



INSS ROUNDTABLE SERIES ON
POST-CONFLICT STABILIZATION AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT
"Liberia - from Intervention to Stabilization"

5 MARCH, 2004

Featured Guest: Ambassador Terry McNamara, Political Advisor for JTF - Liberia

Introduction

Ambassador Terry McNamara gave a personal retrospective of his time spent in Liberia during the recent U.S. intervention in July 2003. His account included a brief history of the region and his own personal experiences and evaluation of the effectiveness of the U.S. intervention. His observations were followed by a discussion on the effectiveness of specific U.S.-led military training programs. Participants at the roundtable were drawn from the U.S. interagency and Washington think-tank community.

Historical Background

Liberia gained its independence in 1847. Even so, relations between the native Africans and the returned former slaves were always tense and remained so even after independence. By 1926, when the Firestone rubber plantation was opened, the Liberian economy had begun to grow, and by WWII the economy had fully emerged because of Liberia's extensive iron reserves. In 1944, before the end of the war, William V.S. Tubman, a progressive, was elected President, and served until his untimely death in 1971. His successor, William Tolbert, was less nimble and unable to maintain political stability, finally culminating in a bloody military coup led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe. The new military leaders declared a populist agenda, but they were unable to keep their promises, leading to the rise of Charles Taylor's opposition group in 1989. Less than a decade later, Taylor signed a ceasefire with other Liberian factions and was subsequently elected president of Liberia. However, Taylor's human rights record and tendency to meddle in his neighbors affairs continued to have a destabilizing effect on the region, resulting in a growing opposition by various rebel groups and prompting the UN to impose sanctions. The steady eroding of Liberian civil society created a tremendous hardship on the civilians, further destabilizing both the country and its neighbors. This regional threat demanded action by the UN, the wider international community and regional actors.

US intervention in July 2003

The UN response to the growing crisis was to urge the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) to create the ECOWAS Monitoring group in Liberia (ECOMIL), which was comprised of eight countries and pan-African battalions under Nigerian leadership. The U.S. declared its willingness to support the African forces by providing logistical assistance (primarily through State Department programs) and a few ground troops, but only on the condition that Taylor would leave Liberia before U.S. troops arrived. The U.S. Army's Southern European Task Force (SETAF) in Vicenza, Italy was ordered to form Joint Task Force (JTF)- Liberia with half staying in Vicenza to provide logistical & reachback support and the other half deploying to Liberia. Operating from the USS Iwo Jima, the JTF found significant challenges in dealing with both African commanders and the limited communications.

During this intervention, the international press criticized the U.S. for not allowing humanitarian aid to enter Liberia at a faster rate. Addressing these concerns, Ambassador McNamara pointed out two key obstacles that impeded humanitarian relief in the operation's initial phases.

- *First*, it would have been difficult and dangerous for relief workers to bring supplies into Monrovia before the port was secured. In order to secure the port, the U.S. first had to take control of Bushrod Island, a key strategic location located in the harbor of Monrovia that interposed the U.S. force between the two warring factions. In order to secure the port and open it for operation, the U.S. worked closely with NGOs and IOs.
- *Second*, the U.S. also sought to secure the airport, where a large munitions shipment had been waiting for final delivery to one of the belligerent factions. Once these two tasks were accomplished, stabilizing the capital became much easier because of the demonstrated control by the JTF over two very visible and important sites.

Ambassador McNamara emphasized that it was necessary to stabilize the capital before humanitarian assistance could really become effective. Additionally, the U.S. military was the only available organization with the necessary equipment (i.e., helicopters) to properly survey the land and assess the extent of the humanitarian disaster. Subsequent survey missions suggested that the international press might have overstated the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis.

Ambassador McNamara also noted that the international media might have been concerned that unless the international community took note of the crisis the Nigerians would remain in charge and repeat their earlier mistakes from Sierra Leone. The Nigerians did not have a consistently good reputation in peacekeeping situations.

In terms of the U.S. response, Ambassador McNamara was pleased with the overall effectiveness of U.S. action and specifically with the success of the task force. A U.S. military officer, also present in Liberia with Ambassador McNamara, offered the view that Liberians for the most part welcomed the American presence and that the U.S. soldiers were, in turn, respectful and professional when dealing with their African counterparts or superiors from the various ECOMIL battalions.

Training and Performance of African Forces in Liberian Peace Support

By the mid-1990s, the United States recognized the need to train African forces for future peacekeeping or stabilization missions on the African continent. The African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) focused on providing training and non-lethal equipment to the militaries of several select African countries. In addition to this program, the government also trained African soldiers and officers through the International Military Education Training (IMET) program as well as during combined exercises with U.S. forces. (In spite of these efforts, the CSIS study, "Resolving Africa's Crises: U.S. Diplomacy and Support to Peace Operations", {March 2001} suggested that the combination of various government programs has done little to contribute "noticeable change in any of Africa's wars.")

However, in Liberia during July 2003, this basic concept of training and providing some equipment to African forces to enhance their performance in peace operations showed its value, exemplified by ECOMIL's performance in Liberia. Of the participating battalions, many had been trained under ACRI and one had been trained under Operation Focus Relief (OFR). Operation Focus Relief was initially set up to train seven West African light infantry battalions for peace enforcement operations in Sierra Leone following the partial collapse of that country's peace settlement in early 2000. In addition to training, the battalions also received some equipment, improving their military capabilities. Of these programs, OFR was much more effective for the five Nigerian, one Ghanaian and one Senegalese composite battalion that were prepared for combat in Sierra Leone. OFR was an \$80 million program over 5 months (ACRI, by contrast, was \$20 million over 5 years for many more "battalions"). The Nigerian battalion trained under the efforts of OFR and deployed to Liberia performed superbly.

ECOMIL showed that the initial "light," non-combat training was not as effective as the more intensive OFR-style

training (and equipping) but had nevertheless become of great value. ACRI battalions were trained only for peacekeeping and combat, obtained limited equipment and did not always remain intact after training, but the training was seen to have its payoff in ECOMIL (even the acceptable performance of Benin and Mali elements are attributed to the ACRI program). In addition, the performance of individual African officers who had received ACRI or OFR training was outstanding, and the IMET training of individual officers, particularly at U.S. military schools, left a lasting, very favorable impact. Training received from the British, French and others was also valuable. Taking account of the OFR and related experiences, ACRI recently has been redesigned as is now called the African Contingency Operations Training Assistance (ACOTA) program.

Impact of U.S. Forces

During the discussion, several additional points emerged. According to some participants, the U.S.'s most critical contributions to the early phases of the Liberia operation were largely psychological (e.g., intimidating Liberian factions, emboldening ECOMIL forces). By and large, the Liberians welcomed U.S. intervention and the mere presence of U.S. forces provided a psychological boost that enhanced the performance of African forces. The substantial effective liaison and personal diplomacy work of the U.S. Joint Task Force commander and his staff also further enhanced the Africans' performance. African training was limited to only battalion level training so they had little capability or experience in operating as a larger force. The informal assistance provided by JTF personnel enabled them to close the gap in capabilities. The work of U.S. civilians in establishing a workable tactical operations center (TOC) was an outstanding example of tactful, culturally sensitive assistance for African field-grade officers.

To be sure, U.S. firepower and military reconnaissance, particularly helicopters, was a vital part of overall success of ECOMIL. In fact, ECOMIL would have welcomed more extensive U.S. operations, but was pleased with the assistance it received. Shared responsibilities by U.S. and ECOMIL for security operations worked well with the U.S. taking over airport security, thereby encouraging the Nigerians to occupy Bushrod Island (the prior securing of the island by U.S. forces made the Nigerian task easier).

Because of the improved professionalism and competence of ECOMIL's forces, the U.S. task was easier to accomplish. The African commanders of ECOMIL did their job well, maintaining cohesion and discipline, despite the diversity of forces and lack of prior joint training. Personalities also appeared to make a big difference. For example, the Nigerian Force Commander had a strong command presence as well as previous experience in Liberia so he knew the potential problems and how to avoid them. Moreover, the arrival of Nigerian armored personnel carriers in the city of Monrovia made a very favorable impression - as did the arrival of forces at the airport.

Final Observations

- Coalition partners will tend to take their cues from the U.S., both at the strategic and tactical levels. With good communication, and expectations based on an accurate assessment of the situation on the ground, these cues will result in creating more robust intervention forces and in stiffening the resolve of coalition members to do their part.
- Information is a crucial enabler for the intervention force. Regions in crisis are ripe for false information and conspiracy theories; effective information campaigns will defeat the false reporting.
- Cultural awareness is of paramount importance for the intervention force. So are effective language skills.

Prepared by: Ms. Bindi Patel, Amb. Robert Oakley, COL Paul Hughes, INSS

The INSS Roundtable Series on Post-Conflict Stabilization and Crisis Management (PCS/CM) explores challenges to the effective utilization of U.S. diplomacy, security assistance and military power, often in concert with allies and partners, for the purposes suppressing or mitigating conflicts and achieving post-conflict stabilization and associated humanitarian objectives in war-torn countries.

Previous PCS/CM Roundtables:

"Bringing Congo Back from the Brink: A Report from the Field", October 24, 2003.

Speakers: Dr. William Durch, Senior Fellow, Henry L. Stimson Center and Mr. Paul Simo, Director for Africa at the International Human Rights Law Group.

Dr. William J. Durch of the Stimson Center, together with colleague Paul Simo of the International Human Rights Law Group, discussed their recent trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DROC), where they observed on-going stabilization operations being conducted by the United Nations and the European Union. In particular, the EU's effort, *Operation Artemis*, has focused on security stabilization with the goal of handing the operation over to an expanded UN mission in the near future. For more information, please visit http://www.hrlawgroup.org/country_programs/drc/default.asp.

"Meeting Iraq's Security Requirements: Where do we go from here?", December 15, 2003.

Speaker: Mr. Walter Slocombe, Former Senior Advisor for National Security & Defense, Coalition Provisional Authority.

Mr. Walter Slocombe, formerly Under Secretary of Defense for Policy from 1994-2001, served as the Coalition Provisional Authority's Senior Advisor for National Security and Defense from May to November, 2003. In this capacity, he was CPA's senior official responsible for assessing Iraq's future defense needs and directing the process of creating the New Iraq Army. He also was closely involved in synchronizing these efforts with on-going U.S.-led operations aimed at stabilizing the country and defeating threats to Iraq's post-Saddam recovery. For more information, please visit http://www.csis.org/features/040209_slocombe.pdf.

"Afghanistan: An Assessment of Current Challenges", February 6, 2004.

Speaker: Mr. Ali Jalali, Minister of the Interior, Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan.

Mr. Jalali, a former Afghan Army officer, Mujaheddin leader, security expert, radio personality and author, was made the Interior Minister of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan in 2002. He addressed Afghanistan's general security situation, the ongoing development of its national police, security challenges for elections and Afghanistan's war on drugs. For more information, please see the online INSS report "[Afghanistan: Current and Future Challenges](#)".

For more information on the Post-Conflict Stabilization and Crisis Management series, please contact COL Paul Hughes, NDU-INSS, (202) 685-2371, email: hughesp@ndu.edu.

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