

Appendix 2B. War and the failure of peacekeeping in Sierra Leone

WILLIAM RENO

I. Introduction

On 2 May 2000 members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) detained and disarmed a Zambian battalion of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) that had been sent to break the siege of Kenyan peacekeepers in Makeni. This incident effectively spelled the end of the Lomé Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF, signed on 7 July 1999 after over eight years of war.¹ Since then, all parties have returned to battle. In August 2000 the UN Secretary-General recommended increasing UNAMSIL's strength from 7500 to 20 500 troops.² The United Kingdom unilaterally sent warships and a commando battalion to Sierra Leone. Diplomats in other states put Charles Taylor, president of neighbouring Liberia, under pressure for allegedly aiding RUF forces.

These developments highlight the extent to which Sierra Leone's war has become part of a regional conflict. The breakdown of the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement also illustrates the difficulties facing conflict resolution: on the one hand, one must negotiate with those who have guns; on the other hand, all sides, but especially the RUF, use negotiations as an alternative means of rearming and expanding their influence. Finally, the course of events in Sierra Leone has demonstrated the role of the trade in diamonds in sustaining the conflict.

II. Background to the conflict

Sierra Leone's war dates back to March 1991 when a small force of RUF fighters, led by Foday Sankoh, a former Sierra Leone Army (SLA) corporal, crossed from Liberia into Sierra Leone. At the start of the war the RUF was lightly armed but the army was small. Siaka Stevens (president of the country from 1968 to 1985) was denied his office in a coup after elections in 1967; an army mutiny in 1968 restored the elected government. He then faced coup attempts in 1971 and 1974.³ Stevens thus relied for security on a paramilitary body, the Internal Security Unit (ISU), and groups of armed youths attached to his All People's Congress (APC), the country's sole legal party between 1977 and 1991. This strategy left the army with fewer than 3000 personnel by 1991.⁴ In addition, more than 300 of the best-trained troops were serving in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group

¹ See section III below. On the history of the conflict in Sierra Leone and peacekeeping efforts, see also successive editions of the SIPRI Yearbook.

² Under Security Council Resolution 1299 of 19 May 2000, UNAMSIL's strength was to increase to 13 000 in the interim. For pre-crisis figures, see United Nations, Third report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UN document S/2000/186, 7 Mar. 2000, annex; for post-crisis figures, see United Nations, Sixth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UN document S/2000/832, 24 Aug. 2000, para 50.

³ Turay, E. and Abraham, A., *The Sierra Leone Army: A Century of History* (Macmillan: London, 1987), pp. 136–71.

⁴ Ero, C., *Sierra Leone's Security Complex*, Conflict, Security and Development Group Working Paper no. 3 (Centre for Defence Studies, King's College, London: London, June 2000), p. 18.



Figure 2B. Map of Sierra Leone

(ECOMOG), formed in 1990 to establish peace in Liberia, and an additional 30 troops joined Operation Desert Storm to expel Iraq from Kuwait.

The RUF received backing from Charles Taylor, then head of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), which invaded Liberia on 24 December 1989 to overthrow the government of Samuel Doe. Taylor saw support for the RUF as an opportunity to expand his influence beyond the confines of Liberia. Subsequent reports allege that he personally benefited from the RUF's control over diamond resources in eastern Sierra Leone.⁵ It is more likely, however, that Taylor's support for the RUF in 1991 initially centred on using it as a proxy to weaken ECOMOG, which protected a

⁵ Partnership Africa Canada, *Sierra Leone: Diamonds and Human Security* (PAC: Ottawa, 2000); and US Congress, House of Representatives, International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Africa, 'Prepared Testimony of Howard F. Jeter, Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs: Sierra Leone and conflict diamonds', 9 Mar. 2000, URL <http://www.state.gov/www/policy_remarks/2000>. UN Security Council Resolution 1306 of 5 July 2000 bans the import from Sierra Leone of rough diamonds that are not certified by the Sierra Leone Government.

provisional government in Monrovia and blocked Taylor's attempt to install himself as the country's president. Sierra Leonean President Joseph Momoh had decided to allow an anti-Taylor coalition of Liberian dissidents to use Sierra Leone territory as a rear base. ECOMOG also used Freetown's Lungi international airport to operate air sorties against the NPFL in Liberia. Taylor's connections to the RUF later became more intense and continue to the present time. These developments also suggest that 'resource wars' are in fact not causes of conflict so much as an effect of it, at least in Sierra Leone.⁶

The SLA overthrew Momoh's government in April 1992. They complained that corruption among senior officers was preventing supplies from reaching front lines and that some APC members were secretly collaborating with the RUF to control economic assets. The coup leaders installed themselves as the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) under the leadership of Captain Valentine Strasser, who promised that the army would defeat the RUF.

By 1994 the NPRC had increased the SLA's strength to 14 000 soldiers, many of whom were recruited from among unemployed youth and those with experience in armed gangs associated with former APC politicians.⁷ The SLA did not end the war, however. Two years after the NPRC coup, a former NPRC minister observed: 'There developed an extraordinary identity of interests between NPRC [regime] and RUF [rebels]. This', he continued, 'was responsible for the *sobel* phenomenon, i.e., government soldiers by day became rebels by night'.⁸ Army predations became so serious that the NPRC warned that elements of the army were disloyal.⁹

Unable to fight the RUF effectively, the NPRC engaged private security companies—in 1995 Gurkha Security Guards Limited, and later Executive Outcomes, a South African firm. The NPRC government also began arming pro-government militias, known as Kamajor and later constituted as the Civil Defence Force (CDF). Executive Outcomes succeeded in securing most of the country's population centres and economically valuable areas, including alluvial diamond mining fields, which the RUF had captured in late 1994 and early 1995.¹⁰

Executive Outcomes' intervention, while militarily effective in the short term, created serious long-term political complications in Sierra Leone's war. First, greater security provided opportunities for societal groups to organize to force the NPRC to deliver on promises that Momoh had made to allow multi-party elections to install a civilian president. International organizations and foreign diplomats exerted considerable pressure on NPRC officials to hold elections. They were held in February 1996. Second, factions within the SLA feared that Executive Outcomes would replace the army. This encouraged some SLA soldiers to identify their interests more closely with the RUF. Third, the offensive against the RUF forced rebel fighters to seek closer ties with Charles Taylor for aid. Once Taylor became president of Liberia in 1997, and foreign aid failed to appear, the connection between the RUF and Taylor became much tighter as Taylor had to focus on exploiting commercial opportunities

⁶ Collier, P., *Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy* (World Bank: Washington, DC, 15 June 2000); and Berdal, M. and Malone, D. (eds), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Lynne Rienner: Boulder, 2000).

⁷ Musah, A., 'A country under siege: state decay and corporate military intervention in Sierra Leone', eds A. Musah and J. Fayemi, *Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma* (Pluto: London, 2000), p. 86.

⁸ Abraham, A., 'War and transition to peace: a study of state conspiracy in perpetuating armed conflict', *African Development*, vol. 22, no. 3/4 (1997), p. 103.

⁹ Barrett, L., 'Instability grows', *West Africa*, 30 Jan. 1995, p. 140.

¹⁰ Hooper, J., 'Peace in Sierra Leone: a temporary outcome', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Feb. 1997), pp. 91–96.

in the diamond trade in order to generate the political resources he needed to keep his associates in line.

The elected president, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), inherited these political dilemmas. Unsure of SLA loyalty (and facing at least two coup attempts between taking office in March 1996 and May 1997), Kabbah relied on CDF forces for his security and to fight the RUF. He also faced international pressure to negotiate with the RUF to end the war—a prospect made more attractive to Kabbah by the setbacks the RUF had suffered. The RUF demanded Executive Outcomes' departure as a precondition for signing the Abidjan accords in November 1996.¹¹

Government reliance on CDF forces became even more intense when Executive Outcomes left Sierra Leone in January 1997. This aggravated tensions between the SLA and the Kabbah Government. Elements of the SLA overthrew the government on 25 May 1997. The RUF welcomed the coup and formed an alliance, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), with the SLA faction's head, Major Johnny Paul Koroma. Koroma named Sankoh his deputy (despite the fact that he had been detained in Nigeria since March 1997 where he had travelled to discuss the stalemate in the peace process) and appointed RUF members to cabinet positions.

This event further internationalized Sierra Leone's war. Most West African governments refused to recognize the AFRC, pitting the ECOMOG contingent (which included about 4000 soldiers, almost all of them Nigerian, and which remained in western parts of Freetown and at Lungi airport¹²) against the AFRC regime. Guinea and Nigeria contributed about 10 000 troops to fight the AFRC, finally reinstalling Kabbah in February 1998.¹³ ECOMOG and Nigeria became even more central to the Kabbah Government's security after its restoration, underscored by Kabbah's appointment in mid-April 1998 of Nigerian Brigadier Max Khobe as Chief of Defense Staff in charge of national security.

This event also marked an intensification of human rights abuses, which were already considerable before the 25 May 1997 coup. Once in power, the RUF and the AFRC singled out suspected Kabbah supporters and men of voting and fighting age, among others, for mutilation. Eye-witnesses and victims reported that amputees were commonly given directions to deliver verbal messages to others that the AFRC and RUF would resist international pressure to give up power, and to release Sankoh from Nigerian custody. Mutilations continued after Kabbah's return, reportedly to discourage citizens from giving political or military help to the restored government.¹⁴

While in exile in Guinea, Kabbah contacted the private company Sandline International to provide arms to ECOMOG forces fighting to restore his regime. This was in spite of UN sanctions against all parties to the war in Sierra Leone. Allegations later surfaced that Sandline operated as a proxy of the British Government, which was intent on restoring the elected regime.¹⁵ This development highlighted differences

¹¹ United Nations, Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone, UN document S/1996/1034, annex, 30 Nov. 1996.

¹² Aboagye, F. (Lt-Col), *ECOMOG: A Sub-Regional Experience in Conflict Resolution, Management and Peacekeeping in Liberia* (SEDCO: Accra, 1999), pp. 161, 246.

¹³ United Nations, First report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone, UN document S/1998/750, 12 Aug. 1998, para. 15. Guinea's troops arrived under a separate agreement based on successive long-term security agreements with Sierra Leone's governments.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, 'Sierra Leone: sowing terror. Atrocities against civilians in Sierra Leone', Report, New York, July 1998.

¹⁵ British House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, *Report and Proceedings of the Committee: Second Report, Sierra Leone*, vol. 1 (Her Majesty's Stationery Office: London, Feb. 1999), HC 116-I.

between British and UN diplomats over how to end the war in Sierra Leone. After Kabbah's return to Freetown, Britain became Sierra Leone's largest arms supplier after an amendment of the UN sanctions in 1998 permitted arms transfers to the country's government. The latter used these connections to provide more arms to the CDF and to support ECOMOG's battles against the ex-SLAs of the AFRC and RUF.

III. The Lomé Peace Agreement¹⁶

Highlighting the extent to which outsiders influenced the Sierra Leone Government's conduct of the war, Kabbah again negotiated with the RUF when it became clear that ECOMOG's Nigerian contingent would leave Sierra Leone following elections in Nigeria in 1999. (2000 Nigerian troops were incorporated into UNAMSIL in November 1999.¹⁷) ECOMOG forces had also discovered that the RUF was not easily defeated. The RUF had expelled ECOMOG from the Kono diamond fields in December 1998. Elements of the AFRC regime and the RUF even managed to occupy Freetown for a few days in January 1999. They forced Kabbah to flee once again until an ECOMOG counteroffensive dislodged the invaders. The RUF also captured the northern provincial capital of Makeni in late December 1998, and still held it in early 2001.

Nigeria's new civilian government, which took over in May 1999, recognized that it lacked the resources to defeat the rebels, especially while other states in the region provided covert support to the RUF. For Nigeria, the only pragmatic solution was to engage in dialogue with the rebels. Negotiations took place under ECOWAS auspices and eventually included the Liberian and Burkinabe presidents, both of whom had supported the RUF in the past. It was against this background that Sankoh was released from Nigerian custody on 18 April 1999 and flown to Lomé, the capital of Togo, to begin peace negotiations with the Kabbah Government.

On 7 July 1999 the Kabbah Government and the RUF signed the Lomé Peace Agreement, which mandated the disarming of all warring groups, the appointment of RUF members to cabinet positions, the conversion of the RUF into a political party, and Sankoh's appointment as vice-president and director of the Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction, and Development (CMRRD), which was to regulate the issuing of diamond mining licences.¹⁸

Recognizing the danger that the RUF might prevail militarily, US State Department officials allegedly applied pressure on the Kabbah Government to negotiate an agreement with the RUF, a move that was to become controversial after the collapse of the Lomé agreement in 2000.¹⁹ US interests played an important role at this point because they translated into support for diplomatic initiatives of ECOMOG. Sierra Leone would also become a test case for the diplomatic and military support of non-African states for strategies to deal with conflicts in so-called collapsed states. The USA would stake out a role of negotiation and limited commitment, in contrast to the UK's strategy of direct military engagement. The British strategy is examined below.

¹⁶ Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone, 7 July 1999, available at URL <<http://www.sierra-leone.org/documents.html>>.

¹⁷ Adeyemi, S., 'UNAMSIL: a long road to peace', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol. 12, no. 4 (Apr. 2000), p. 42.

¹⁸ Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (note 16), Article VII.

¹⁹ US Senate, Africa Subcommittee, *United States Policy in Sierra Leone* (US Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 11 Oct. 2000).

Explanations of the US role vary. One interpretation holds that the Clinton Administration valued the appearance of order without regard for the nature of the government that ruled Sierra Leone. A US-sponsored peace agreement would remove Sierra Leone from public attention as the USA appeared to address crises in Africa while ensuring that its resources and soldiers would not be committed to an African problem.²⁰ The Freetown press stressed the coercive aspects of the US role and even claimed that Kabbah had been 'kidnapped' by US officials and forced to sign the Lomé agreement, and that the agreement was in large part written by an official of the US Agency for International Development (USAID).²¹

Another interpretation focuses on Charles Taylor's relationship with the RUF and asserts that the RUF and Taylor are exploiting the collapse of Sierra Leone as a state. They manipulate international agencies into believing that the RUF will transform itself into a political party. In fact, their objective is to solidify control over mining areas for their own profit and to increase Taylor's regional political influence. Some UN officials and officials in foreign states have tolerated this deception because they recognize that financial and manpower backing for a large-scale peace enforcement effort was unlikely. Others have viewed Sierra Leone uncritically, assuming that the parties to the conflict would recognize a coalition government and would obey the terms of the Lomé agreement. Critics, on the other hand, regard conflict in collapsed states as fundamentally different from wars between ideological rivals which mobilize mass followings and build 'liberated zones' to practise their ideas of governance.²²

Some Sierra Leoneans regarded the positions taken by UN and foreign diplomats who stressed reconciliation as offensive. They pointed out that US diplomats had branded Sankoh as a violator of human rights and made statements that stressed rebel violations of international law.²³ They noted that a year earlier the UN Security Council had condemned 'as gross violations of international humanitarian law the recent atrocities carried out against the civilian population . . . of Sierra Leone by members of the Revolutionary United Front and the deposed junta'.²⁴ The Lomé agreement included a provision for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (which was never implemented)—a point that highlighted inconsistencies in international approaches to Sierra Leone's war and a cycle of foreign backing for the Sierra Leone Government to fight the RUF alternating with pressure on it to negotiate.

RUF agents recognized these alternating strategies. At the very least, this caused them to distrust the stated intentions both of the Sierra Leone Government and of the UN as the guarantor of the Lomé agreement. RUF spokesmen recalled that the February 1998 ECOMOG offensive against the RUF and its SLA allies preceded an agreement that the AFRC had made to hand over power to Kabbah in April 1998, and recognized the indirect role that the British Government played in supplying

²⁰ Lizza, R., 'Where angels fear to tread', *New Republic*, 24 July 2000, pp. 22–27.

²¹ 'Clinton forced Kabbah to sign Lomé accord!', *For di People* (Freetown), 18 July 2000, p. 1. On US State Department coaching of Sankoh, see 'Waiting for Sankoh', *Africa Energy & Mining*, 3 May 2000, p. 3.

²² This view appears in articles by James Rupert in the *Washington Post* and in editorials in the *New York Times*. From Sierra Leone, see 'Is Kabba a collaborator?', *The Democrat* (Freetown), 23 Aug. 2000, p. 1; and series, 'Nine years of senseless war,' *For di People*, 22–30 Mar. 2000. Sierra Leone's press publishes valuable interviews and eyewitness accounts. Some journalists provide political analysis that is among the most accurate of non-classified sources.

²³ US Department of State, 'Statement by James P Rubin, Sierra Leone: rebel atrocities against civilians', Press release, 12 May 1998.

²⁴ United Nations, Statement by the President of the Security Council, UN document S/PRST/1998/13, 20 May 1998, para. 2.

ECOMOG. They recalled that Kabbah's Government tried 58 defendants in mid-1998. All defendants, charged with treason, murder and arson, faced execution. The Nigerian authorities produced Sankoh, who was also charged with treason.²⁵ As noted above, he was only released on 18 April to attend the Lomé meetings, and did not receive a full pardon until 29 May 1999. Demonstrating his unwillingness to trust the Sierra Leone Government, Sankoh remained in Lomé until 3 October 1999, the point at which UN officials formally committed themselves to deploy UNAMSIL.²⁶

IV. The failure of the Lomé agreement

The Lomé agreement failed to end the country's war and in some ways contributed to its continuation. Its main shortcoming lay in the inability of the UNAMSIL peace-keeping force to enforce the terms of the agreement in the face of RUF non-compliance. UNAMSIL contingents began to lose their weapons to RUF fighters soon after the first contingent, a unit from Kenya, arrived on 29 November 1999. A Guinea contingent lost approximately 500 AK-47 rifles, other weapons and several tons of ammunition.²⁷ Some Sierra Leone journalists suspected that in fact Guinea's soldiers sold their weapons to the RUF.²⁸ Kenyan units were relieved of their weapons on two occasions in January 2000. Later incidents also involved weapons taken by members of the ex-SLA.²⁹ The largest loss of weapons occurred in conjunction with RUF attacks on UNAMSIL contingents that began on 2 May 2000, the date when the last of the Nigerian ECOMOG troops left Sierra Leone. A remaining Nigerian contingent attached to UNAMSIL also lost weapons to the RUF. A more significant loss occurred among a Zambian battalion sent to relieve the Kenyans under siege. These losses appeared to rival those of the Guineans in January.³⁰

The UNAMSIL crisis in May 2000 highlighted President Taylor's role in providing weapons to the RUF. This reflected a continuing longer-term relationship, in which Taylor served as a commercial channel for RUF-supplied diamonds mined in Sierra Leone.³¹ The RUF attacks and the detention of UNAMSIL peacekeepers raised the level of diplomatic attention to this connection. This increasing pressure on Taylor and earlier restrictions on financial aid to Liberia from abroad probably increased Taylor's reliance on this source of income. Himself a former 'warlord' who was elected to office in 1997 as a result of an agreement similar to Lomé, Taylor faced considerable threats to his security. During the course of 1999, he spent 80 per cent of

²⁵ Freetown Magistrate's Court, *The Inspector General of Police vs Cpl Foday Saybana Sankoh*, 4 Sep. 1998.

²⁶ UN Security Council Resolution 1270, 22 Oct. 1999 mandated the expansion of the UN's hitherto civilian observation mission, UNOMSIL to include 6000 peacekeepers. See also Dwan, R., 'Armed conflict prevention, management and resolution', *SIPRI Yearbook 2000: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2000), p. 88; and Dwan, R. *et al.*, 'Multilateral peace missions, 1999', *SIPRI Yearbook 2000*, p. 138.

²⁷ United Nations, Third report (note 2), para. 11.

²⁸ 'Kabbah bungles', *For di People*, 16 Feb. 2000, p. 1.

²⁹ United Nations, Fourth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UN document S/2000/455, 19 May 2000, para. 19. See also more generally Berman, E., *Rearmament in Sierra Leone: One Year After the Lomé Peace Agreement* (Small Arms Survey, Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies: Geneva, Dec. 2000).

³⁰ United Nations, Fourth report (note 29), para. 61.

³¹ United Nations, Report of the Panel of Experts appointed pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), UN document S/2000/1195, 20 Dec. 2000, paras 19 and 181-94.

formal state revenues of \$55 million on his paramilitary forces and was estimated to have had access to upwards of \$125 million annually from Sierra Leone.³²

In return, Taylor reportedly harboured RUF commander Sam ('Maskita') Bockarie in Liberia, where Bockarie allegedly recruited Liberians and others to fight with the RUF in Sierra Leone. A journalist reported that small arms, ammunition and Liberian fighters were crossing into Sierra Leone in June 2000.³³ Numerous sources highlighted specific commercial links between Taylor, Sierra Leone's diamonds and the RUF.³⁴ US officials also confronted Taylor about this activity.³⁵

The RUF's relationship with Taylor demonstrated the importance of control over diamonds in its overall strategy. Assistance from its Liberian patron is tied to RUF occupation of diamond-mining areas in Kono district and elsewhere. The long-term political implications of this reliance for the RUF have been considerable. Instead of attracting and mobilizing a popular following in Sierra Leone after 1991 to overthrow the corrupt and inept government, RUF commanders found that they could fight the government with guns bought with diamonds, brought from Liberia or captured from their enemies. They did not have to rely on the goodwill of local inhabitants or the contributions of their energies and wealth, or take on the arduous political and organizational task of building a mass movement to fight their way to power.

The RUF's failure to build a political movement also increased its reliance on diamonds and assistance from Liberia to resist the blandishments of the Sierra Leone Government and international actors that Sankoh and others so distrusted. This meant that the RUF could not satisfy the key provision of the Lomé agreement—that it permit UNAMSIL peacekeepers to control these areas. Nor could its fighters report to disarmament centres without the RUF giving up its primary source of power.³⁶ The crisis of May 2000 occurred in the wake of UNAMSIL attempts to unilaterally occupy areas in the Kono and Kambia districts, outside the limited territory under government control, after several previously announced deadlines passed.

Disarmament figures also reflected RUF non-compliance with the Lomé agreement. By the start of the 2 May hostilities, the UN reported that 24 042 ex-combatants (out of approximately 45 000) had been disarmed: 4949 from the RUF, 10 055 from AFRC/ex-SLAs, and 9038 from the CDF. By UN admission, the 24 042 former combatants surrendered only 10 840 weapons.³⁷ The Freetown press, suspicious of these figures, reiterated widespread popular suspicions that the RUF was manipulating the disarmament process to its own advantage and intimidating UNAMSIL officials and predicted violent confrontation with UNAMSIL.³⁸ It is likely that fighters reported to disarmament centres to collect \$300 bounties for appearing. Even so, UN officials

³² On Taylor's security spending, see Ero (note 4). On claims regarding his commercial revenues, see Holbrooke, R. (US ambassador to the UN), 'Statement before the UN Security Council's exploratory hearings on Sierra Leone diamonds', 31 July 2000, URL <<http://www.usinfo.state.gov/topical/usandun/holb0731.htm>>.

³³ Farah, D., 'Liberia reportedly arming guerrillas: rebel control of Sierra Leone diamond-mining areas crucial to Monrovia, sources say', *Washington Post*, 18 June 2000, p. A21.

³⁴ E.g., 'Godfather to the rebels', *Africa Confidential*, 23 June 2000, pp. 1–3.

³⁵ 'Cross-border crisis', *Africa Confidential*, 21 July 2000, p. 2.

³⁶ The RUF reiterated its insistence on controlling mining areas during negotiations. RUF, 'Lasting peace in Sierra Leone, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF–SL) perspective and vision' (mimeograph) 1 May 1999.

³⁷ United Nations, Fourth report (note 29), para. 26.

³⁸ A 1-day sample includes Hughes, C., 'Kabba's monster', *The Democrat*, 24 Mar. 2000, pp. 1–2; 'Real life', *For di People*, 24 Mar. 2000, p. 2; and Samai, J., 'Kabbah's weakness', *Concord Times*, 24 Mar. 2000, p. 2. Non-Sierra Leonean officials expressed suspicions of these figures in conversations with the author.

reported that, although all factions tried to prevent their fighters disarming and to punish those who did, the RUF did so more systematically and violently.³⁹ RUF fighters who did disarm tended to be from the dissident Dennis Mingo faction and did not significantly weaken the RUF's capabilities on the battlefield.⁴⁰

This imbalance in disarmament helped to widen a split between the RUF and its weakened ex-SLA allies. Ex-SLA head and former AFRC leader Johnny Paul Koroma stated that the RUF 'used us to benefit from Lomé', as the agreement made no offer of government positions to ex-SLAs.⁴¹ Now calling themselves the West Side Boyz,⁴² ex-SLAs also complained that self-awarded 'jungle ranks' received no official recognition and that those who reported for disarmament often did not find jobs in the government army. This fear proved realistic, especially after the arrival of approximately 600 British soldiers in May 2000 (a deployment eventually stabilizing at about 225 soldiers to retrain a new Sierra Leone Army). AFRC membership disqualified candidates. Ex-SLAs also were more likely to be forcibly disarmed as a result of violent encounters with opponents than were other groups. This reflected the relative military weakness of this group and their inability to secure backing from external patrons, as had the Sierra Leone Government, the RUF and elements of the CDF (which benefited from financial connections to overseas Sierra Leoneans).

Ex-SLA grievances against the RUF stemmed from the AFRC's expulsion from Freetown in 1998, after which Koroma was held for 18 months at an RUF base in Kailahun district under the control of Commander Bockarie (although this did not end joint ex-SLA/RUF attacks). Koroma claimed that he was mistreated and that negotiators at Lomé were uncritical about RUF claims that Koroma was second-in-command of an AFRC–RUF alliance. Clashes between ex-SLAs and the RUF became increasingly frequent after the signing of the Lomé agreement, culminating before the agreement broke down in a nine-day battle starting on 21 March 2000.⁴³

V. Back to war and British intervention

The RUF's attacks on and the detention of 500 UNAMSIL peacekeepers starting on 2 May 2000 signalled the end of the Lomé agreement. Sankoh reiterated in a letter to foreign and Sierra Leonean officials that the RUF had not received all the state offices provided for under the agreement.⁴⁴ The RUF's main complaints centred on the allocation of diplomatic posts and para-statal positions. Critics speculated that RUF officials aimed to use these posts to do business overseas under the cover of diplomatic immunity in order to avoid heavy reliance on Taylor and his associates, who were taking large cuts in the proceeds from diamond transactions.⁴⁵ A more apparent interest lay in soothing international qualms about the grant of amnesty in the Lomé

³⁹ UN, Fourth report (note 29), paras 30, 31 and 57.

⁴⁰ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Sierra Leone humanitarian situation report, special issue Mar. 2000', 7 Mar. 2000, available at URL <<http://reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf>>.

⁴¹ 'Junta leader regrets rebel alliance!', *For di People*, 31 Jan. 2000, p. 1.

⁴² The term 'West Side Boyz' refers to ex-SLA affiliation with 'West' in the US gangsta rap commercial war between Death Row Records ('West') and Bad Boy Records ('East'), and the music of Tupac Shakur. RUF and ex-SLA fighters wore Tupac Shakur T-shirts as uniforms in attacks in late 1998 and early 1999.

⁴³ 'When will RUF attack?', *For di People*, 14 Apr. 2000, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Sankoh, F., 'The Lomé peace agreement', 24 Feb. 2000. Correspondence available at URL <www.sierra-leone.org>.

⁴⁵ From documents and correspondence recovered from Sankoh's residence in Freetown after his 8 May flight.

agreement, and reflected Sankoh's continuing deep suspicion about the motives of the Sierra Leone Government and fears that the amnesty agreement would not protect him.

Sankoh went into hiding on 8 May after a crowd attacked his Freetown residence. He was captured 10 days later. Declared by all other parties as unfit to participate in further negotiations, Sankoh remains in the custody of the Sierra Leone Government and is now liable for prosecution under the terms of a proposed war crimes tribunal.⁴⁶ Plans for the tribunal reversed the Lomé agreement's blanket amnesty and left open the possibility of prosecuting defendants who would have been exempted under the terms of the Lomé agreement.⁴⁷ This debate may reinforce RUF perceptions that the Sierra Leone Government and its backers jettison bargains when they find the resources and political will to fight, and seek agreements when these elements are missing.

Britain stepped up bilateral assistance to the Sierra Leone Government, eventually adding 550 military personnel to the 15 British military observers assigned to UNAMSIL. Operating under British command, these paratroopers and marines supported the Sierra Leone Army and pro-government militias in the defence of Freetown against the RUF. During June and July approximately 250 personnel under the auspices of the British International Military Advisory Training Team (IMATT) joined the approximately 400 British troops that remained stationed around Freetown and aboard a naval ship off the coast. The IMATT objective is to train a new Sierra Leone Army so that it can conquer territory that UNAMSIL could then occupy. By late December, an estimated 4500 Sierra Leone Army troops had completed the British training programme.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, the UN Secretary-General proposed increasing UNAMSIL's force strength to 20 500.⁴⁹ This increase did not occur while UNAMSIL was plagued by bitter internal disputes. In mid-October the Indian and Jordanian contingents, together numbering almost 5000 personnel, signalled their intentions to depart by February 2001. As of mid-December 2000, even before Indian and Jordanian withdrawals, the UNAMSIL force level stood at only 12 455.⁵⁰ The Indian decision followed the leaking of a document written by UNAMSIL's commander, Major-General Vijay Jetley, in which he claimed that the Nigerian contingent undermined the effectiveness of UNAMSIL. Jetley charged that 'the Nigerian Army was interested in staying in Sierra Leone due to the massive benefits they were getting from the illegal diamond mining', which they carried out through an arrangement with the RUF. He also charged that the former ECOMOG commander, General Khobe (who had also served as the Sierra Leone Army's Chief of Defence Staff), had accepted \$10 million from the RUF to allow mining activities without interference.⁵¹

An additional reason for the departure of the Indian and Jordanian contingents was the inability of the UN and the UNAMSIL commander to use military means to preempt RUF attacks on them or to launch military operations against the RUF once

⁴⁶ Under the authority of UN Security Council Resolution 1315, 14 Aug. 2000.

⁴⁷ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on the establishment of a Special Court for Sierra Leone, UN document S/2000/915, 4 Oct. 2000, para. 21. See also chapter 2, section II in this volume.

⁴⁸ British Parliament, House of Lords, 'Statement of Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean', *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 10 Oct. 2000, col. 170.

⁴⁹ United Nations, Sixth report (note 2), para. 31.

⁵⁰ United Nations, Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UN document S/2000/1199, 15 Dec. 2000, para. 26, force level found on chart, p. 12.

⁵¹ Jetley, V. (Maj.-Gen.), 'Report on the crisis in Sierra Leone', May 2000, para. 3, available at URL <www.sierra-leone.org>.

soldiers had been kidnapped. The peacekeeping mandate of UNAMSIL and the militaries contributing soldiers did not envision combat of this sort, nor were UNAMSIL personnel equipped or given logistical support to engage in sustained combat.⁵²

VI. Multiplying factions and contention in peacekeeping

The British approach to Sierra Leone's conflict involved considerably greater use of violence against anti-government forces than UNAMSIL was willing to use. British forces attacked ex-SLA groups in Okra Hills on 30 August and 10 September 2000 to release British personnel who had been kidnapped on 25 August in connection with what appeared to be ex-SLA grievances about not being included in the British military training programme, and to press demands for food, medicine and the release of one of their commanders from prison in Freetown.⁵³

The kidnapping episode also exposed a factional split among the ex-SLAs. The kidnappers were loyal to Foday Kallay, who claimed to be the leader of the ex-SLAs after Johnny Paul Koroma left them to take a government post in Freetown.⁵⁴

IMATT training exercises appear to have generated grievances among CDF members who also fear that they will have no role in a reconstituted Sierra Leone Army, since they are excluded as a group from participation in these training programmes. Unlike ex-SLAs and most in the RUF, CDF forces tend to come from the communities where they are based. This may help moderate their abuses of local populations, although human rights abuses on their part remain considerable.⁵⁵ Their increasingly marginal role in the defence of Kabbah's Government, however, may underlie increasing reports of CDF attacks on UNAMSIL.⁵⁶

The actions of British forces also created tensions between them and UNAMSIL. For example, the 42 Commando Group Royal Marines staged military exercises around Freetown on 13 November following the 10 November signing of a UNAMSIL-brokered one-month ceasefire agreement between the RUF and Sierra Leone Government officials that was to allow UNAMSIL to travel throughout Sierra Leone. The military exercise was to 'remind the leadership of RUF of the need to honour that agreement', said the British commander.⁵⁷

As of mid-December, UNAMSIL peacekeepers had not deployed into RUF-held areas, despite ceasefire provisions. This generated more tension between UN and British military officers. 'It is as if the UN leadership has learned nothing from previous experiences', said a British officer in reference to UNAMSIL unwillingness to deploy. A senior UN officer replied that 'If the British want war, they can have it and we will leave',⁵⁸ underscoring both the UN position that peacekeepers can intervene only with consent from all parties, and continued RUF intransigence on the issue of UNAMSIL's access to RUF-controlled territory.

⁵² See also chapter 2, section II.

⁵³ Jalloh, A., 'Their west side, our side', *Concord Times*, 6 Sep. 2000, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Acknowledged in United Nations, Seventh report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UN document S/2000/1055, 31 Oct. 2000, para. 16.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch, 'New evidence of atrocities in Sierra Leone', Press release, New York, 30 Nov. 2000.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Thomas, R., 'Kamajors, Guinean soldiers clash', *Concord Times*, 17 Aug. 2000, p. 1.

⁵⁷ British Ministry of Defence Situation Report, 13 Nov. 2000, URL <<http://www.mod.uk/index.php3?page=493>>.

⁵⁸ Farah, D., 'A separate peacekeeping', *New York Times*, 10 Dec. 2000, p. A42.

UNAMSIL, like British support for the Sierra Leone Government, has contributed to the multiplication of factions. The RUF's failure to disarm and attacks on UNAMSIL, an intransigence that Sankoh had backed up with his words, coupled with international pressure for him to face trial for crimes against humanity, disqualified him for future negotiations on behalf of the RUF. UN officials sought a new interlocutor, despite the continuing loyalty of many RUF fighters to Sankoh.⁵⁹ Issa Sesay was 'elected' the RUF's new head as UN officials signalled that they would talk to him. The spokesman for one faction of the RUF, Gibril Massaquoi, stated, however, that '90 percent were taking orders from Maurice Kallon', a commander in northern Sierra Leone loyal to Sankoh.⁶⁰ An RUF commander likewise stated: 'General Issa has betrayed them [fighters] and they now have nothing to do with him as they will continue the struggle'.⁶¹ Fighting later broke out between RUF factions in Kailahun district, which also drew in fighters loyal to Sam Bockarie, the RUF commander in eastern Sierra Leone with close ties to Liberian President Taylor.⁶² Bockarie appears to head his own faction in the east but to cooperate with Kallon.

Taylor allegedly maintains close connections with the Bockarie and Kallon factions to pursue an offensive against Guinea, signalling a major regional expansion of this war. That he is linked to this expansion of the war is an analysis that the UN Security Council shares.⁶³ Starting in October 2000, RUF attacks into Guinea became more intense, especially in the Kambia area.⁶⁴ There was strong feeling among British officers that, concurrent with the arrival of a UN field team in Sierra Leone, RUF strategy focused on forcing the UN and the Sierra Leone Government to again make peace with the RUF, but in such a way as to leave the RUF in control of significant territory. In the event of a post-agreement election, the RUF would be in a position to intimidate citizens into voting for it, much as Taylor had done in Liberia in 1997. The international community would then consider Sierra Leone 'stable', leaving the RUF in control of the country, or so some in the British contingent suspect.⁶⁵

VII. Conflict resolution in a stateless polity

Sierra Leone's conflict highlights problems associated with conflict resolution in regions that are marginal to the strategic concerns of powerful states, especially since the conflict has become more internationalized through its connections to Taylor. Both the UN and the British forces have found it difficult to respond to and influence autonomous militias, whether pro- or anti-government. Those that they face shift

⁵⁹ Personal communications with United Nations Office of the Under-Secretary for Political Affairs, May–Oct. 2000. See also United Nations, Report of the Security Council Mission to Sierra Leone, UN document S/2000/992, 16 Oct. 2000, para. 54(a).

⁶⁰ Agence France-Presse, 21 Nov. 2000. See also United Nations, Seventh report (note 54), para. 2.

⁶¹ 'Massive recruitment', *Standard Times* (Freetown), 1 Aug. 2000, p. 1.

⁶² 'RUF fights over leadership in Kailahun', *Standard Times*, 1 Sep. 2000, p. 1. See also UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Sierra Leone humanitarian situation report', 6 Dec. 2000, URL <<http://reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf>>.

⁶³ United Nations, Statement by the President of the Security Council, UN document S/PRST/2000/41, 21 Dec. 2000.

⁶⁴ Taylor appeared to be using conflict in north-eastern Liberia as an opportunity to resupply the RUF while backing Ahmed Touré, a dissident Guinean who vowed to overthrow the regime of Guinean President Lansana Conté. In fighting since Oct., dissident Guinean forces backed by RUF incursions have been joined by members of an army faction that staged an unsuccessful revolt against Conté in 1996. Conversations with a Western diplomat, 21 Nov. 2000 and 8 Dec. 2000.

⁶⁵ Communication with a British officer, 15 Oct. and 20 Nov. 2000.

allegiances and may simultaneously fight and profess an alliance to the same organization. As British officers discovered after the August kidnapping of British personnel by the West Side Boyz, when force is used against multiplying decentralized opponents there is no 'army' that can surrender. Thus force in this context is only punishment. Victory requires physical occupation and administration. To defeat the multiple factions of the RUF, the CDF and the West Side Boyz by military means alone would require the use of force at levels that are prohibited by the conventions of warfare and international agreements.

The British solution to this dilemma involves a lengthy commitment. Jonathan Riley, the British Force Commander in Sierra Leone, said: 'We will leave when the war is either won or resolved on favourable terms'.⁶⁶ Heir to the institutional legacy of British rule of the hinterland of Sierra Leone from 1898 to 1961, British Prime Minister Tony Blair's administration appears to have clear ideas about how to prosecute a war in what is essentially a stateless society. Former colonial officers have participated in discussions concerning British political strategies for engaging Sierra Leoneans.⁶⁷ A former colonial district commissioner, for example, returned to Sierra Leone to engage in chieftaincy consultations to gain a political-anthropological understanding of the multiple grievances that lead members of communities to take up arms and to build support for Kabbah's regime among 'traditional' authorities.⁶⁸

The UN approach of engaging factions in ceasefires and peace negotiations gives more explicit recognition of the limits of the use of force in this context. This strategy accommodates the limited mandate of UN peacekeepers to use force against local groups and the unwillingness of officers of foreign military contingents or their political masters back home to have their troops used for combat. This limited mandate constrains UNAMSIL's use of intelligence and analysis—much to the ire of British military officers and many Sierra Leoneans—in contrast to British officers, who are better able to act on such information.

Both approaches face serious constraints. On the one hand, it is uncertain whether a post-Blair administration in Britain will possess the political will to remain engaged in Sierra Leone for many years. The British Parliament during the colonial era was sceptical about the value of British involvement in Sierra Leone (and in 1865 proposed abandoning the colony altogether). It is less clear if British voters will countenance a long engagement. On the other hand, the UN preference for negotiation poses a high probability of Sierra Leone being left in the control of groups known for grave human rights abuses. Departure on these terms would humiliate UN officials and seriously undermine the credibility of future peacekeeping missions. If the above analysis of Taylor's strategy is correct, RUF control in Sierra Leone would also lead to destabilization and war in Guinea.

In any event, it is highly likely that Sierra Leone's war will continue and that it will continue to be a defining case of outside intervention in wars in stateless areas well out of proportion to Sierra Leone's size or strategic importance.

⁶⁶ Quoted at URL <www.sierra-leone.org/news>.

⁶⁷ Author's personal observation and discussion with former colonial officers connected with current British policy efforts.

⁶⁸ Personal communication, 20 Nov. 2000. This follows British colonial practice from West Africa.