of "Radio Liberia, the shortwave service of the Liberian Communications Network, coming to you from central Liberia, West Africa. We transmit on 6.100 MHz in the 49-metre band from 5 a.m. to 6 p.m. and on 5.100 MHz in the 60-metre band from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m."<sup>76</sup> The rural service was based in Totota, Bong County.<sup>77</sup> The BBC was unable to determine its political affiliation, but on August 26 Isaac Musa, one of Taylor's closest aides, commended the NPFL leader publicly for setting up a multimillion-dollar shortwave station in the country, a service that would, according to Musa, contribute greatly to the peace process.<sup>78</sup> The following day, James Kassoyen, deputy manager of Radio Liberia International, told Liberian media that the service would begin full programming aimed at "the promotion of the peace initiative in Liberia."<sup>79</sup>

An election date had been set for July 19, 1997. Among the thirteen parties and their candidates running for the presidency, Taylor and the National Patriotic Party (NPP) were widely recognized as the incumbents.<sup>80</sup> The former warlord was able to transform his faction into an effective political machine, mobilizing the necessary material resources and personal networks in a focused bid for the presidency. Taylor's threats of a return to war if the elections were delayed most certainly gave election organizers incentive to carry the process forward and ordinary Liberians pause in their choice of candidate. Taylor's media blitz was an important feature as well: according to Lyons, "Nearly every town in Liberia and every constituency in Monrovia had an NPP office,

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<sup>73</sup> "Out of Control," *Africa Confidential* 37, no. 10 (10 May 1996), 1-2.

<sup>74</sup> "Out of Control," *Africa Confidential* 37, no. 10 (10 May 1996), 1-2.

<sup>75</sup> "New Shortwave Radio Testing," *SWB*, EE/0028/WB (July 12, 1996).

<sup>76</sup> "Test Transmissions of New Shortwave Radio Monitored in July," *SWB*, AL/D2698/A (August 23, 1996).

<sup>77</sup> "Clandestine and Other Selected Broadcasts," *SWB*, WBI/0032/WB (August 8, 1997).

<sup>78</sup> "Taylor Commended For Setting Up SW Radio Station," *SWB*, WBI/0035/WB (August 30, 1996).

<sup>79</sup> "Radio Liberia Plans to Begin 'Full Programming,'" *SWB*, WBI/0035/WB (August 30, 1996).

<sup>80</sup> For useful and brief overview of the election participants, see David Harris, "From 'Warlord' to 'Democratic' President: How Charles Taylor Won the 1997 Liberian Elections," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 37, no. 3 (1999), 431-455.

and the country was covered in Taylor signs, bumper stickers, and t-shirts.”<sup>81</sup> Taylor’s KISS-FM and Radio Liberia International provided unparalleled exposure, raising awareness among Liberians through late night broadcasts that reached far beyond Monrovia.<sup>82</sup> Taylor’s competitors complained about the the radio campaign. The LPC’s George Boley had called for its closure, suggesting, probably not unfairly, that it was a disruptive propaganda tool.<sup>83</sup> Roosevelt Johnson, essentially run out of the country by Taylor and Kromah in 1996, commented on the subject in an interview with the weekly news magazine *West Africa* in May 1997: “How do I run my campaign? How can I canvass in Gbarnga and beyond, running my campaign and educating the people? Even the radio station we have cannot reach anywhere... The people must be educated. The people have only this information about the NPFL and her radio station(s), what Taylor tells the people.”<sup>84</sup> The week of the election, *West Africa* carried a panel of interviews with the candidates. Taylor, according to the magazine, declined to participate because he “did not want to conduct his campaign in the international media”!<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Taylor’s competitors proved incapable of mobilizing, at least where and when it counted, to the same degree, and he won the election with seventy-five percent of the vote.

According to international election monitors fielded by UNOMIL, the Organization of African Unity, the European Union, the Carter Center, Friends of Liberia (FOL), and other groups, the elections were generally free and fair.<sup>86</sup> Some imbalances were noted, however, among them unequal access to media outlets. Efforts to equalize the resources of the candidates were ineffectual, and other radio stations, such as Star Radio, established by the Swiss NGO Fondation Hirondelle, only came online two days prior to the election. FOL, the Carter Center, and UNOMIL all noted imbalance in campaign resources. Weeks before the election, Former President Jimmy Carter noted:

There are a number of newspapers published and FM radio stations broadcasting, representing the views and interests of a range of candidates. However, Charles Taylor controls the only operating low frequency station, giving him almost exclusive coverage of more remote areas of the country. We helped to make arrangements for the expedited delivery of another low frequency transmitter from Italy, and expect a total of three to be operating by July 10.<sup>87</sup>

Either the transmitters arrived too late, not at all, or simply did not function, as Taylor’s FM shortwave service was the only one to reach hinterland audiences prior to the election. UNOMIL, likewise, acknowledged that equal access to air time was a key

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<sup>81</sup> Lyons, *Voting For Peace*, 58.

<sup>82</sup> Harris, "From 'Warlord' to 'Democratic' Presiden," 438.

<sup>83</sup> "LPC Leader Calls Kiss-FM Radio 'Disruptive'," *SWB*, WBI/0045/WB (November 8, 1996).

<sup>84</sup> Ben Asante, "The 'Most Wanted Man' (II)," *West Africa* 4148 (5-11 May 1997), 715-717.

<sup>85</sup> *West Africa* (14-20 July 1997). Need Full Citation

<sup>86</sup> Lyons, *Voting For Peace*, 56.

<sup>87</sup> Jimmy Carter, "Visit to Liberia and Nigeria," The Carter Center (25 June 1997).

<http://www.cartercenter.org/viewdoc.asp?docID=21&submenu=news>, Accessed February 9, 2003.

element in establishing the fairness of the elections.<sup>88</sup> UNOMIL's efforts at regulating the situation were commendable – it had embarked on a campaign of information operations to enhance the peace process, including a radio show using air time borrowed from local stations in Monrovia<sup>89</sup> – but it was in no position to manage broadcast resources. According to Col. Carlos Frachelle, a Uruguayan army officer who served with UNOMIL, the mission's lateral communications system “consisted of radio channels for UNOMIL, radio channels for UN agencies, radio channels for NGOs, and radio channels for ECOWAS” – all operating without the benefit of a secure frequency, and complicated by difficult terrain and weather, a hostile political climate, and a complex network of users.<sup>90</sup> UNOMIL, the United Nations Development Program, and Search for Common Ground, a U.S. based NGO specializing in conflict management, requisitioned and distributed 5,500 wind-up shortwave receivers around the country to ensure broader access to its radio shows.<sup>91</sup> According to the UN Secretary-General's Final Report on the mission, “UNOMIL's countrywide public information campaign, conducted through radio and the print media, did much to assist voter education.”<sup>92</sup> Without more broadcasters, however, it is difficult to see how this last initiative accomplished anything but provide Taylor with more potential listeners.

## CONCLUSION

The NPFL's long-term scorched earth and denial-of-resource tactics thus made it possible for Charles Taylor to build, maintain, and ultimately profit from an unparalleled wealth of broadcast media facilities and equipment. In the initial phases of the fighting in 1990, the speed of the NPFL advance maximized its territorial gains, and by extension its access to a network of rural radio stations installed under the Doe regime. At the same time, lacking any proprietary broadcast capability, its chief spokespeople aggressively pressed their cases in the BBC and other foreign media, a ploy that raised their international profiles and resulted in internal consequences for the rebel group. The general brutality of the civil war and the violence of rebel attacks facilitated a scorched earth campaign, minimizing the potential for the NPFL's enemies to acquire similar media assets. As the war progressed and the NPFL consolidated its media resources at its Gbarnga headquarters, it embarked on a concerted propaganda campaign against

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<sup>88</sup> United Nations Electoral Assistance Division, "Elections in Liberia : Role of UNOMIL in Supporting the Electoral Process," Background on the Elections in Liberia (New York : United Nations Department of Public Information, 17 July 1997).

[http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/co\\_mission/unomilBOE.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/co_mission/unomilBOE.htm), Accessed February 9, 2003.

<sup>89</sup> "Field Mission Makes Waves," *United Nations Peace Missions: 1997 Year in Review* (New York : United Nations Office of Communications and Public Information, 1998).

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/yir97>, Accessed February 9, 2003.

<sup>90</sup> United States Institute for Peace, Conference on "Managing Communications: Lessons From Intervention in Africa", National Defence University, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., June 20, 1996.

<http://www.usip.org/oc/sr/managingcomm.html>, Accessed February 9, 2003.

<sup>91</sup> "Field Mission Makes Waves."

<sup>92</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Final Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia*, UNDOC S/1997/712 (12 September 1997).

<http://ods-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N97/234/17/IMG/N9723417.pdf?OpenElement>, Accessed February 9, 2003.



ECOMOG and ECOMOG nationals. Later, working from a position of weakness and with unprecedented access to the capital, Taylor took the opportunity to destroy competing media outlets, pillage their equipment, and reestablish his own propaganda machinery, part of it from the relative safety of his rural headquarters. By the time of the 1997 elections, Taylor's enemies were unable to mobilize political constituencies or project themselves in anything resembling the manner in which Taylor had done. They were thus in no position to compete, and external attempts at equalizing uneven access to campaign resources failed to adequately address the situation.