

**SIERRA LEONE**  
**TIME FOR A NEW MILITARY**  
**AND POLITICAL STRATEGY**

11 April 2001

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# SIERRA LEONE



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## SIERRA LEONE

### TIME FOR A NEW MILITARY AND POLITICAL STRATEGY

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sierra Leone is a human tragedy of massive proportions that is rapidly becoming a security nightmare for all West Africa. Two-thirds of Sierra Leone's population are thought to have been displaced during the ten-year civil war. Another 600,000 have become refugees in neighbouring countries. The war is spilling over into Guinea, where heavy fighting since September 2000 threatens the collapse of the government and has already produced a massive, new refugee problem. In effect, Sierra Leone is now at the heart of a series of conflicts that risk forming an arc of violence from southern Senegal to the Ivory Coast.

ICG believes the international community needs to take a radically different approach to that in which it has engaged so far. There should be no further negotiations with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) other than for its complete disarmament and demobilisation. The RUF has blatantly used negotiations for the purpose of rearming. It has consistently shown bad faith in the string of agreements it has signed in Abidjan, Conakry, Lomé and Abuja. The RUF has no meaningful political constituency. Its main backer is Charles Taylor, the president of Liberia, who uses it as a proxy army to pursue his drive for regional hegemony: not for nothing is Taylor known widely as the Milosevic of West Africa. And, of course, the RUF has committed heinous atrocities qualifying as war crimes.

This report reaches the conclusion, stark, but we believe unavoidable -- that the international community must help Sierra Leone take decisive military action against the RUF. There are two vital conditions.

First, it is urgent to harmonise the divergent approaches of the UK government, which is arming, retraining and re-equipping the Sierra Leone army (SLA) for a serious campaign, and the UN military mission (UNAMSIL), which is still trying to implement the compromise provisions of the Lomé agreement. The international community cannot run two or more strategies in Sierra Leone simultaneously. Working against each other with conflicting mandates will only fuel the conflict and invite warring factions to exploit differences. Achieving a common approach will require much diplomacy, especially with West African nations that are hesitant about a muscular policy in which a former colonial power takes a prominent role.

Those in the RUF who refuse to demobilise should be defeated militarily. The military option could be spearheaded by UK trained and led Sierra Leone armed forces, with UNAMSIL securing the areas regained. The UK should provide military and intelligence backup to guarantee the safety of UN forces. The Civil Defence Force (CDF) could provide additional security for local villages and settlements.

Secondly, military action must be co-ordinated with a coherent political strategy accepted by all the key international actors and the Sierra Leone government. This will involve some form of UN-endorsed commitment to an international effort that may need to last five years or more, in order to help Sierra Leone re-establish good governance and reconstruct its shattered society. Without such a political effort, even military victory over the RUF would be pointless since the resulting power-vacuum would soon be filled by more violence from government and pro-government forces, new rebels and predatory neighbours.

The specific recommendations that follow will be difficult to implement. If the international community does not make a substantial commitment to help Sierra Leone resolve both its military and political problems now, however, it is all too easy to foresee the contagion of violence spreading out of control in West Africa much as has happened in Central Africa.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***To the UN Security Council***

1. Abandon the Lomé Agreement and make no further deals with the RUF.
2. Call for immediate surrender of the RUF and, against those who refuse, support the threat and eventual use of military force by the Sierra Leone army, supported by the UK.
3. Give UNAMSIL a tougher mandate to occupy and protect areas liberated by the SLA and harmonise its objectives with the UK and with West African heads of state.
4. Impose targeted sanctions on Charles Taylor's regime in Liberia -- involving visa restrictions, freezing of bank accounts and the like -- in order to persuade it to end its support for the RUF.
5. Provide adequate financing so that the Special Court established under UN Security Council Resolution 1315 of August 2000 can begin to investigate and prosecute those responsible for war crimes and a Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission can start operations.
6. Support Demobilisation and Reintegration Programs for RUF and government militia (CDF) combatants.
7. Commit to a continuing international role in Sierra Leone, which may need to last five or more years, to assist the Sierra Leone government constitute a more reliable army, re-establish good governance, and restore its shattered society.

**Freetown/Brussels/London, 11 April 2001**



## SIERRA LEONE

### TIME FOR A NEW MILITARY AND POLITICAL STRATEGY

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Sierra Leone has become a tragedy of massive proportions. Moreover, the civil war in that country has now spilled into neighbouring Guinea, where heavy fighting since September 2000 threatens to produce the collapse of another West African government. In effect, Sierra Leone is at the heart of a series of conflicts that risk spreading an arc of conflict from southern Senegal to the Ivory Coast.

Radical action is urgently needed if the further spread of war is to be avoided. The experience since the first international intervention in neighbouring Liberia in 1990 has demonstrated that neither the United Nations nor regional groupings can achieve this unaided, not least because conflicts in this part of Africa make a unanimous approach by the local countries impossible. The presence of an 800-strong British military force in Sierra Leone is an important new factor. However, if lasting peace is to be established in Sierra Leone and destabilisation of the region halted, it is essential that the British role and other forms of international intervention be harmonised. The International Crisis Group believes that further efforts to achieve a workable negotiated agreement between the parties to the Sierra Leone war would be fruitless. Rather, what is needed is broad international consensus on the military measures required to save the country from further agony and prevent violence from extending further throughout the region, and support for a complementary political strategy to rebuild the devastated country's institutions.

The modern republic of Sierra Leone grew out of an eighteenth-century settlement on the West African coast for black people from Britain, some of them former slaves. Starting with the colony of Freetown, British rule eventually extended into the hinterland. The country remained under British rule until independence in 1961. From the beginning, Sierra Leone's political parties vied for dominance at any cost. In 1967, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), that had led the country since independence, was narrowly defeated by the All People's Congress (APC) led by former trade union leader Siaka Stevens. The latter was prevented from taking power immediately by a military coup, but in 1968 Stevens became head of state. His APC party quickly consolidated power, and in 1978 it formally established a one-party state. Its notoriously corrupt government made extensive use of patronage and eventually undermined all the principal institutions including parliament, police, and civil service, resulting in chaos.

The past twenty years have seen a succession of bad governments, both military and civilian, all in one way or other dependent upon or involved in the trade in diamonds, which are Sierra Leone's most valuable resource. In the last decade the diamond trade has helped destroy Sierra Leone. Financial, military and diplomatic crime have characterised the country, as Lebanese, Israeli, Russian and other traders have competed for gems, and various military forces have fought for control of the diamond fields.<sup>1</sup>

Diamonds have also fuelled the terrible civil war in which a nihilistic movement known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by a former corporal, Foday Sankoh, has battled against every government that seized or otherwise obtained power in Freetown since 1991. Sankoh, widely thought to be a psychopath, has repeatedly committed atrocities against civilians. He has been supported in his ambitions by the equally brutal and unscrupulous Charles Taylor, now president of Liberia. Taylor won power in Liberia through war and now seeks to dominate the Mano River basin, which includes Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea.

Throughout the 1990s, Sierra Leone has had only one period of relative peace, in 1995-1996. South African mercenaries from an organisation known as Executive Outcomes were hired by the NPRC in April 1995. With a force of less than 200, they drove the RUF away from Freetown, secured the diamond fields and many other areas, and enabled a peaceful democratic election to be held in 1996. This was won by Tejan Ahmed Kabbah, a former UN official. Unwisely, Kabbah thought that Foday Sankoh could be persuaded to reasonable compromise. In one of several peace agreements ultimately broken by the RUF, Kabbah agreed that Executive Outcomes should leave. As a result, he was overthrown by a military coup and exiled in May 1997.

Nigerian forces, deployed under the banner of the Economic Community of West African States Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), eventually restored Kabbah but they were unable to defeat the RUF, which invaded Freetown again in January 1999, killing, mutilating and abducting thousands of people. It was this awful event – coinciding with the Kosovo crisis – that finally compelled the broader international community to act. At that stage, the refugees in and from Sierra Leone were double those of Kosovo. Around 600,000 persons have fled the country - mainly to Guinea - and two-thirds of Sierra Leone's population of almost five million are thought to have been internally displaced.

The question was what to do. Nigeria, now under the democratic rule of Olusegun Obasanjo, wished to withdraw, and no other country wanted to take its place. Consequently, President Kabbah was pressured by the U.S., the UK and his neighbours to make another peace agreement with Sankoh, in Lomé in July 1999. Under this, Sankoh was, astonishingly, given the status of vice president and put in charge of the strategic minerals, including diamonds. The RUF were amnestied for their crimes. A UN mission (UNAMSIL) was dispatched to implement the accord.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1: Detailed Background to the Political Crisis.

The Lomé agreement collapsed in May 2000. The RUF was chiefly to blame, sabotaging the peace process by capturing 500 UN peacekeepers and their equipment. The peacekeepers were eventually released through the intervention of Liberia's Taylor, and Sankoh was arrested. He faces the prospect of trial by the special tribunal established under UN Security Council Resolution 1315 of August 2000 for war crimes committed after the signature of the Lomé agreement, if international funding for that tribunal and political will can be found. Nevertheless, the RUF still controls 50 per cent of the country, including the diamond areas. From those areas it continues to make incursions across the border into Guinea, which is growing ever more unstable.

The collapse of the peace process has left the United Nations and its member states floundering for a response. Neither the amnesty offered to all combatants by the Lomé accord nor the deployment of what is already the UN's largest current peacekeeping force has been sufficient to keep the peace process on track. A decade after the end of the Cold War, Sierra Leone provides a sobering reminder of how little progress has been made on forging appropriate international responses to conflict. A further international failure in Sierra Leone will have catastrophic consequences for West Africa and grave implications for future international peacekeeping.

Throughout the last decade, international initiatives in Sierra Leone have been marred by divergent and competing agendas. Too often, mediators have staked their credibility on negotiated settlements in which rival warring groups are treated as potential political players, even allies in a coalition government. The notion of bringing rebel groups into government, which has been successful in some countries and some situations, however, has proved utterly misguided in Sierra Leone. The Lomé accord, the most recent agreement to disintegrate, was a vain exercise motivated largely by international expediency. It attempted to elevate those responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians into statesmen even though they lacked a coherent political agenda and almost any political base.

The collapse of Lomé means that the international community and the Sierra Leone government must rethink their approaches. There are key questions that need to be resolved before it will be possible to embark on a new strategy based on more than short-term expediency: what issues underlie the war? who are the key players, including in the international community? what assumptions are behind the failed peace initiatives? what new approaches are viable? The situation is so desperate and so unusual that new approaches are certainly necessary.

The answers do not lie in futile pursuit of yet another negotiated settlement with forces that have shown no interest in adhering to accords. The RUF plays a long game and uses peace agreements as stepping stones towards its ultimate goal of power. Its strategy is at the expense of democracy and the country's citizens. For the commanders of the RUF and its chief puppeteer, President Taylor, peace offers little reward; war presents greater opportunities to extend their influence.

ICG believes that there is no other real option than to take military action against the RUF. We do so, however, with the vital proviso that this must be associated with a coherent political strategy agreed among the key international actors and with the Sierra Leone government. The type of political strategy sketched here is



an unusual one. It will require significant international commitment to Sierra Leone for five years or more. In the particular case of Sierra Leone, the decision already made to establish an international tribunal to try Foday Sankoh and others accused of war crimes is a significant marker of the willingness of national and international forces to work together.

The necessity for a coercive military response has been recognised by the UK, which has been supporting the Sierra Leone government's need to reform and strengthen its armed forces to defeat the RUF on the battlefield since last summer. The UK and the U.S. have also supported a complete embargo against diamonds from Liberia in order to cut the RUF's revenue. The prospect of such a military policy, which conflicts with the UN's propensity towards impartiality, being applied without broader international agreement causes deep consternation in West Africa for understandable reasons. It must acquire the commitment of key regional and other international players if it is to succeed. Most importantly, a military policy will not succeed in isolation but must be coupled with a political strategy that addresses the conflict's underlying causes and has broad support inside Sierra Leone and within the region. Without international consensus around these linked objectives, real peace is unlikely, and the people of Sierra Leone, who have been victims for so long, will continue to suffer.

In short, Sierra Leone needs radical solutions involving the serious use of force complemented by extended international political commitment. The use of military force should always be a last resort, but ICG believes the crisis is so grave that this option must now be seriously pursued.

## II. ROOT CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

Amidst the turbulence of Sierra Leone's conflict, the underlying causes are frequently overlooked. These include corrupt and unaccountable government, ethnicity that has been manipulated for political ends, and alienated youth. Peace cannot be sustained without addressing all these factors.

### A. Bad Government

Sierra Leone's problems are rooted in its history. Since independence in 1961, Sierra Leone has never experienced truly democratic, accountable government.<sup>2</sup> Independence was preceded by lengthy colonial rule which, although including a strain of authentic democratic tradition, was characterised by patronage and authoritarian government, especially in rural areas.

The habits of trust and accountability between people and rulers are often absent. There is little general awareness of the duties and responsibilities of government as these are accepted internationally. Politicians have for decades squandered the country's resources, which include good land and rich mineral deposits. Diamonds provide easily transportable and lucrative returns for people who enjoy good connections with or within the government. A medley of politicians, businessmen, soldiers and civil servants have formed networks of patronage or commerce,

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1: Detailed Background to the Political Crisis.

spread as far as the Middle East, the U.S. and Europe, that have undermined state institutions. Unsurprisingly, within a few years of the RUF's appearance, the rebel group's primary focus had become the occupation and control of diamond areas as a source of funds for weapons. The link between diamonds and corruption, conflict and weapons is a central feature of Sierra Leone's war.<sup>3</sup>

Sierra Leone desperately needs to establish a government that is both legitimate and accountable. The events of the last five years have shown that free elections alone are no guarantee. President Kabbah's SLPP government was democratically elected but is now widely regarded as corrupt. It is highly dependent on armed support from forces over which it has no control. President Kabbah has spent much of his life outside the country, is often perceived as detached from the population, and does not demonstrate the requisite level of influence over all members of his government. He has also shown poor judgement. Following his return to office in February 1998, for example, he unwisely oversaw a policy that led to the execution of people associated with the military junta and convicted of treason. This and other policies heightened animosity towards his administration and undoubtedly contributed to the intensity of the horrific revenge killings and abuses during the January 1999 RUF attack on Freetown.

Elections in 2001? There is widespread support among Sierra Leone citizens for new elections this year. Although they would be insufficient in themselves, they could be a vital element in creating a new legitimate government and underpinning reforms. New elections were due in March 2001 but were postponed by the government due to insecurity in parts of the country. They are unlikely to be held soon as around 50 per cent of Sierra Leone's territory is controlled by the RUF and two-thirds of its population is displaced.

The constitution provides conditions under which elections can be postponed: if Sierra Leone is fighting a war affecting the national territory; if the president concludes that under such circumstances it is not practicable to hold an election and proposes postponement to the parliament; and if the parliament so decides. If these conditions are met, the president's tenure may be extended for a maximum of six months at any one time. The number of extensions is unlimited.

There are other practical problems. The 1996 elections cost around U.S.\$10 million. Unless similar funding is forthcoming from donors, there is little possibility of organising new elections. Voter registers will need to be revised, constituency boundaries delineated, and hundreds of thousands of refugees repatriated. This will not be cheap.

## **B. Unaccountable Military**

President Kabbah's most immediate problem is control of the armed forces. Under President Siaka Stevens, the armed forces remained small, around 3,000, sufficient to quell minor uprisings but not to pose a threat to the government. President Stevens did, however, establish an Internal Security Unit, from which the Special

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<sup>3</sup> For a full account, see *Report Of The Panel Of Experts Appointed Pursuant To UN Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), Paragraph 19 in Relation To Sierra Leone* (December 2000).

Security Division (SSD) was created in 1972. This notorious, 500-strong unit was effectively a private army for his APC party.

In 1991-92, to counteract emergence of the RUF, the security forces were expanded to around 13,000. (The exact figure has never been determined because of the large number of 'ghost' soldiers, who drew salary and rations.) Recruitment attracted street boys and unemployed youth. Coupled with poor leadership, training and equipment, the rapid expansion led to disillusionment among front-line soldiers and the emergence of what became known in Sierra Leone as 'sobels' – 'soldiers by day, rebels by night'.<sup>4</sup> During 1994 and 1995, violence against civilians was often blamed on combatants believed to be part of the security forces. Difficulty in identifying the attackers fostered a belief that both sides – army and rebels - were equally to blame.

The 'sobel' phenomenon and collapse into gang-like tactics had several causes. Soldiers were unprepared to risk their lives to serve corrupt masters in Freetown, particularly as their salaries and rations were frequently missing. That led to collusion with the RUF to avoid battle. There was evidence of large-scale transfers of arms and ammunition from the army to the RUF. Also, soldiers discovered the lucrative returns that could be made by mining diamonds or simply looting civilian property.

Substantial commonality of interest gave the army and the RUF further incentive to cooperate. During 1995, terror tactics – which included amputation and carving messages into the chests and backs of victims – were often designed to deter the population from the democratisation process that was gathering momentum. Both the RUF and the armed forces recognised that elections were against their interests. The armed forces – which held power throughout the NPRC military administration headed by Valentine Strasser – stood to lose their ruling position. For the RUF, elections threatened further exclusion at home and internationally since a democratic government would gain international recognition and credibility. It has been alleged that the practice of cutting off the hands of civilians at random dates from this period and was originally an attempt to deter voting: the official election slogan was 'The future is in your hands'. Such terror tactics, however, failed to deter. The parliamentary and presidential elections held in February 1996 had widespread support. People saw the elections as a chance to express dissatisfaction with both the military government and the RUF and bring about permanent change.

While the initial success of the elections was astonishing, the Kabbah government failed to inspire extensive loyalty. It favoured a Mende militia in the form of the *Kamajors* (later the central element in the Civil Defence Force, CDF). Latent discontent within the army intensified, resulting in the coup of May 1997. The immediate spark was a government proposal to slash spending on the military and use the savings for the CDF, turning it into a private army for the ruling SLPP or factions within it. Johnny Paul Koroma, the head of the AFRC, justified his coup by noting that:

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<sup>4</sup> ICG Interviews with residents of Bo and Kenema, November 1995.

*'the SLPP tribal hunter militia, the Kamajors, received logistics and supplies far beyond their immediate needs. This was enough indication of the preference for the private army over our Armed Forces, foreshadowing the ultimate replacement of the Constitutional Defence Force by Mr Kabbah's hunters.'*<sup>5</sup>

The AFRC junta, which took power in May 1997, may have had some desire to end the war by inviting the RUF to join it in power, but it also sought to protect army privileges. At a more basic level, the administration reflected the battlefield collusion between the two sides. However, the army underestimated the strength of the RUF and quickly found itself a hostage of the rebel movement.

When a Nigerian military assault in February 1998 pushed AFRC and RUF forces out of Freetown, their common front ended. What was left of the alliance wreaked terror against civilians, particularly in the Northern Province.<sup>6</sup> Some former military filtered back into Freetown while others joined the RUF and yet others continued nominally as the AFRC or joined splinter groups such as the West Side Boys who set up base in the Okra Hills outside Freetown. In August 2000, this faction kidnapped eleven British soldiers, ultimately leading to its elimination during a rescue by British special forces.

With its entry into Freetown in February 1998, the Nigerian-dominated ECOMOG contingent effectively became Sierra Leone's military. President Kabbah was reinstated, and Nigerian Brigadier-General Maxwell Khobe, who had led the assault on Freetown, was seconded to be the country's defence chief. General Khobe was in theory answerable simultaneously to the Nigerian and Sierra Leone governments.

**The New Sierra Leone Army.** Sierra Leone has a long history of private armies formed by particular parties or factions, degenerating into banditry, and official security forces being abused for private interest. The British decision to revive the Sierra Leone army as the core of a new military thus carries significant risks.

In September 1999, the SLA consisted of around 6,300 troops of which 2,000 were new recruits, the others the rump of the AFRC with little loyalty to the elected government and with a lamentable human rights record.<sup>7</sup> The military is highly politicised. Maintaining an ethnic balance will be essential if it is to be impartial. The military is also riddled with corruption. Sierra Leone has a long history of coups, and for nearly a decade the army has taken power on a whim. Inculcating values of professionalism, discipline and service to the state and eliminating corruption will require long-term training.

Finally, the success of security sector reform requires not only the remodelling and retraining of soldiers into an accountable force, but also a guarantee that they will be adequately paid and equipped. Sierra Leone's resources are limited and the government has no revenue base adequate to finance an efficient army in the

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<sup>5</sup> In letter from Johnny Paul Koroma to ECOWAS, August 1997. Available at [www.sierra-leone.org/koroma0897.html](http://www.sierra-leone.org/koroma0897.html).

<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, *Sierra Leone: Childhood – a Casualty of Conflict* (Amnesty International, AFR 51/69/00, London, 31 August 2000), p.7.

<sup>7</sup> Comfort Ero, *Sierra Leone's Security Complex* (Centre for Defence Studies, King's College London, 2000), p.41.

short or medium term. Donors have traditionally been reticent to fund the security sector, although since last May the UK has increased bilateral defence assistance to Sierra Leone.

**The Civil Defence Force.** Apart from the considerable difficulty in organising the SLA into a responsible force, there remain other security forces of dubious nature within the government camp. Most notable is the Civil Defence Force. The CDF began as an initiative to protect civilians from the ravages of both RUF and SLA but its current strength and composition may exacerbate rather than improve the internal security situation.

Currently, the CDF consists of some six different groupings, representing the main ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. The most powerful, however, are the *Kamajors*. These were originally a guild of hunters among the Mende people in the southeast of the country. They defended their villages and hunted game with home made shotguns. As RUF and army looting intensified, traditional chiefs, many supporting the SLPP, which is regarded as a Mende-dominated party, recruited young men to be initiated into the *Kamajor* movement to defend their communities. The success of the *Kamajors*, supposedly equipped with extraordinary spiritual powers, stimulated similar defence forces, also purportedly traditional in nature, in other parts of Sierra Leone. These were loosely organised under the CDF umbrella.

On balance the CDF has been highly successful at protecting some communities, particularly when supported by good logistics and elite troops such as the South African military company Executive Outcomes. The CDF alone, however, is generally unable to resist a concerted RUF attack. Over time, the CDF has evolved into a force which itself contains the seed of destabilisation. The mistrust and hostility that has existed between CDF and army for six years has not evaporated with creation of the 'new' SLA. Towns like Lunsar have been lost to the RUF reportedly because of fighting between the coalition of forces that support the government. Some CDF commanders admit they now exist to guard against the SLA as much as against the RUF. CDF fighters are bitter that they receive fewer rations and weapons than the SLA. They argue the CDF stayed loyal to the democratic government and fought the RUF in the bush while the SLA colluded with the rebels. That loyalty, they argue, should be rewarded.

To a large degree, the CDF's future depends on the ambitions of Chief Hinga Norman, the Deputy Defence Minister, who is the nominal leader of all CDF and exercises real control over some *Kamajor* forces. Norman, formerly a professional army officer, was imprisoned in the late 1960s for planning a military coup on behalf of the SLPP, the party which is today in power. There is sometimes speculation that he may attempt a coup again, although this appears unlikely. However, Chief Norman may be a candidate in the next presidential election, in which case his influence among the CDF will be of real political value, especially if the CDF were to be seen as instrumental in the war against the RUF. There are also splits emerging in the CDF. Chief Norman is said to be losing control of the *Kamajors* in the regions of Kenema and Pujehun and Moyamba district to another leader, Eddie Massally.

There is a risk of wider ethnic instability if the SLPP, whose core support is among the Mende, were to lose forthcoming elections. The Mende component of the CDF – the *Kamajors* – are seen by many as guarantors of Mende power. Controlling the CDF – and giving it an effective role, such as local territorial force as is being mooted - is a major challenge facing the Sierra Leone government and its British military advisers.

### C. Ethnic Politics and Exclusion

Ethnic balance, most particularly in the reorganised armed forces, will play a large part in rekindling people's confidence in institutions of government. Ethnic relations have been a persistent undercurrent in Sierra Leone's modern history, although there is not a history of enmity comparable to that in the Balkans or Rwanda, nor has widespread violence been conducted on a plainly ethnic basis.

The first seven years of Sierra Leone's independence were dominated by the SLPP, which attracted support predominantly from the Mende people in the south. Under the All People's Congress (APC) led by Siaka Stevens, power shifted to northern groups, principally the Limba and Temne. Stevens' dictatorship ensured that this dominance, reinforced by ethnic favouritism in the security forces, continued until the transfer of power to Joseph Momoh in 1985.

When the SLPP in 1996 won office for the first time in nearly 30 years, it was widely perceived as the return to power of a Mende constituency. But Kabbah tried to heal ethnic divisions by bringing representatives of other parties into his government. The dominance of northerners in the army remained a legacy from Stevens' time. Hence, the military coup of May 1997 also reflected some shift in the ethnic complexion of power.

Yet ethnicity is not necessarily all-pervasive. Ethnic factors appear to have played little role in the formation of the RUF or in its later manoeuvres. RUF combatants come from all parts of the country, many of them recruited by force. In its first months, the RUF attempted to rally support not on grounds of ethnic favouritism but in protest against social and political exclusion, a result of corrupt central power of whatever form.

### D. Militarisation of Youth

'Central to an understanding of the war in Sierra Leone is the role of alienated youth ... for whom combat appears a viable survival alternative in a country with high levels of urban unemployment'.<sup>8</sup>

Sierra Leone's future will depend on ensuring that youth do not join military factions. That in turn largely depends on having an economy able to absorb an expanding young work force. This is a challenge that is not unique to Sierra Leone. Throughout Africa, poorly educated, unemployed youth are the excluded and disenfranchised outcasts created by corrupt governments. In Sierra Leone,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibrahim Abdullah and Patrick Muana, 'The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone', in Christopher Clapham (ed.), *African Guerrillas* (James Currey, Fountain Publishers and Indiana University Press, Oxford, Kampala & Bloomington, 1998), p.172.

frustrated urban and rural youth formed a veritable reserve army. The RUF's simplistic messages offered the possibility of reversing the social hierarchy through violence. Quick wealth was also an attractive incentive.

Although many joined the RUF for these reasons, young people with an identical profile in 1992 joined the army to fight the RUF. It is perhaps unsurprising that ill-equipped, poorly-trained, ill-paid army recruits colluded with the rebels. The more structured CDF, by contrast, recruited a greater concentration of rural youth through the patronage networks of chiefs. More recently, recruitment into the CDF has been less discriminate.

For the young, therefore, ethnic differences have been less important than finding a remedy to feelings of dispossession and alienation or, more positively, achieving a sense of purpose. Policies that do not address these fundamental issues are unlikely to provide long-term remedies for Sierra Leone's problems.

### III. THE FAILURE TO ACHIEVE PEACE

While the underlying causes of Sierra Leone's war can be traced to different roots, the resolution of the conflict has been hampered by a number of issues. First, the RUF has shown little sign of wanting peace. The international community has confused the signing of agreements with achieving peace. Lomé and earlier negotiations need to be understood as interludes within a wider strategy of war through which the RUF bought time to seize power. A new peace agreement that relies on the RUF being a cohesive force willing to adhere to a document is pointless. Finally, the response of the international community has been uncoordinated and has shown lack of resolve. Its competing interests have hampered the search for a consistent strategy.

#### A. The Futility of Negotiations and the Failed Peace Accords

Early Attempts at Negotiation (1992 -1996). Few chances for negotiation were taken during the early years of the war. When the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) military junta came to power in 1992, the RUF sought a negotiated settlement but the NPRC spurned the offer as it was confident of military victory. Its counteroffer to the RUF was tantamount to a demand for unconditional surrender and was rejected by Sankoh.<sup>9</sup> Instead, the RUF consolidated its weak position and realigned its rhetoric.<sup>10</sup> As the military situation began to turn during 1994 and early 1995, the RUF's desire to negotiate lessened further.

The NPRC and RUF re-established communication toward the end of 1995 when the NPRC offered a coalition government of 'national unity'. But Sankoh, still confident he could win militarily if foreign forces left (specifically the Executive Outcomes mercenaries), refused to compromise. According to senior diplomatic

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone* (James Currey and Heinemann, London and Portsmouth NH, 1996), pp.10-11.

<sup>10</sup> For further information on the NPRC, see appendix 1.

sources, he demanded the presidency, but the NPRC was willing to concede only the vice-presidency.<sup>11</sup>

Faced with Sankoh's unwillingness to compromise, the NPRC stepped up its military attacks through Executive Outcomes. EO deployed a helicopter gunship and tactics that included concentrated mortar fire and ground attacks by approximately 120 soldiers. It rolled the RUF back in a number of battles, taking the Kono diamond fields in late 1995 and enabling a number of diamond companies, including Branch Energy, a firm with close links to EO, to resume mining. During the later battles, it conducted combined operations with the *Kamajors* and occasionally with the Sierra Leone armed forces, though these were often hampered by intelligence leaks.

In January 1996, following a campaign that destroyed a key RUF base in the Kangari Hills, the RUF dropped its demands, agreed to a ceasefire, and began unconditional negotiations for the first time. It was this that created the period of relative stability that enabled the elections in February 1996 to proceed.

**The Abidjan Accord (1996).** The election of a civilian government undermined any legitimacy the RUF might have claimed and relegated it to an insurgent threat. But the army was also threatened by civilian government as it lost political and economic privileges. When Sankoh, after weeks of talks in the Ivory Coast, reneged on his promise to sign a peace accord, President Kabbah authorised EO and the *Kamajors*, supported by the SLA, to assault RUF positions. A few days after they destroyed the RUF headquarters southeast of Kenema in November 1996, Sankoh agreed to sign the Abidjan peace accord. A senior diplomat in Freetown noted that, 'always military pressure was needed to be put on before negotiations could succeed'<sup>12</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, Sankoh insisted that the Abidjan agreement include EO's departure. Unwisely, Kabbah agreed. In its place a UN peacekeeping force was to be established but never arrived. Donors were not willing to meet the U.S.\$ 47 million bill for 700 soldiers, and Sankoh continued to dispute the agreement, maintaining that the UN presence should be less than 100. Nevertheless, EO was finally asked to leave by President Kabbah, who believed the RUF was sincere about peace. Three months later, without any external force to defend his government, he was deposed in another military coup led by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC).

**The Conakry Accord (1997).** The AFRC was not recognised by any foreign government or by the Sierra Leone people. After extensive bloodshed and destruction, the Conakry Accord was signed in October 1997 by a delegation sent by the AFRC leader Johnny Paul Koroma. It was intended to restore the Kabbah government. But it clearly became a ploy to buy time in the face of international pressure and a domestic boycott by government employees, who refused to work under the AFRC regime and shut down key government functions. Under cover of the accord, the AFRC stockpiled weapons and attacked remaining ECOMOG positions at the country's international airport at Lungi.

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<sup>11</sup> Confidential interview, 24 April 1997.

<sup>12</sup> ICG Confidential interview, 24 April 1997.



The Lomé Accord (1999). A Nigerian/ECOMOG offensive retook Freetown in February 1998, forced the AFRC out of the city and reinstalled President Kabbah. In January 1999, however, the RUF rampaged through Freetown, killing and maiming until Nigerian troops drove them out. Seven months later, the Lomé Accord was brokered by the UN under the auspices of Francis Okello, special representative of the UN Secretary General, as well as by the UK, the U.S. and regional states. Lomé was an act of expedience. ECOWAS states – particularly Nigeria – wanted to withdraw. Nigeria claimed it was spending U.S.\$ 1 million a day and had been actively fighting for over two years. Other than from the UK, there was little Western assistance for the Nigerian operations, and there was scant prospect of any replacement force or backing from Western states. Lomé was the child of stalemate. For the UN, striving for continued relevance as a peace-brokering body after being sidelined in Kosovo by NATO, the stakes were high. In October 1999, the Security Council authorised the establishment of UNAMSIL.

The international desperation to reach an agreement and 'create' peace enabled the RUF to negotiate very favourable terms. Donor countries, for their part, invested more heavily in the Lomé process than in past agreements and made important concessions to push the accord through. The U.S. hoped that the agreement would usher Sierra Leone off the international agenda at minimum cost. President Clinton's special envoy to Africa, Jesse Jackson, helped persuade Sankoh. At a critical point, Sankoh received a call from Clinton. Sankoh was reportedly jubilant. 'What rebel leader gets called by the president of the United States?' he asked. 'I only got that call because I fought in the bush for so many years'.<sup>13</sup>

Under Lomé the RUF was brought into the government, gaining four cabinet positions, heading a number of public sector directorships, and filling some ambassadorial posts. Most controversially, there was a blanket amnesty for all crimes committed during the war, however terrible. At the last moment however, the UN dissociated itself from the amnesty for crimes against humanity. In November 1999, a UN spokesperson stated that the amnesty would not cover 'the most flagrant' human rights abuses, and there would be a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In February 2000, the Sierra Leone parliament approved legislation to create such a commission. However, it has not begun to function.

Lomé also achieved one of the RUF's central goals – exit of the Nigerians. Foday Sankoh was rewarded with the status of vice president and chairmanship of the Strategic Mineral Resources Commission, effectively giving him access to the country's diamond resources. Diamonds have been the main source of revenue for the RUF in its nine years' bush war. When Sankoh was imprisoned in May 2000, documents were discovered in his house that allegedly prove he continued to export diamonds illegally while in government.

Given the extent of concessions to the RUF, President Kabbah, was reluctant to sign. He buckled under international (particularly U.S.) pressure.

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<sup>13</sup> Steve Col, 'The Other War', *Washington Post Magazine*, 9 January 2000, p.26.

**The Abuja Agreement (2000).** Within days of the last ECOMOG troops' departure in May 2000, the RUF took 500 members of UNAMSIL hostage and seized their vehicles and weaponry. Charles Taylor, increasingly recognised as the real power behind the RUF, came under strong international pressure to secure the eventual release of these hostages. He claimed this result proved his desire to broker a peace; it also showed his power over the RUF. Subsequently, Sankoh was arrested in Freetown, and a powerful UK force was dispatched to Lungi airport to provide security for the capital after the UN debacle. This intervention was crucial in again changing the military balance inside Sierra Leone.

In August, the Security Council approved the creation of a Special Court for war crimes. In November a cease-fire was agreed in Abuja between the RUF and the government, which was followed by a break in fighting. However, the RUF continues to commit atrocities against the civilian population and to block UN deployment. Furthermore, the fighting has spread to Guinea, where the RUF is backing rebels.

## **B. The RUF - No Credibility or Legitimacy**

For the most part the RUF has agreed to negotiations when it faces military disadvantage and has then broken the resulting agreements after rearming. Negotiated peace settlements with the RUF, unless they provide for its complete demobilisation and disarmament, are, therefore, extremely suspect.

Moreover, the RUF lacks any independent political legitimacy. It is effectively controlled by Liberia's President Taylor, who uses it to advance his regional ambitions. The RUF has become an army of Taylor's convenience, so negotiations with the RUF's leadership ignore the real power behind its operations. These factors, discussed in more detail below, point to the need for a coercive military strategy that also provides opportunities for RUF combatants to demobilise voluntarily.

**A Proxy for Charles Taylor's Political Ambitions.** Taylor was elected Liberia's president in 1997 after a campaign of terror. He runs Liberia as his own personal fiefdom. He has a personal stake in every major business and personally directs all financial and security services. For Taylor, there is limited advantage at best in ending the Sierra Leone war. Disorder enables the RUF to control the diamond fields and gives Taylor access through northern Sierra Leone to attack Guinea. Both the RUF and his own elite forces have been trained by Fred Rindel, formerly with the South African special forces. Associated with Rindel are several South Africans, formerly of Executive Outcomes, who have effectively changed sides. Rindel is believed to have markedly improved the RUF's military capabilities. A state of war also provides a pretext for Taylor to quell domestic opposition.

President Taylor is not just interested in money and diamonds. Resources are simply a means to his political goals. As one senior Liberian commentator put it, 'he's in Sierra Leone not for the money but for his political agenda.'<sup>14</sup> Although the

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<sup>14</sup> ICG interview, 3 November 2000.

Sierra Leone diamond revenues are a key source of funds, the Liberian president has never been short of money. While head of the NPFL, in control of 90 per cent of the country, he was estimated by the former U.S. ambassador to Liberia, William Twaddell, to be earning U.S.\$ 75 million a year from taxes on the passage of diamonds, timber, rubber and iron ore through his territory.<sup>15</sup>

Taylor is determined to attain power throughout the region. Since the mid-1980s he has relied heavily on personal links with Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and Libya. He attended the Libyan training camps that 'became the 'Harvard and Yale of a generation of African revolutionaries'<sup>16</sup> where he first met Foday Sankoh. Now unchallenged in his control of Liberia, he has a grander design to control the Mano River countries. However, his desire to destabilise Sierra Leone and Guinea also reflects personal grudges. He was angered that West African ECOMOG forces occupied Monrovia in 1990 and foiled his initial attempt to seize power.

An uncompromising report by the UN in December 2000 identified President Taylor as the principal culprit behind the Sierra Leone war and linked him with diamond smuggling and arms trading. It noted that he 'is actively involved in fuelling the violence in Sierra Leone, and many businessmen close to his inner circle operate on an international scale, sourcing their weaponry mainly in eastern Europe'. It added:

'In short, Liberia is breaking [UN] Security Council embargoes regarding weapons imports into its own territory and into Sierra Leone. It is being actively assisted by Burkina Faso. It is tacitly assisted by all the countries allowing weapons to pass through or over their territory without question, and by those countries that provide a base for the aircraft used in such operations.'<sup>17</sup>

**An Unpopular Movement.** The RUF has no discernible popular following. The 1996 elections were essentially a protest vote against the RUF and the Sierra Leone government of the day. While there was some initial sympathy for the RUF's aims – opposition to corruption in government – that has long since evaporated.

From its beginning the RUF relied on terror and brutality, summarily executing leaders believed to support the government, including chiefs, government officials and village elders. It has carried out widespread and indiscriminate campaigns of terror, mutilating thousands of people, often at random. It has received little support from the more settled rural communities, the population of which has often preferred to flee the 'freedom fighters'. Consequently, there has been 'little scope for the transformation of political dissent in these areas into revolutionary fervour'.<sup>18</sup>

**An Ideological Vacuum.** The simplistic ideology the RUF once enunciated is no longer a real influence on its actions. It has been replaced by a triangle of profit,

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: the Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, (C. Hurst and New York University Press, London and New York, 1999), p.90.

<sup>16</sup> Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, *ibid*, p.72.

<sup>17</sup> Report of the UN panel on illicit diamond and arms dealings in Sierra Leone, December 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Abdullah and Muana, 'The Revolutionary United Front', p.179.

power and brutality. The overwhelming view in Sierra Leone is that the RUF is criminal.

The main RUF propaganda tract, 'Footpaths to Democracy: Toward a New Sierra Leone', quotes copiously from foreign revolutionary documents and essentially calls for a return to multi-party democracy, a fair sharing of resources, reform of education and an end to Lebanese domination<sup>19</sup>. This bears no relation to RUF practice. The RUF has not focused on building a political base in the countryside among the peasantry that might have been its natural following but has sought only to terrorise. Sankoh is a militaristic despot and, like Charles Taylor, is intent on taking power by whatever means. He executed his two main internal rivals, Rashid Mansaray and Abu Kanu in 1992, apparently for objecting to his tactics, and thereby eliminated any threat to his command.

The RUF concentrates upon making money, obtaining power, punishing those who are perceived as opponents, and perpetuating the privileges of gangland authority. Since Sankoh's imprisonment, it has continued to mine diamonds but the proceeds have gone to other senior leaders and Taylor. Miners work most commonly on a 'split pile' arrangement whereby they keep diamonds from one pile, and the other is taken by the RUF. Most reports indicate that any larger stones are taken by the RUF with the largest going to Liberia<sup>20</sup>.

**Forcible Recruitment of Young Fighters.** Many, perhaps most, RUF fighters were forcibly recruited. Many are child soldiers who were kidnapped from their homes and fed on a diet of drugs. Former child combatants report using marijuana or *djamba* (often spiced with gunpowder to make it stronger), homemade alcohol, and various tablets. Cocaine and heroin are also taken, but less frequently.<sup>21</sup> Children say they took drugs because it made them 'fearless'. They 'no longer saw people as people but as animals, and they could do anything they had to do, the implication being that drug taking made it possible to commit atrocities such as killing family members and cutting off peoples' limbs'.<sup>22</sup>

There are many accounts of children forced to commit atrocities against their home villages. This transforms them into pariahs in their own communities and makes it impossible for them to return. Others are tattooed with RUF symbols so they cannot go home even if they had the chance to escape. Former combatants also relate that they would be beaten if they returned from raiding expeditions against civilians with nothing, and several tell of seeing friends shot by commanders if they did not follow orders.<sup>23</sup>

**War Crimes and Terror as a Means of Control.** The RUF has committed heinous atrocities that qualify as war crimes. Indeed, the main tactic used to control territory is intimidation through violence. A RUF hallmark is amputation. Since the mid-1990s hundreds of people have had hands hacked off. The most

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<sup>19</sup> The economic influence of the Lebanese communities in West Africa is often seen as imperialistic by local populations.

<sup>20</sup> *Report Of The Panel Of Experts Appointed Pursuant To UN Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000)*.

<sup>21</sup> Sue Loughlin, 'A preliminary assessment of past and current drug use among former child ex-combatants in Sierra Leone', Report for UNICEF, August 2000, p.4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

dramatic orgy of violence occurred in January 1999 when the RUF, supported by disgruntled members of the former army, infiltrated Freetown, attacked Nigerian troops from ECOMOG, killed several thousand civilians and amputated limbs of over 800 people.<sup>24</sup> More than anything, it was these well-documented atrocities that forced Western governments to take notice of Sierra Leone.

**Internal Divisions within the RUF.** There appear to be splits within the RUF. These are not new. In April 1997 one group of senior RUF members denounced Sankoh's leadership because he did not support the Abidjan Accord. They were taken prisoner and tortured. Some never reappeared. It is unclear whether the RUF now operates cohesively as a single unit. Junior members were sent to sign the November 2000 cease-fire, for example. It is uncertain exactly who has authority to represent the movement and ensure that it adheres to a peace agreement.

With Sankoh's imprisonment, the RUF appears to have come more directly under President Taylor's control. Issa Sesay has been announced as 'interim leader', although it is not clear on whose authority. The 'interim' nature of the appointment is presumably meant to indicate that Sankoh remains in theory the overall leader despite his imprisonment. Sesay's appointment appears not to have total support but is most likely backed by President Taylor. Some leaders, such as Dennis 'Superman' Mingo, have opposed Sesay's more moderate line, while there are reports that Sam 'Mosquito' Bockarie may be trying to exert more influence after disagreeing with Sankoh and taking refuge in Liberia. But Bockarie's position is uncertain since it was reported in January 2001 that Taylor had expelled him from Liberia, probably to distance himself from visible connections with the RUF.

Further confusion has fuelled uncertainty about who speaks for the RUF. On 22 November 2000 media reports quoted RUF spokesperson Gibril Massaquoi as alleging that the RUF was divided over the cease-fire signed earlier in the month, and the majority of combatants no longer took orders from Sesay. This was later denied. The RUF appears broadly divided into two commands. The eastern command has two main brigades, one centred around Kono and Tongo diamond areas to secure those resources and the communication routes to Liberia. The northern command, with four brigades, is located in the Magburaka, Makeni area. The division poses difficulties for obtaining full RUF acquiescence to any peace agreement.

### C. Conflicting Agendas and Military Deadlock

Intransigence and a lack of legitimacy and integrity have been the hallmarks of the RUF but the RUF has also capitalised on the absence of international resolve and the multiplicity of international agendas. The result has been a series of weak accommodations engineered by the international community that have perpetuated rather than resolved the war.

The UK intervention to retrain the SLA with a view to conducting a more coercive strategy is a break with the past. It contains risks given SLA unreliability but it

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<sup>24</sup> 'Getting Away with Murder, Mutilation and Rape: New Testimony from Sierra Leone', *Africa Rights Watch*, Vol. 11, No. 3(A), June 1999.

recognises that there is little chance of permanent peace through negotiations. The UK stance has been met with scepticism and a degree of resentment in Africa. The UN has tended to favour another series of negotiations, in large part because UNAMSIL is incapable of robust action.

## 1. The African Response

**Nigeria.** A small Nigerian unit has been in Sierra Leone since the mid-1990s. Nigerian troops have served under both ECOMOG and the UN. The initial Nigerian role was to assist Sierra Leone during the Liberian war when it was clear Charles Taylor was helping the RUF. A large ECOMOG force held parts of Liberia and was frequently in conflict with Taylor's NPFL faction. Conversely, one militia recruited from Liberian refugees (ULIMO) was helping the Sierra Leone army against the RUF.

In Sierra Leone, the ECOMOG force was usually small and restricted to guarding key installations. When confronted with the AFRC/RUF forces during the coup in May 1997, the Nigerians were forced into an embarrassing retreat to the international airport. Their failure was exacerbated by the fact that Nigeria had also signed a defence agreement with the Kabbah government in March 1997 which promised to provide presidential protection, training for the Sierra Leone military and strategic support for the regime.

That blow to Nigerian pride, added to impatience at the intransigence of the AFRC/RUF junta, was a key reason for the Nigerian assault that took Freetown and restored Kabbah to power in February 1998. Intervention also suited General Sani Abacha's military government. Nigeria needed – and still needs – to be seen as a powerful player and a positive force for regional stability. For Abacha the intervention was an opportunity to divert the increasing international pressure on Nigeria to improve its human rights situation and hold elections. The West was obliged to recognise Nigeria's involvement in Sierra Leone because no other state was willing to fulfil this role.

More than any other nation, Nigeria has committed itself militarily to the resolution of Sierra Leone's war. Without its involvement it is likely the RUF would have consolidated its power. But it also locked Nigeria into a long-term fight against the RUF, which retreated into the hinterland. On assuming office in early 1999, the newly elected Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, stated that one of his main foreign policy priorities was to reduce the cost of Nigerian troops in Sierra Leone. Prior to the Lomé agreement, there was a clear feeling among Nigerian politicians that it was time the UN pulled its weight in Africa by sending more peacekeepers or at least paying for ECOMOG.

Today Nigeria's continued presence risks degenerating into collaboration with its supposed enemies. Something similar happened earlier in Sierra Leone and in Liberia where international peacekeepers often collaborated with various armed factions. During the Liberian war, timber and minerals were transported across the frontlines between rival forces, earning ECOMOG the synonym of 'Every Car Or Moving Object Gone'. In September 2000, some

Nigerian soldiers were accused by the Indian UN Force Commander, General Jetley, of collaborating with the RUF to mine and trade diamonds. This is an accusation with which most independent observers in Sierra Leone concur. The economic ambitions of senior Nigerian officers are worrying, especially since, as part of UNAMSIL, Nigerian troops are likely to reoccupy the diamond mining areas

Positioning Nigerian forces in the diamond areas could prolong an intractable conflict. Added to the U.S.\$ 1,000 per month that Nigeria receives for each soldier it contributes to UNAMSIL (under ECOMOG all costs were borne by West African states and so overwhelmingly by Nigeria), the fear is that some commanders have little incentive to seek an end to the conflict.

When a UN Security Council mission visited Liberia in October 2000, President Taylor stated he would prefer Nigerian forces to be based in the diamond fields and to guard the Liberian border. This contrasts to statements during the Lomé negotiation when he insisted that ECOMOG withdraw. His change is clearly linked to what he judges would give him best advantage. Within days of ECOMOG's departure in April 2000, the RUF took UN peacekeepers hostage. Now with the threat of the UK-trained force on the horizon, Taylor is courting Nigeria and attempting to drive a wedge between Nigeria and the UK so as to maintain his stronghold. On 21 November 2000, for example, he called for withdrawal of UK forces if they were not brought into UNAMSIL. Clearly, Taylor believes he can do business with the Nigerians.

**Liberia and Guinea.** West African conflicts are too frequently compartmentalised into state specific insurgencies, ignoring regional implications. Sierra Leone's war was perceived as a local conflict until its regional ramifications recently became only too obvious. Clearly, the RUF has support from Liberia and, indirectly, Burkina Faso. There has been significant fighting along the Sierra Leone-Guinea border between RUF and Guinean troops and also between Liberian and Guinean security forces along the Guinea-Liberia border around the Guinean town of Guéckédou where there are approximately 200,000, mainly Sierra Leone, refugees.

Liberia and Guinea have accused each other of territorial violations and harbouring dissidents. Liberia has charged that more than four attacks on its territory in two years were carried out with the acquiescence of Guinea, which it alleges trained and armed Liberian insurgents.

Guinea claims the Liberian government supports incursions into its territory from Sierra Leone and Liberia. Guinea has carried out several bombing raids of Sierra Leone territory, claiming they were in pursuit of dissidents who were attacking Guinean towns and villages. Fighting in Guinea's forest region has created a humanitarian crisis involving over 300,000 Sierra Leone and Liberian refugees, who have fled the wars in their countries. The conflict has seriously affected the ability of aid agencies to reach desperate refugees. The UNHCR describes the crisis as its biggest humanitarian emergency.

Charles Taylor is widely regarded as supporting RUF attacks against Guinea. There are fears that these attacks could provoke more widespread conflict and instability within Guinea, a country of over seven million considered close to collapse from internal strife and the misgovernment of President Lansana Conte's regime.

In addition to Taylor, another name consistently linked with the incursions into Guinea is that of Mohammed Touré, son of Guinea's first post-colonial leader, Ahmed Sékou Touré. Mohammed Touré is believed to be close to Taylor and working alongside the RUF to exploit its control of territory adjacent to Guinea's long border with Sierra Leone. Ethnicity also plays a leading role in this instability since there are mixed populations along the border.

Many of the same factors in Sierra Leone and Liberia's wars are present in Guinea. Poverty and corruption have resulted in high levels of youth unemployment. Unsurprisingly, students and disgruntled young people are at the vanguard of protests and most likely to take up arms. Unfortunately, Guinea's mineral wealth, including one third of the world's bauxite reserves<sup>25</sup>, significant iron ore and gold and an estimated 300 million carats in diamond reserves, could prove to be a source of instability.

## 2. The United Nations

**Military Role.** ICG believes that there is a need for military coercion against the RUF but UN forces can not do this. Increasing their numbers in the expectation that more will prove better could lead to further UN humiliation.

The UN's mandate permits peacekeepers only to protect themselves when threatened and to protect civilians in 'imminent threat of physical violence' in areas of UNAMSIL deployment. Thus, in practice, the issue of where and when to use force to protect civilians is open to inconsistent interpretation and is ultimately at the discretion of the field commander. UNAMSIL's evacuation of Kenyan peacekeepers from Kabala when the town came under RUF attack in early June 2000 demonstrated the lack of clarity and vulnerability inherent in the current 'Chapter Six and a Half' mandate. Many argue that UNAMSIL needs more extensive powers so as to be better prepared if attacked or deployed in dangerous areas. Under a stronger Chapter VII mandate, it would be more easily held accountable for any failures.<sup>26</sup>

However, even a more robust mandate will not change the reality that the UN force is ill-suited to wage war in Sierra Leone. It cannot be expected to launch offensives. To protect civilians effectively, UNAMSIL requires not only a robust mandate, and the political will to hold UN field commanders and their units accountable, but also serious military capability.

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<sup>25</sup> Guinea's production represents 11 percent of the world's production.

<sup>26</sup> See U.S. Committee for Refugees [http://www.refugees.org/news/fact\\_sheets/faq\\_sierraleone.htm](http://www.refugees.org/news/fact_sheets/faq_sierraleone.htm)



Regrettably, much of the current UNAMSIL force is inadequate, and its soldiers are not willing to put their lives at risk in a conflict in which they have no direct interest. The standard of many of the African forces that form the bulk of UNAMSIL is woeful. Poorly briefed, ill-equipped and unable to operate cohesively, they are unprepared to cope with the tactics of the armed groups. Peacekeepers in May 2000 put up little resistance to RUF attempts to disarm them in Makeni. Rather than disarming combatants, they contributed a significant array of weaponry and equipment to the arsenal of the RUF. An informal poll of the rules of engagement by various contingents revealed that they would return fire if under attack but that they considered themselves under no obligation to go to the rescue of another country's soldiers in UNAMSIL.

The U.S. supports a more forceful UNAMSIL approach and advocates that the force be strengthened. It favours a redrafting of the UN mandate to allow UNAMSIL to impose peace and has threatened to withhold funding if that does not happen. The U.S. has started training five Nigerian, one Ghanaian and one Senegalese battalion to join UNAMSIL and enforce a more aggressive mandate.<sup>27</sup> But there is little guarantee that this diverse force could retake much territory. Experience suggests that the successful use of force requires a single cohesive military unit.

Furthermore, adopting a more robust Chapter VII approach would deter potential troop-contributing countries. They question why their soldiers should fight a war to which Western governments are unprepared to commit troops. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was unusually frank during the hostage crisis of May 2000: 'We would have liked to see some of the governments with capacity, with good armies and well-trained soldiers, participate but they are not running forward to contribute to this force'.<sup>28</sup>

For developing countries, the opportunity to earn hard currency has become a compelling reason for contributing peacekeepers. UN peacekeeping forces in Africa – especially in unresolved internal conflicts – are rapidly turning into a third world army paid by the West. Whereas five years ago, Western governments formed the backbone of UN deployments, today they shun such involvement. Lakhdar Brahimi, the Algerian diplomat who led a UN panel on the reform of peacekeeping, recently lamented 'you can't have a situation where some people contribute the blood and some contribute the money'.<sup>29</sup>

India's withdrawal of its 3,000 soldiers and Jordan of its 1,800 at the end of 2000 is linked in part to their reluctance to provide peacekeeping forces to areas where Western troops refuse to go. But there was also considerable hostility between Nigeria and India over Gen. Jetley's remarks concerning Nigerian diamond interests. The two most senior Nigerian officials implicated in the report - Mr Annan's special representative in Freetown, Ambassador

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<sup>27</sup> The U.S. partnership with Western African armies to support UN operations in Sierra Leone is called "Operation Focus relief".

<sup>28</sup> UN press release SC/6857, 11 May 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Colum Lynch, 'U.S. and Europe Shift UN Peacekeeping Burden to Poor Nations' Troops', *Guardian Weekly*, 14 December 2000, p.29.

Oluyemi Adeniji, and Gen Jetley's immediate subordinate, Brigadier-General Mohammed Garba - both denounced Gen. Jetley's memorandum.

After that incident, future co-operation between these two major contributors, each with three battalions, was untenable. General Victor Malu, the Nigerian chief of staff, demanded Gen. Jetley's immediate removal. 'We are not going to serve under that man in whatever circumstances. If he is not removed, he will not get our co-operation, and we are the largest contingent in the force,' he said.<sup>30</sup>

Although two Bangladeshi battalions and further troops from Zambia and Ghana will partly fill the gap, the departure of the Indians is a major blow to UNAMSIL's viability; the Indian forces were its best troops.

**International Tribunal.** 'The Lomé peace agreement entrenched the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of human rights abuses throughout Sierra Leone's eight-year conflict. By including an amnesty for all activities undertaken in pursuit of the conflict, the peace agreement granted impunity for some of the worst human rights abuses, including crimes against humanity and war crimes.'<sup>31</sup>

The Security Council has resolved (Resolution 1315 of 14 August 2000) to create an international tribunal to prosecute those who have committed crimes against humanity. The tribunal or special court will try 'persons who bear greatest responsibility' for 'crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international law, as well as crimes under relevant Sierra Leonean law, committed within the territory of Sierra Leone'. Unlike the Tribunals of Rwanda and Former Yugoslavia, the court is to be a mixed effort between the international and Sierra Leone justice systems.<sup>32</sup> Although the Lomé accord of July 1999 included a comprehensive amnesty, it would be possible to prosecute people who have committed crimes since that date, including Foday Sankoh. Moreover, it is sometimes argued that RUF failure to respect Lomé terms has rendered the amnesty null and void, thus enabling prosecution also of earlier crimes.

The tribunal is needed. Those who have committed abuses must be brought to trial. That will go some way to ending impunity for perpetrators on all sides of human rights abuses. But there has been little material support for its establishment. In January 2001, Secretary-General Kofi Annan cautioned the Security Council against moving ahead without proper funding. He noted that the court might encounter financial problems unless provided three years of operational funds before its inception.

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<sup>30</sup> Chris McGreal and Ewen MacAskill, 'UN to Bolster Peacekeeping Force by 7,000. Decision to Send Extra Troops Could Solve Dilemma about Leadership', special report: Sierra Leone, *The Guardian* (London), 13 September 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Amnesty International, *Sierra Leone: Ending Impunity - an Opportunity Not to be Missed* (Amnesty International, AFR 51/60/00, 6 July 2000), p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> See letter from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council dated 12 January 2001, S/2001/40.

There is also need for legal improvements within Sierra Leone. Administration of justice, both civil and criminal, is barely functional. Judicial institutions 'lack the necessary personnel with the appropriate training in international criminal law, financial support, equipment and the necessary legal tools to conduct trials of those accused of crimes under both national and international law'<sup>33</sup>. Furthermore, Sierra Leone law does not currently extend to crimes under international law, including crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The Lomé Accord also mandated a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and a national human rights commission but little progress has been made toward establishing either. The TRC was to be established 90 days after the signing and to submit its report twelve months later. However, the government stated that it did not want the TRC to begin until disarmament and demobilisation of combatants were complete. Recently, UNAMSIL has assisted the government to draft legislation to establish a human rights commission, but funding is lacking. A workshop by the UNAMSIL human rights office in November 2000 also laid out some issues for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

### 3. The UK Role

The UK has maintained an interest in Sierra Leone since independence. It contributed the bulk of the funding to the February 1996 election. The so-called Sandline Affair (known also as the 'Arms to Africa Affair') and the publicity surrounding atrocities in Sierra Leone intensified British interest. In March 1998 it was reported that the British private security company Sandline (an associate of Executive Outcomes) had violated an arms embargo on Sierra Leone. Sandline had purchased weapons and provided a small number of personnel and a helicopter in support of the February 1998 Nigerian assault on Freetown to reinstate President Kabbah. Sandline, dubbed 'mercenaries' in the British press, claimed that the UK government had known of its intention to assist Kabbah. While the Labour government condemned the affair as an affront to ethical foreign policy, it appeared to many that the company was supporting the restoration of democracy against a barbarous AFRC/RUF junta and could, therefore, be seen as being on the 'right' side in Sierra Leone's war.

Sandline's intervention raised a more fundamental issue. In the absence of other international assistance, President Kabbah had little choice other than to arrange a commercial deal to obtain the funds to pay Sandline for its support and to request the help of Nigeria, which then was under the dictatorial rule of Sani Abacha. The international media coverage of atrocities when the RUF entered Freetown in January 1999 fuelled further pressure on the UK to assist in resolution of the Sierra Leone conflict. These events resulted in a marked increase of UK funds to restructure the Sierra Leone armed forces in 1999.

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<sup>33</sup> Amnesty International, *Sierra Leone: Ending Impunity*, p.3.

As noted earlier, the UK's policy to train and equip SLA troops to inflict a military defeat on the RUF is high-risk. A military offensive against the RUF may be essential given the failure of Sierra Leone's elected government to stabilise the country and end the war but if pursued in the absence of an appropriate political strategy it could prove disastrous. Even if a reorganised SLA, supported by British troops, could decisively defeat the RUF, the consequence might be further regional destabilisation since RUF forces could regroup in Liberia and renew their offensive in Guinea. Moreover, SLA forces, unless regularly paid and effectively commanded, might well begin to live off the land as so many troops in Sierra Leone have done in the past. Finally, a British withdrawal after a comprehensive military victory over the RUF would tip the balance of military power and risk restarting the war, as happened after the withdrawal of Executive Outcomes in 1997. All the problems which helped create the war in the first place remain present, aggravated by the events of the past ten years.

It is obvious, despite Whitehall denials, that British involvement in logistics and training will need to continue for a long time. Habits of ill discipline and corruption are endemic in the Sierra Leone armed forces, and many of the same soldiers are being recycled. Familiar problems – especially 'lost' wages and rations – are re-emerging as soldiers are placed under Sierra Leone command following their UK training. To reorient the SLA, it needs to know it is being effectively led. For that to happen, British officers must be placed in the chain of command, probably as deep as the rank of major. That step, while believed essential by British officers on the ground, is politically risky for a Blair government already accused of 'mission creep' by its political opponents. It would also create unprecedented dependence by an African country on a former colonial power.

The necessity for outside commitment to Sierra Leone goes further than the military sphere. In effect, a military option alone is doomed to failure in the sense that it cannot by itself stabilise Sierra Leone and could cause serious military repercussions throughout West Africa, further destabilising a troubled region. A military option, while necessary, can only achieve stability if it is part of a medium-term political strategy.

#### **4. Harmonising Objectives**

There is mounting unease in West Africa at the British approach to arm, retrain and re-equip the Sierra Leone army with the objective of defeating the RUF. The show of British strength in November 2000, including deployment of warships, attack helicopters and marines, may have been comforting for Sierra Leone citizens, but it was condemned by the acting UN commander, a Nigerian, who considered it overly aggressive and declared it might undermine any peace agreement.

The Nigerian position - which has great resonance in UNAMSIL - is that international and Sierra Leone government forces should push into the interior, persuading, not compelling, the RUF to stand aside. Multinational forces, given their composition and mandate, actually have few other options. UNAMSIL continues to hold one-on-one conversations with the RUF,

entreating its leaders to keep the Lomé accord, which in reality has already failed.

The UK mission is distinct from that of the UN, and there are risks of serious disagreement. The new appointments of Force Commander Major-General Daniel Opande (Kenya), Deputy Force Commander Major-General Martin Agwai (Nigeria) and a British Chief of Staff, Brigadier-General Alastair Duncan, may help bridge some of the gaps. But the question remains how mediation aimed at forging a consensus favoured by UNAMSIL can mesh with the more aggressive stance taken by the Sierra Leone government and its UK backers.

Nevertheless, the two international forces need each other. UNAMSIL relies on the guarantee of forceful UK intervention. Without it, UNAMSIL risks once again being humiliated by the RUF as in May 2000. At the same time, the UK plan presumably requires UNAMSIL to occupy areas that the SLA takes, especially given the nature of Sierra Leone troops. That strategy, however – appearing to take sides against the RUF – does not coincide with the UN approach.

The UN also worries that, should the SLA be defeated by the RUF, its soldiers will retreat into UNAMSIL bases, effectively placing them on the front line and compromising their 'impartiality'.

The international community cannot run two or more strategies in Sierra Leone simultaneously. Working against each other with conflicting mandates will only fuel the conflict and invite warring factions to exploit differences. The former Yugoslavia and Somalia provide clear examples that strategic coherence is fundamental to success.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

There are no simple solutions to the Sierra Leone war. The task is to make the best policy from the possibilities and players available. The international community must not repeat its mistakes by believing that a quick-fix negotiation will resolve the conflict. This time around, Sierra Leone deserves reassurance that the international community will fulfil its commitment to restore and uphold peace for as long as needed. That first aspect -- to restore peace -- involves a militarily robust response.

The Lomé peace agreement is dead and should be abandoned. It was broken by the RUF in the first months after its signature. The most recent blatant demonstration of bad faith came in December 2000 with the long awaited hand-over of weapons and equipment taken from UNAMSIL in May 2000. A total of eleven armoured vehicles were returned on 11 December 2000 but they had been stripped of all mounted weapons and equipment. No other weapons or ammunition were turned in, despite commitments to do so. Furthermore, the RUF banned UNAMSIL from entering areas it controlled until certain 'non-negotiable' conditions were met, including the release of Foday Sankoh.

Since bringing the RUF into negotiations has not aided peace, the UN should call for the RUF's immediate 'surrender'. The RUF is not a cohesive movement. It lacks ideology or popular support. It is an armed gang, ultimately controlled by President Charles Taylor.

RUF combatants wanting to demobilise should be helped to do so quickly and in safety, with well planned and designed re-integration programs to entice them out of the bush. Delays in providing re-integration programs will result in many youths being recycled as further recruits for President Taylor and his security forces.

Those in the RUF who refuse to demobilise should be defeated militarily. The military option could be spearheaded by UK trained and led Sierra Leone armed forces with UNAMSIL securing the areas regained. The UK should provide military and intelligence backup to guarantee the safety of UN forces. The CDF could provide additional security for local villages and settlements.

Such a military strategy, while essential, clearly requires a shift in international perceptions and agreements.

A forward military strategy requires rapid harmonising of international positions. It is unlikely to succeed while the UN-West Africa alliance pulls in a different strategic direction from the UK-Sierra Leone government alliance. The international community must quickly find a united way forward or it will witness another intervention disaster in Africa.

It is essential that the UN Security Council upgrade the UNAMSIL mandate. This will require a concerted effort by permanent Security Council members including the U.S., UK and France. The UK is already committed to such a course. The U.S. also supports redrafting the UN mandate. Its role as a funder of the operation and its training function with various West African armies give the U.S. considerable influence. France is understood to be considering a British request to take a more positive approach to military interventions in West Africa. An incentive for France to do this could come from its relations with Ivory Coast, the government of which is threatened by a further spread of violence in the region and has closed its territory to arms transfers from Burkina Faso to Liberia.

It is also vital that other West African governments identify themselves with such an approach. This is perhaps the hardest diplomatic task. It would effectively legitimise a position already taken by the UK that has never been the subject of any international mandate. It would require resolution of deep differences between West African governments.

The most important actor in this respect is Nigeria. A guarantee of further international funding for African troops in UNAMSIL would have to be part of a comprehensive diplomatic agreement that would also include an enhanced mandate for UNAMSIL and agreement by ECOWAS on an aggressive stance towards the RUF. Importantly, Ivory Coast might now be expected to support such a position given its vulnerability. France might also be prevailed upon to intercede with its regional allies and is already considering British requests for support for joint border operations between Sierra Leone and Guinea. This would be welcome if agreed by key regional actors, especially Nigeria and Ivory Coast. Other African

governments should be asked for support. Little can be hoped for from the Organisation of African Unity, which is too large and disparate, but some gesture of support for robust international action might be obtained from South Africa, which has good relations with both Britain and the U.S. Although South Africa is not militarily involved in West Africa, its influence and its rhetorical commitment to the notion of an African renaissance make its position important.

If Charles Taylor is not stopped from fuelling the Sierra Leone conflict, he is likely to encourage formation of a new rebel group should the RUF be defeated. This tactic was often seen during the earlier war in Liberia. The conflict must be examined in its regional context and Sierra Leone's neighbours need to be made accountable for their role in it. The use of targeted sanctions – visa restrictions, freezing bank accounts and the like -- against key members of President Taylor's power structures and their families would be extremely effective. To keep Taylor's threat at bay these sanctions could be extended to Taylor's business partners in the region and in the United States. A key element would include logging activities, which enrich Taylor's immediate circle and are frequently associated with arms shipments. ECOWAS is already considering such sanctions against Liberia.

Funding is needed to start the Special Court, which has already been formally established. While the pitfalls of the Rwandan tribunal need to be heeded, the instigators of violence such as Foday Sankoh and key members of the RUF hierarchy should stand trial. This is essential to stop the cycle of impunity.

Parallel support is needed to re-establish basic judicial functions within Sierra Leone and to bring into play a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in a form appropriate to the Sierra Leone situation. The latter would seek to produce a degree of healing between those who have committed crimes at a lower level, and their victims.

The underlying causes of Sierra Leone's war are frequently forgotten in the face of the immediate conflict. These include corrupt and unaccountable government, manipulated ethnicity and alienated youth. Peace cannot be sustained without addressing these factors.

Demobilisation and reintegration campaigns that collapsed in May 2000 should be rejuvenated to provide an incentive for soldiers to give up their weapons. Even before May 2000, only a minority of those who demobilised were RUF.

The CDF needs to be brought under more accountable control, possibly as part of local territorial units. Currently, it is an extra-state force, answerable to Chief Hinga Norman, who runs it as his own military. The CDF's future needs to be resolved quickly and decisively. While it has been effective in keeping the RUF at bay, it is a wild card in the peace process and risks deteriorating into a new RUF. The UK and Sierra Leone governments have developed an apparently sound concept to formalise the CDF's existence and bring it under state control. It envisages the CDF serving as a smaller territorial force that could be mobilised in response to local security threats. Its weaponry could conceivably be stored in one central arsenal.

Improving governance in Sierra Leone is the most difficult problem of all but it is essential if there is to be a lasting peace. The civil war is rooted in four decades of bad government and a longer colonial history of indirect rule. Elections in 1996 produced a government which was democratically chosen but soon demonstrated itself incapable of governing well or installing peace. It failed to address many of the fundamental problems that have underpinned the war. New elections are needed. They should be run by the UN, as in Cambodia and elsewhere.

However, there is no reason to believe that a government elected in the immediate future would do any better unless rooted in a clear partnership with the international community. This means the Security Council making a clear commitment to a continuing role for the international community in Sierra Leone for a long enough period, probably five years or more, to complete essential contributions not only to rebuilding Sierra Leone's army but also to re-establishing the judicial system and other elements of good governance, including a national system of education.

The whole strategy proposed, with both its military and civilian support dimensions, would need to be the subject of negotiation with key political actors in the country, and discussed and, as far as possible, endorsed by key regional actors, especially Nigeria. It would surely be supported by the overwhelming majority of the Sierra Leone population.

Regarding the international half of this partnership, the single most eligible actor to play a leading role is the UK government, which is the only potential peacemaker that has shown the will and ability to intervene decisively. Its authority, however, would need to be confirmed in some form and complemented by the UN, with respect to both military and political strategy. It needs to be emphasised again that a purely military strategy, without a real political commitment by the international community, would likely only further destabilise the region, as many West Africans fear, regardless of the fate of the RUF.

These are unusual and radical recommendations. They will be difficult to implement. However, if the international community were to leave Sierra Leone quickly, even in the event of the military defeat of the RUF, violence would likely resume at once as the consequent power-vacuum attracted intervention from Liberia and Burkina Faso. The results would almost certainly include a collapse of government in Guinea and spread of the zone of conflict throughout much of West Africa in a manner comparable to what has happened in Central Africa. In other words, without an unusually intense and protracted international commitment in Sierra Leone, the prospects are terrible.

**Freetown/London/Brussels, 11 April 2001**



## Appendix A: Political Background to the Crisis

The modern republic of Sierra Leone grew out of an eighteenth-century settlement on the West African coast for African and Caribbean Slaves and free citizens from Britain, some of them former slaves. Starting with the colony of Freetown, British rule eventually extended into the hinterland. The country area remained under British rule until it gained independence in 1961. From the beginning Sierra Leone's political parties vied for dominance at any cost. In 1967, the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP), that had led the country since independence, was narrowly defeated by the All People's Congress (APC) led by former trade union leader, Siaka Stevens. The latter was prevented from taking power immediately by a military coup but in 1968 Stevens became head of state. His APC party quickly consolidated power and in 1978 formally established a one-party state. This notoriously corrupt government made extensive use of patronage.

In 1985, the 80-year old Stevens handed over power to his hand-picked successor, General Joseph Momoh. Momoh cracked down on prominent Lebanese businessmen who controlled the Sierra Leone diamond trade and had become politically powerful under APC rule. These businessmen used their wealth to finance the civil war then raging in Lebanon itself and their influence with the government to encourage diplomacy helpful to one or another Lebanese faction. However, President Momoh became increasingly dependent in his own turn on Israeli traders and diplomatic and security networks and on Russian criminals with interests in the diamond trade. Such webs of international influence, in which criminal, financial, military and diplomatic interests are inextricably linked, have characterised Sierra Leone ever since.

Sierra Leone's war began in March 1991 when a small armed contingent known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), accompanied by Liberian fighters and Burkinabe soldiers, entered south-eastern Sierra Leone from Liberia. Foday Sankoh and other leading figures in the RUF had been involved with Charles Taylor and other insurgents from various West African countries in training camps in Libya and Burkina Faso in the 1980s. They said they intended to overthrow the APC government of President Momoh and claimed their larger goal was a radical, pan-African revolution.

The RUF was heavily dependent on Taylor, then the leader of a military faction in the civil war that had begun in neighbouring Liberia in 1989. Taylor and Sankoh sometimes claimed that their alliance was based on pan-African revolutionary solidarity. Taylor was also motivated by a desire to punish the Sierra Leone government for its participation in the West African intervention force in Liberia, known as the Economic Community of West African States Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and led by Nigeria. That intervention in 1990 had prevented Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) faction from taking control of Liberia. As time went by, Sierra Leone and Liberian forces became increasingly embroiled in one another's affairs, and Taylor supported the RUF to prevent Sierra Leone from being used by his Liberian opponents as well as to acquire diamonds and other plunder.

On 29 April 1992, President Momoh was overthrown in a military coup by young officers disillusioned with his government. Many of these officers had battlefield experience of the burgeoning two-country war. The coup was overwhelmingly popular among Sierra Leone citizens, many of whom regarded the old administration as incorrigibly corrupt. But the new National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) administration, consisting of eighteen military officers and four civilians, headed by Captain Valentine Strasser, soon adopted a style reminiscent of its predecessors. It also suffered a series of defeats

## APPENDIX A

against the RUF. Despite military government and the expansion of the Sierra Leone army from 3,000 to over 13,000, the RUF advanced within a few kilometres of Freetown. Moreover, it became increasingly apparent that the government army often avoided fighting the RUF. Army and rebel commanders even reached informal understandings not to confront one another. Both sides lived off the countryside, plundering and abusing unarmed civilians. In desperation the government hired a private military company, Executive Outcomes, mainly comprised of former South African soldiers. This more disciplined and experienced force, which was supported by local armed militias, reversed the tide of war and pushed the RUF from most strategic areas.

The subsequent lull in fighting afforded sufficient stability – coupled with international and local pressure for democracy – for elections to be held in February 1996. These were conducted reasonably well and were won by the SLPP party led by Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, a former international civil servant with the United Nations.

The new government continued the policy of encouraging some local communities to recruit their own armed militias, officially called the Civil Defence Force but often known as *Kamajors*. It signed a peace settlement with RUF leader Foday Sankoh in Abidjan in November 1996, as part of which Kabbah was obliged to terminate Executive Outcomes' contract at the beginning of 1997. This proved a mistake that crucially changed the balance of military force and upset whatever basis had existed for political accord.

Three months later, President Kabbah was overthrown in a coup led by his own army, which had grown dissatisfied with the new government's curtailment of its privileges and its increasing use of the Civil Defence Force as, in effect, a private army. Kabbah and his government were forced into exile in Conakry. The new Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) invited the RUF to join a coalition government.

A bizarre alliance of former foes, the AFRC/RUF administration was characterised by the total absence of the rule of law. There was widespread violence, rape and looting. The military regime was shunned by the international community. Many Sierra Leone civil servants boycotted their government jobs. Under international and domestic pressure, the AFRC/RUF agreed in Conakry in October 1997 to return power to the democratically elected Kabbah government. But almost immediately the AFRC/RUF administration showed increasing reluctance to adhere to its pledges.

Nigerian forces, present under an older defence agreement, continued to hold the international airport at Lungi even after the May 1997 overthrow of Kabbah. In February 1998 these troops, now technically part of ECOMOG, attacked Freetown, ousting the AFRC government. Most RUF fighters returned to the interior and resumed guerrilla war. Many Sierra Leone soldiers who had served the AFRC junta also fled to the interior and lived off the land, making common cause with the RUF. Pitted against them were 10-12,000 mainly Nigerian troops, under the banner of ECOMOG. These worked closely with the armed civilian militias, especially the *Kamajors*.

Horrible atrocities against civilians in rural areas were reported throughout 1998. In many cases these seem to have been perpetrated by the RUF and former soldiers seeking to impose their will in the countryside, but there were also reports of atrocities by the *Kamajors*. In effect, Sierra Leone was prey to a variety of armed groups, some having little coherence and no formal status. Its government, although internationally regarded as legitimate by virtue of its electoral mandate, was actually dependent on Nigerian troops and local militias. Several local forces recruited Liberians who had come to Sierra Leone either as refugees or as military adventurers. Some of these retained

links to Liberian military factions. There were many reports of collusion between groups officially opposed to one another, especially in diamond-marketing.

In July 1998, the UN established UNOMSIL, a 40-strong observer force.<sup>34</sup> But in January 1999, AFRC and the RUF infiltrated and nearly seized control of Freetown. Appalling atrocities were inflicted on civilians including rape, the random amputation of limbs from men, women and children, and kidnapping. Three thousand people are believed to have been murdered or abducted and many hundreds mutilated before ECOMOG again consolidated and pushed the RUF out of the capital.

ECOMOG, overwhelmingly Nigerian, was incapable of inflicting a lasting military defeat on the RUF, which continued to be supplied from Liberia by President Taylor. Nigeria wanted to withdraw, especially once Olusegun Obasanjo was elected as head of a civilian government in 1999. With few other states showing interest in sending troops and under international pressure to take even cosmetic action, another peace agreement was signed between the government and the RUF in Lomé just six months after the January 1999 atrocities.

Under Lomé the RUF gained positions in the government, and Foday Sankoh was given the status of vice president and made responsible for diamond marketing. To replace departing ECOMOG forces the UN Security Council also agreed to establish a 6,000-strong peacekeeping force, recently raised to 17,500. The new UN force, known as UNAMSIL, was empowered under Chapter VI of the UN Charter 'to ensure the security of movement of its personnel and, within its capabilities and areas of deployment, to afford protection to civilians under immediate threat of violence, taking into account the responsibilities of the Sierra Leone government and ECOMOG'. Half of the 6,000 troops were expected to be provided by ECOWAS countries.<sup>35</sup>

But within days of the last ECOMOG troops' departure in May 2000, the RUF took hostage 500 members of UNAMSIL and seized their vehicles and weaponry. Charles Taylor, increasingly recognised as the real power behind the RUF, came under strong international pressure to secure the eventual release of these hostages. He claimed this result proved his desire to broker a peace; it also showed his power over the RUF. Subsequently, Sankoh was arrested in Freetown, and a powerful UK force was dispatched to Lungi airport to provide security for the capital after the UN debacle. This intervention was crucial in again changing the military balance inside Sierra Leone.

By December 2000, a vague west-east front line divided the warring factions. Since then there has been little fighting inside Sierra Leone itself. To the north of this front line, the RUF remains dominant except for isolated army deployments around Kabala and Bumbuna. In the south, especially around Freetown, some 13,000 UNAMSIL peacekeepers, predominantly African and dominated by three Nigerian battalions, are stationed in camps. Between them, and operating completely independently, is the Civil Defence Force (CDF), an exceedingly loose militia group of up to 40,000 fighters nominally under the control of the Deputy Minister of Defence, Hinga Norman. The training and strength of the militia is highly variable though many have modern automatic weapons.

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<sup>34</sup>This was renamed UNAMSIL in October 1999, initially with some 6,000 troops.

<sup>35</sup>John L. Hirsch, *Sierra Leone: Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy* (International Peace Academy Occasional Paper Series, Lynne Rienner publishers, Boulder and London, 2001), p.127.

## **APPENDIX A**

The new Sierra Leone army, which will ultimately number 8,500, is becoming a more powerful force. Under the direction of several hundred UK soldiers, 3,000 have now completed basic training. A British rapid reaction force has been stationed offshore, presumably ready to intervene should the RUF become a major threat once again. A key concern to many observers, however, is that among the troops deployed in support of the government are many who could carry out future abuses. The new, retrained Sierra Leone army appears to contain individuals who were themselves responsible for human rights abuses in previous years. If they are not well led, there may be more abuses. The CDF has also been responsible for many abuses; some of its fighters are reported to have served previously with other militias in Sierra Leone or in Liberia.

## Appendix B: Acronyms

- AFRC: Armed Forces Ruling Council. A military junta established after a coup in 1997, which was driven from power by Nigerian forces operating under the umbrella of ECOMOG in February 1998. Troops loyal to the AFRC retreated to the countryside and continued to operate as armed opponents of the restored democratic government.
- APC: All People's Congress. A political party formed by the late Siaka Stevens, which held power until a military coup in 1992.
- CDF: Civil Defence Force. Officially a government-aligned militia force of about 40,000, the name is given to a number of local militias, most notably the *Kamajors*, which are in fact largely independent of government control.
- ECOMOG: ECOWAS Cease-Fire Monitoring Group. Originally organised in 1990 to intervene in Liberia, it has evolved into an umbrella for various regional interventions in which Nigeria has played a leading role.
- ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States. A regional economic grouping which has become a key diplomatic forum for organising regional military interventions in Sierra Leone, Liberia and elsewhere.
- EO: Executive Outcomes. A South African security company run by former members of the South African Special Forces. Employed by the Sierra Leone government in 1995-6, it decisively altered the military balance. Its contract was terminated under the terms of the Abidjan peace agreement in early 1997. EO has subsequently been dissolved, but some of its associates have recently worked for President Taylor of Liberia and have aided the RUF.
- NPRC: National Provisional Ruling Council. A military junta established after a coup in 1992 chaired by Valentine Strasser. It ceded power to an elected government in 1996.
- RUF/SL: Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone. A revolutionary group formed by Sierra Leone citizens in Libya in the late 1980s and led by Foday Sankoh. It began its armed campaign in March 1991. It is particularly known for its use of terror tactics such as amputation and mutilation.
- SLA: Sierra Leone Army. The armed force of the Sierra Leone government.
- SLPP: Sierra Leone People's Party. A political party which held power immediately after independence and again since 1996. Regarded as having a power-base particularly among the Mende people, one of the country's largest ethnic groups.
- ULIMO: United Liberation Movement for Democracy. A militia established in 1991 by Liberians opposed to Charles Taylor, at that time Liberia's main rebel leader. ULIMO was employed as an auxiliary force inside Sierra Leone, fighting against the RUF, before pushing its way into Liberia. It subsequently split into rival factions, some supported both by the Nigerian faction in ECOMOG and the government of Guinea. ULIMO has used Guinean territory to launch attacks on President Taylor's Liberia and appears to have played a role in recent fighting inside Guinea.
- UNAMSIL: United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, established by UN Security Council Resolution 1270 of October 1999.

**Appendix C: Chronology**<sup>36</sup>

- 1961 Sierra Leone is declared independent on 27 April. Its first prime minister is the leader of the Sierra Leone People's Party.
- 1967 All People's Congress party leader Siaka Stevens wins elections. He is prevented by a coup from taking office.
- 1968 Non-commissioned officers stage Sierra Leone's third coup in thirteen months. Siaka Stevens assumes power.
- 1978 The APC adopts a one-party constitution.
- 1985 Military force commander Major-General Joseph Momoh succeeds Stevens as president.
- 1990 Momoh supports return to multiparty constitution. Elections scheduled for 1992.
- 1991 March 23. Around 100 fighters, including Sierra Leone citizens, Liberians loyal to Charles Taylor, and some Burkinabe mercenaries, attack Sierra Leone in the name of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by Foday Sankoh, a former army corporal once detained for his part in a coup attempt.
- 1992 April 29. Junior officers carry out a coup and establish the National Provisional Ruling Council with Captain Valentine Strasser as chairman.
- 1994 September. Sierra Leone and Nigeria sign a mutual defence agreement.
- 1995 February. An RUF advance on Freetown is stopped by pro-government forces including some 2,000 Nigerian soldiers.
- 1995 March. Strasser signs a contract with the South African security company Executive Outcomes.
- 1996 January 16. Brigadier-General Julius Maada Bio replaces Strasser as NPRC Chairman in an internal coup.
- 1996 February 26-27. Presidential and legislative elections are held with the participation of thirteen political parties. No presidential candidate receives the required 55 per cent vote.
- 1996 March 15. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of the SLPP wins a runoff.
- 1996 March 29. Kabbah is sworn in as president.
- 1996 November 30. Kabbah and Sankoh sign the Abidjan Peace Agreement.

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<sup>36</sup>Adapted from Hirsch, *Sierra Leone: Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy*, pp.113-34.

## APPENDIX C

- 1997 January 31. Executive Outcomes officially leaves Sierra Leone under the terms of Abidjan.
- 1997 May 25. A military coup installs the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, chaired by Major Johnny Paul Koroma. President Kabbah flees to Guinea.
- 1997 June 1. Major Koroma invites the RUF to join the ruling junta.
- 1997 October 8. UN Security Council Resolution 1132 establishes an embargo on selected items. ECOWAS is empowered to enforce the embargo.
- 1997 October 23. In negotiations in Conakry between the junta and ECOWAS, the AFRC/RUF agree to restore President Kabbah within six months.
- 1998 January 15. Nigerian troops operating with ECOMOG attack Freetown.
- 1998 February 15. The AFRC/RUF leave Freetown, which is taken by Nigerian troops.
- 1998 March 10. President Kabbah returns to Freetown and is reinstated as president.
- 1998 July 13. UN Security Council 1181 establishes the UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone.
- 1999 January 6. AFRC/RUF forces re-enter Freetown by force. They inflict major destruction and widespread atrocities.
- 1999 May 25. Negotiations begin on a new peace agreement.
- 1999 July 7. The Lomé peace agreement is signed by President Kabbah and Foday Sankoh. The UN Security Council welcomes the agreement.
- 1999 October 22. UN Security Council Resolution 1270 establishes the UN Mission in Sierra Leone, now known as UNAMSIL.
- 2000 February 7. The Security Council adopts Resolution 1289 which expands UNAMSIL from 6,000 to 11,100 military personnel and revises its mandate to include additional tasks, like providing security at key locations and ensuring the free flow of people and goods on specified routes.
- 2000 May 6. After several incidents indicating its non-compliance with the peace process, the RUF takes 500 UN peacekeepers hostage.
- 2000 May 8. RUF fighters in Freetown fire on a demonstration, killing seventeen people.
- 2000 May 9. ECOWAS appoints Charles Taylor to ensure that the RUF complies with the terms of the Lomé peace agreement and frees the estimated 500 UN peacekeepers hostages.
- 2000 May 17. Foday Sankoh is captured by a crowd in Freetown, turned over to government authorities, and imprisoned.

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- 2000 May 19. UN Security Council resolution expands UNAMSIL to 13,000.
- 2000 May 29. An ECOWAS summit approves a proposal to send 3,000 West African troops to Sierra Leone.
- 2000 June 10. A team of British military trainers arrives in Freetown.
- 2000 July 5. The UN Security Council imposes an eighteen-month trade ban on uncertified diamonds from Sierra Leone in a bid to stop their sale from funding the RUF rebellion (Resolution 1306).
- 2000 August 1. The UN Security Council Sanctions Committee announces the composition of a panel to look into possible violations of sanctions and the link between trade in diamonds and arms.
- 2000 August 4. The UN Security Council extends UNAMSIL's mandate and agrees to a reinforcement of its military component (Resolution 1313).
- 2000 August 14. The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 1315 that recommends the setting up of a Special Court, which would have jurisdiction over suspected perpetrators of war crimes and human rights violations and would operate under both Sierra Leonean and international law.
- 2000 August 28. Kofi Annan recommends that UNAMSIL be increased to 20,500 troops, which would cost \$305 million more, bringing the UNAMSIL annual budget to \$780 million.
- 2000 September 20. India announces its intention to withdraw troops from UNAMSIL, soon followed by Jordan.
- 2000 November 10. Sierra Leone's government and the RUF agree to a cease-fire and to resume the peace process. They also agree that the UN Mission will be allowed to deploy freely in rebel held areas in order to supervise the cease-fire.
- 2000 December 20. The UN panel investigating illicit arms and diamond dealings with anti-government forces in Sierra Leone recommends a complete embargo on all diamonds from Liberia.
- 2001 January 1. The British announce that their troops will remain in Sierra Leone "until the RUF has been defeated by war or diplomacy".
- 2001 January 17. Kofi Annan cautions the Security Council that the Special Court has not yet received adequate funding from UN member states.
- 2001 January 30. Presidential and parliamentary elections are postponed because of the continuing insecurity in parts of the country.
- 2001 March 30. UN Security Council Resolution 1346 authorises the extension of UNAMSIL by six months and increases its military strength to 17,500.



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## About the International Crisis Group

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The International Crisis Group (ICG) is a private, multinational organisation committed to strengthening the capacity of the international community to anticipate, understand and act to prevent and contain conflict.

ICG's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts, based on the ground in countries at risk of conflict, gather information from a wide range of sources, assess local conditions and produce regular analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers.

ICG's reports are distributed widely to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made generally available at the same time via the organisation's internet site, [www.crisisweb.org](http://www.crisisweb.org). ICG works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analysis and to generate support for its policy prescriptions. The ICG Board - which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media - is directly involved in helping to bring ICG reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. ICG is chaired by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari; former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans has been President and Chief Executive since January 2000.

ICG's international headquarters are at Brussels, with advocacy offices in Washington DC, New York and Paris. The organisation currently operates field projects in eighteen crisis-affected countries and regions across three continents: Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia in Europe; Algeria, Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe in Africa; and Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in Asia.

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