

United Nations Arms Embargoes

Their Impact on Arms Flows and Target Behaviour

Case study: Sierra Leone, 1997–present

Paul Holtom

sipri

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
2007

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This is one of a series of case studies on United Nations arms embargoes. Drawing on the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database and other open sources, these case studies analyse arms flows before, during and after a UN arms embargo has been established. These case studies were researched and written by members of the SIPRI Arms Transfers Project to inform a report by SIPRI and the Uppsala University Special Program on the Implementation of Targeted Sanctions (SPITS), *United Nations Arms Embargoes: Their Impact on Arms Flows and Target Behaviour* (SIPRI: Stockholm, 2007). This report and the case studies are available at <http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=356>.

The research was carried out between November 2006 and July 2007 and was funded by a special grant from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

I. Introduction

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) started the Sierra Leone civil war when they invaded with support from Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) in March 1991. The brutal civil war was primarily fought for control of Sierra Leone's mineral resources, in particular its diamonds. During the civil war (1991–2002) three military coups succeeded in deposing the sitting government in April 1992, February 1996 and May 1997. The last of these military coups drew sharp international criticism, because it removed the democratically elected president, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, from power. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) immediately called for the military junta to restore Kabbah to power. Its efforts failed and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1132 (1997) established an arms embargo on Sierra Leone. The military junta was subsequently removed from power in February 1998 by ECOWAS troops based in Sierra Leone. Shortly after Kabbah's return to power, UNSC Resolution 1171 (1998) amended the arms embargo to apply only to non-governmental forces in Sierra Leone. Its impact was limited as RUF forces took control of large parts of Sierra Leone in 1998–99. International military force once again played a decisive role in forcing the RUF to negotiate for peace in 2000–2001. The war was officially declared over in January 2002, but the arms embargo remains in place.

This case study begins with a brief outline in section II of the main actors in Sierra Leone's civil war and the role of other West African actors. Some of the main suspected arms transfer relationships are also discussed. Section III considers the targets, scope, coverage and demands of the UNSC arms embargoes imposed on Sierra Leone in 1997 and on only rebel forces in Sierra Leone from 1998 onwards. The monitoring and enforcing of the arms embargo is discussed, along with suspected transfers to the targeted actors during the embargo period. The paper concludes with some thoughts on the obstacles to achieving the aims of the arms embargo and its impact on target behaviour.

II. Background

The origins of the Sierra Leone civil war (1991–2002) have been widely discussed, with a range of historical, cultural/ethnic, political, social and economic factors cited as underlying causes of a conflict that claimed an estimated 75 000 lives, displaced 2.4 million people (more than half of Sierra Leone's population) and left hundreds of thousands of people crippled for life.¹ The proximate cause for the March 1991 invasion of eastern and southern Sierra Leone by Foday Sankoh's RUF and elements of Charles Taylor's NPFL forces was the involvement of Sierra Leone in the ECOWAS Cease-Fire

¹ The introduction relies primarily on the following sources: Abraham, A., 'Dancing with the chameleon: Sierra Leone and the elusive quest for peace', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2001), pp. 205–28; Adebajo, A., *Building Peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau* (Lynne Rienner: London and Boulder, 2002); Fifthen, D. C., *Diamonds and War in Sierra Leone: Cultural Strategies for Commercial Adaptation to Endemic Low-Intensity Conflict* (PhD Thesis, University College London, 1999); Keen, D., *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone* (Palgrave: New York, 2005); Richards, P., *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone* (James Currey: Oxford, 1996); Riley, S and Seasay, M., 'Sierra Leone: the coming anarchy?', *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 22, no. 63 (1995), pp. 121–26; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *The Final Report of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Sierra Leone, 2004); Zack-Williams, A. and Riley, S., 'Sierra Leone: the coup and its consequences', *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 20, no. 56 (1993), pp. 91–98.

Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) mission in Liberia.² The conflict was therefore connected to Liberia's civil war, although most commentators believe that Taylor's interest were primarily economic, relating to his quest to control Sierra Leone's mineral resources, in particular its diamond mines.³

Foday Sankoh, a former corporal in the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF), led the RUF. Sankoh shared Taylor's supporters in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Libya, and benefited from assistance from Taylor's NPFL commandos. However, while the NPFL fighters helped the RUF to make significant territorial gains in eastern Sierra Leone, capturing the diamond mining fields in 1991–92, they also used 'criminality, torture, drugs, plunder and rape' as weapons in their brutal campaign.⁴ Despite their claims to be fighting to free 'the masses' from the corrupt rule of General Joseph Momoh (and the All People's Congress, APC), 'in stark contrast to the 1989 [NPFL] invasion of Liberia, the RUF rebels failed to rally local support to their cause'.⁵

The RSLMF did not at first take the RUF–NPFL invasion seriously. Their subsequent failure to quickly dispatch the few hundred strong invasion force has been blamed on the strains of decades of under-funding and poor equipment (see below), and the fact that a tenth of the RSLMF were participating in the ECOMOG mission in Liberia. Elements within the RSLMF grew increasingly disenchanted with this state of affairs. In April 1992, Momoh was overthrown in a military coup. The establishment of Captain Valetine Strasser's junta, the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) followed.⁶

The NPRC promised to bring peace, and achieved a degree of success in their military campaign against the RUF in 1992–93. However, they had created a 'Frankenstein's monster' in the process, as the RSLMF grew, so too did problems with discipline. Particularly worrying was the appearance of 'sobels', so-called because they were 'soldiers by day and rebels by night'.⁷ They engaged in illegal diamond mining and smuggling, also allegedly exchanging government arms and ammunition for RUF diamonds and other items. At the same time groups of hunters (*Kamajors*) were organizing themselves into Civil Defence Forces (CDF), engaged in fighting against the RUF and sobels. Several commentators have described them as a 'quasi-national army'.⁸

² Taylor famously declared in a BBC radio interview on 1 November 1990 that Sierra Leone would 'taste the bitterness of war' as a result of its intervention in its neighbours. BBC Focus on Africa; BBC Africa Service, 'Interview with rebel leader Charles Taylor of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL)' as quoted in Truth and Reconciliation Commission (note 1), p. 98.

³ Other reasons given for Taylor's interest in fomenting conflict in Sierra Leone included: diverting the resources of the ECOMOG mission in Liberia; preventing rival rebel factions in the Liberian civil war from receiving assistance from Sierra Leone and Guinea (e.g. ULIMO); rewarding Sankoh and other Sierra Leoneans who fought with the NPFL. Keen (note 1), pp. 36–53; and Truth and Reconciliation Commission (note 1), vol. 3b, pp. 60–62.

⁴ Chege, M., 'Sierra Leone: the states that came back from the dead', *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2002, p. 149. An in-depth discussion of the RUF can be found in Abdullah, I. and Muana, P., 'The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone: a revolt of the lumpenproletariat', ed. C. Clapham, *African Guerrillas* (James Currey: Oxford, 1998), pp. 172–93.

⁵ Adebajo (note 1), p. 83.

⁶ For a good discussion of the coup see Zack-Williams and Riley (note 1). The NPRC regime is discussed in some detail in Kandeh, J. D., 'What does the "militariat" do when it rules? Military regimes: the Gambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia', *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 23, no. 69 (1996), pp. 387–404; and Zack-Williams, A., 'Kamajors, "sobels" & the militariat: civil society & the return of the military in Sierra Leonean politics', *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 24, no. 73 (1997), pp. 373–80.

⁷ 'Sobels' have attracted considerable academic attention. See e.g. Fifthen (note 1), p. 39; Riley, S. and Sesay, M., 'Sierra Leone: the coming anarchy?', *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 22, no. 63 (1995), pp. 123–24; and Zack-Williams (note 6).

⁸ Zack-Williams (note 6), p. 375.

A combination of the deterioration of the RSLMF and an improvement in the fortunes of Taylor's NPFL in Liberia helped the RUF to again seize control of the diamond fields of eastern Sierra Leone in 1994. Strasser responded by hiring the South African private military company (PMC) Executive Outcomes (EO) to equip, train and operate with Sierra Leone's counter-insurgency forces.⁹ In return, EO's parent company, Branch-Heritage Group, reportedly received US\$35 million in cash, diamond mining concessions and shares in other resource enterprises.¹⁰ ECOMOG's Nigerian contingent, EO and CDF used heavy mortar and artillery bombardments, followed by gunship-backed infantry, to drive the RUF out of the Kono mining region by August 1995, cutting the rebels off from their sources of revenue and pushing them towards the negotiating table. In the same month, a national conference announced that presidential and parliamentary elections would be held in February 1996.

Strasser was deposed in a bloodless military coup in January 1996, but elections still took place on 26 February 1996. Ahmed Tejan Kabbah was elected president with 60 per cent of the vote in the second round of the presidential elections, held on 15 March 1996. The following day the RUF announced a ceasefire. The following month Kabbah met with RUF leaders in Yamoussokro to discuss a peace agreement. Despite these positive developments, in his maiden speech to the UN General Assembly on 10 October 1996, Kabbah stated that 'the RUF leader now seems unwilling to honour his commitment to sign the [Yamoussokro peace] agreement', a situation that Kabbah feared 'could precipitate a full-scale resumption of hostilities'.¹¹ If the RUF did not sign the Yamoussokro peace agreement, he requested 'the imposition of sanctions' to be considered against the RUF. On 30 November 1996, the Abidjan Peace Accord was signed by the RUF.

Six months later Kabbah was ousted in a military coup orchestrated by Major Johnny Paul Koroma. The May 1997 coup that brought Koromah's Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) junta into power immediately attracted international condemnation, not least because it reportedly offered places in government to the RUF.¹² ECOWAS condemned the coup and adopted a three-pronged approach towards restoring Kabbah's government—dialogue, the introduction of sanctions and the use of force.¹³ The first prong failed in the summer of 1997 when Koroma broke off talks.

⁹ Fifthen (note 1), p. 174. EO was not the first PMC to be contacted to carry out such tasks. In Feb. 1995 the NPRC had hired Gurkha Security Guards through the British arms manufacturer J & S Franklin. The role of PMCs in Sierra Leone during the 1990s conflict has been the source of much discussion. See e.g. Cleaver, G., 'Subcontracting military power: the privatisation of security in contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, vol. 33, 2000, pp. 131–49; Dokubu, C., "'An army for rent", private military corporations and civil conflicts in Africa: the case of Sierra Leone', *Civil Wars*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2000), pp. 55–59; Harding, J., 'The mercenary business: "executive outcomes"', *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 24, no. 71 (1997), pp. 87–97; Musah, A.-F., 'A country under siege: state decay and corporate military intervention in Sierra Leone', eds A. Musah, A. and K. K. Fayemi, *Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma* (Pluto Press: London and Sterling, 2000), pp. 76–116; Shearer, D., *Private Armies and Military Intervention*, Adelphi Paper no. 316 (IISS: London, 1998); and Venter, A. J., 'Sierra Leone's mercenary war', *International Defence Review*, no. 11 (1995), pp. 65–68.

¹⁰ EO reportedly enjoyed US\$1.225 million monthly expense budget, while others have estimated that the cost to the NPRC of hiring EO from May to Dec. 1995 was US\$13.5 million. Francis, D. J., 'Mercenary intervention in Sierra Leone: providing national security or international exploitation', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1999), pp. 326–31.

¹¹ 'Address by Mr. Alhaji Ahmad Kabbah, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone', United Nations General Assembly, 51st Session, 29th Plenary Meeting, UN Document A/51/PV.29, 10 Oct. 1996, p. 5.

¹² E.g. it has been stated that Sankoh personally called Koroma to express his support for the coup. See Zack-Williams (note 6).

¹³ Legg, T. and Ibbs, R., *Report of the Sierra Leone Arms Investigation*, Return to an address of the honourable the House of Commons dated 27 July 1998, p. 13

Therefore, on 29 August 1997, ECOWAS introduced ‘a general and total embargo’ on arms and oil supplies to Sierra Leone, stating that it would inspect, guard and seize any ship, vehicle or aircraft violating the embargo. ECOWAS also requested a UN arms embargo against Sierra Leone. On 8 October 1997, UNSC Resolution 1132 (1997) imposed a blanket coverage arms embargo on Sierra Leone, calling upon the AFRC to ‘relinquish power’, restore the ‘democratically-elected Government and return to constitutional order’.¹⁴

Table 1. Summary of possible/suspected sources and secondary support for arms transfers and other military equipment to warring factions in Sierra Leone before the arms embargo

Recipient	Source of arms	Secondary support	Non-state actors
RSLMF	China, Egypt, Nigeria, UK	Guinea	
NPRC	Belarus, China, Romania, Russia, Ukraine		Brokers; Executive Outcomes
Kabbah government forces (incl. CDF)	Bulgaria, China, Poland, Russia, Ukraine		Brokers; Executive Outcomes
RUF	Eastern Europe, Libya, Ukraine	Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, Libya	Brokers

Arms transfers before the arms embargo

On the eve of the RUF invasion, the RSLMF was 3000 strong.¹⁵ However, the RSLMF was not an effective fighting force, as Sierra Leone’s leaders since the 1960s had favoured the use of the Special Security Division (SSD), which was ‘essentially a private security force’.¹⁶ Although the RSLMF had reportedly received 6000 G-3 rifles from the UK and Nigeria during the 1970s and 1980s, most of the army’s guns ‘dated from the two world wars’.¹⁷ The RSLMF’s conventional arms inventory was limited to very small numbers of light armoured vehicles, light helicopters, mortars and artillery,¹⁸ and even these limited holdings were not fully operational in 1991.¹⁹ It has thus been suggested that ‘the country was devoid of an operational Army when it needed one most’.²⁰ However, its inventory improved in 1991, as China delivered SALW and ammunition.²¹ The RSLMF also received artillery, small arms and ammunition from

¹⁴ UN Security Council Resolution 1132, UN Document S/Res/1132, 8 Oct. 1997.

¹⁵ Of these 3000, 1500 were professional soldiers and 1500 were reservists. Keen (note 1), p. 83. At the time of the invasion, 700 RSLMF army personnel were serving with ECOMOG forces in Liberia. IISS, *The Military Balance 1991-2* (Brassey’s: London, 1992), pp. 136, 142.

¹⁶ Keen (note 1), p. 17.

¹⁷ Keen (note 1), p. 84. For an account of the SALW holdings of the RSLMF see Berman, E. G., *Re-Armament in Sierra Leone: One Year After the Lome Peace Agreement*, Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper no. 1 (Small Arms Survey: Geneva, Dec. 2000), p. 20.

¹⁸ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, <<http://armstrade.sipri.org/>>; IISS (note 15), p. 142.

¹⁹ Berman (note 17), p. 20. SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (note 18).

²⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission (note 1), vol. 2, pp. 145–48, and vol. 3, pp. 74–76.

²¹ Berman (note 17), p. 21.

Guinea and Nigeria, as well as ammunition from Egypt, following the RUF invasion.²² It has been suggested that Guinean and Nigerian assistance at this stage was not only thanks to Momoh's friendship with the Guinean and Nigerian leaders, but also due to fears that the conflict could spill-over into Guinea's mining areas.²³

Arms transfers to the NPRC regime 1992–96

Arms brokers are thought to have played a key role in facilitating a number of transfers of arms from Eastern Europe to the NPRC during the early 1990s, with known shipments including SALW from Romania, armoured vehicles from Russia and one Mi-17 transport helicopter and one Mi-24 combat helicopter from Ukraine.²⁴ Although a number of reports have stated that the bulk of arms and ammunition came from Belarus and Ukraine,²⁵ China also reportedly provided AK-type assault rifles and RPG-2 anti-tank rocket launchers.²⁶ These arms purchases were reportedly funded through illicit diamond smuggling, money-laundering, and the misuse of loans for development and emergency aid.²⁷

The introduction of Executive Outcomes equipment, personnel and experience dramatically changed the course of the conflict following their deployment in May 1995. There is some dispute regarding the number of Mi-24 and Mi-17 helicopters that EO brought to Sierra Leone, with some accounts reporting that they leased one Mi-17 and one Mi-24 from Soruss Air,²⁸ with others suggesting that they had and used two Mi-17s and one Mi-24.²⁹ Either way, their introduction into the battlefield is thought to have had a significant impact not only within Sierra Leone, but has been cited as a factor in attempts to acquire Mi-24s by other regional leaders. Small arms, mortars, machineguns, APVs and Land Rovers fitted with heavy machine guns were reportedly provided to EO by the NPRC regime.³⁰

Arms transfers to the Kabbah government, 1996–97

According to the available data, arms procurement practices by the Kabbah government before the arms embargo differed in very few respects from the practices of the NPRC. Kabbah's government retained the services of EO until January 1997 and reportedly employed the same arms broker and diamond merchant used by the NPRC, Serge Muller.³¹ Mi-24 combat helicopters were also on the government's shopping list, with Belarus' 1997 UNROCA submission recording that these had transited Belarus from

²² Berman (note 17), p. 21; Truth and Reconciliation Commission (note 1), vol. 3b, p. 63.

²³ Fifthen (note 1), p. 37.

²⁴ Two Mi-24s were ordered from Ukraine in Jan. 1995, but by the end of 1995 only one had been reported as delivered. Hooper, J., 'Sierra Leone: the war continues', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Jan. 1996, p. 43. For more information on these transfers see Truth and Reconciliation Commission (note 1), vol. 3b, p. 67.

²⁵ Fifthen (note 1), p. 171; Keen (note 1), p. 95.

²⁶ Berman (note 17), p. 22; and Venter (note 9), p. 67.

²⁷ Keen (note 1), pp. 101, 161.

²⁸ Keen (note 1), pp. 151–52; Musah (note 9), pp. 88–89.

²⁹ Dokubu (note 9), p. 58; and Hooper (note 24), p. 92. One report stated that at least one Mi-24V has been seen in operation with Sierra Leonean armed forces, with a second Mi-24V seen with 'standard Soviet camouflage'. This report also stated that two Mi-17s had been spotted, piloted by South African mercenaries. 'Sierra Leone update', *Air Forces Monthly*, Nov. 1995, p. 5.

³⁰ Dokubu (note 9), p. 59; and Hooper (note 24), p. 43.

³¹ Berman (note 17), p. 22.

Russia on their way to Sierra Leone before the imposition of the UN arms embargo.³² A small number of surplus Polish T-72 tanks were also reportedly transferred from Ukraine in early 1997.³³

It did not take long for the Kamajors/CDF to swap their shotguns for Kalashnikov-type assault rifles and RPG anti-tank weapons. In addition to arms acquired through connections between one of the Kamajor chiefs, deputy defence minister Hinga Norman, and Executive Outcomes,³⁴ Kamajors are thought to have used ‘Old Mande’ trade routes with Burkina Faso and Mali. A large quantity of these arms were thought to have come from China, as a number of former People’s Liberation Army (PLA) 1960s vintage Kalashnikov copies and RPG-7 anti-tank rocket launchers could be found in the Kamajors’ armouries.³⁵

Arms transfers to RUF rebels, 1991–97

Although it has been argued that there is scant reliable information on the exact origins of the RUF’s arsenal,³⁶ it is known that they primarily used AK-type and G-3 rifles, light machineguns and RPG anti-tank rocket launchers.³⁷ The RUF shared the same suppliers and supply routes as Charles Taylor’s NPFL. Arms purchases were arranged from Eastern Europe by Libya, shipped to, and then through, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire and Liberia before reaching the RUF.³⁸

However, this initial reliance upon Taylor had its disadvantages, as supplies to the RUF via Taylor relied upon the fortunes of the NPFL in Liberia. When ECOMOG forces in Liberia appeared to have gained the upper hand in their struggle with NPFL forces in 1992–93, the Liberian arms pipeline to the RUF stopped as arms and ammunition were diverted to the NPFL’s fighting forces. Furthermore, territorial gains made by anti-Taylor warlords and rebels engaged in the Liberian civil war along the Liberian–Sierra Leonean border also made it more difficult for arms to reach the RUF via Taylor and the NPFL. It was during this time that RUF rebels shifted to guerrilla-style tactics and began to seize arms and military equipment from RSLMF and ECOMOG troops and stores. The Guinean contingent of the ECOMOG force based in Sierra Leone also reportedly sold their weapons in exchange for diamonds and other conflict goods,³⁹ as did RSLMF ‘sobels’ and fighters from Liberia’s warring factions during the disarmament process of 1996–97.⁴⁰

³² Belarus submission to UNROCA in 1998 (covering transfers in 1997), <http://disarmament.un.org/UN_REGISTER.nsf>.

³³ Poland’s submission to UNROCA showed that these tanks had been purchased from Ukraine by Polish authorities, before being immediately resold to Sierra Leone.

³⁴ Keen (note 1), p. 196.

³⁵ Fifthen (note 1), p. 77.

³⁶ Berman (note 17), p. 13.

³⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission (note 1), vol. 2, p. 127.

³⁸ RUF small arms seized in 1991 bore Libyan/Arabic markings. Keen (note 1), p. 38. For a more detailed discussion of the transfer of arms from Libya to Liberia via Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire see the report in this series on Liberia.

³⁹ Adebajo (note 1), p. 84; Keen (note 1), p. 51. For a comparison with ECOMOG activities in Liberia see the case study on Liberia in this series.

⁴⁰ On soldier–RUF collusion see Keen (note 1), pp. 120–31; and Truth and Reconciliation Commission (note 1), vol. 3a, p. 182.

RUF leader Foday Sankoh is also thought to have personally arranged for delivery of at least US\$500 000 worth of arms from Libya in 1996,⁴¹ and is also suspected of forging contacts with Belgian and Ukrainian arms brokers and mercenaries. He was arrested in Lagos in March 1997 following, but not directly related to, a meeting to finalize payments for the purchase of heavy weapons from Ukraine.⁴²

III. The arms embargo

UNSC Resolution 1132 (1997) called upon the AFRC junta to ‘relinquish power’ and restore the ‘democratically-elected Government and a return to constitutional order’, deciding that:

All states shall prevent the sale or supply to Sierra Leone, by their nationals or from their territories, or using their flag vessels or aircraft, of petroleum and petroleum products and arms and related materiel of all types, including weapons and ammunition, military vehicles and equipment, paramilitary equipment and spare parts for the aforementioned, whether or not originating in their territory.⁴³

In addition, a travel ban was placed on leading members of the AFRC. The sanctions’ primary aim was to overcome the ‘crisis’ and restore the Kabbah government to power. However, there were problems with the clarity of the targets of the arms and petroleum embargo. Clauses explicitly stated that a sanctions committee would consider applications to import petroleum or petroleum products into Sierra Leone by the democratically elected government of Sierra Leone, ECOMOG or UN agencies on a case-by-case basis. No comparable clauses were contained within the resolution with regard to weapons and ammunition, military vehicles and equipment. However, ECOWAS and the democratically elected government of Sierra Leone were authorized by the UN to ‘ensure strict implementation’ of the arms and petroleum embargo. Was this an implicit exemption from the arms embargo for the military forces of ECOWAS and the democratically elected government of Sierra Leone? The implications of this lack of clarity in terms of arms embargo coverage will be discussed in more detail below with reference to the so-called ‘Sandline Affair’.

Although ECOMOG’s threat of sanctions did not prevent Koroma from leaving the peace talks with ECOWAS in July 1997, the imposition of the UN arms and oil embargo appears to have had an impact, as the AFRC immediately entered into negotiations that led to the Conakry Agreement of 23 October 1997.⁴⁴ The Conakry Agreement called for the AFRC to arrange for the democratically elected government of Kabbah to be restored to power within six months. However, the AFRC appeared unwilling to adhere to this timetable and therefore ECOWAS resorted to the third prong in its approach towards removing the AFRC from power and restoring Kabbah—the use

⁴¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission (note 1), vol. 3b, p. 69.

⁴² Sankoh was arrested and briefly held for carrying a personal firearm at Lagos airport. Abraham (note 1), pp. 213–14.

⁴³ UN Security Council Resolution 1132, UN Document S/Res/1132, 8 Oct. 1997.

⁴⁴ Cortright, D. and Lopez, G. A., ‘Sierra Leone: the failure of regional and international sanctions’, eds D. Cortright and G. A. Lopez, *The Sanctions Decade: Assessing UN Strategies in the 1990s* (Lynne Rienner: London and Boulder, 2000), p. 172.

of force.⁴⁵ In February 1998 ECOMOG forces drove the AFRC regime from power and restored Kabbah's government to power on 10 March 1998. On 16 March 1998, the petroleum embargo was lifted by UNSC Resolution 1156 (1998).⁴⁶ On 5 June 1998, UNSC Resolution 1171 (1998) terminated the arms embargo on Sierra Leone and imposed prohibitions on the 'sale or supply of arms and related materiel to non-governmental forces in Sierra Leone' only.⁴⁷ UNSC Resolution 1171 (1998) also explicitly noted that these prohibitions would not apply to ECOMOG or UN agencies within Sierra Leone. However, states had to notify the sanctions committee of all exports of arms and related materiel for the government of Sierra Leone, while the government also had to inform the sanctions committee of all imports. The travel ban on leading members of the AFRC was extended to the RUF.

UNSC Resolution 1171 (1998) called for 'all rebels to put an end to the atrocities, cease their resistance and lay down their arms'.⁴⁸ It was clearly a selective arms embargo that sought to put an end to the conflict that had been raging in Sierra Leone since 1991, although this was not explicitly stated in the resolution. It did not prevent the RUF and AFRC forces from acquiring sufficient arms and military materiel to mount an impressive offensive in 1998, reaching Freetown in January 1999. The government of Sierra Leone primarily relied upon ECOMOG troops to drive back the rebel forces. However, on 18 May 1999 the RUF and Kabbah once again agreed to a ceasefire and began peace talks, which resulted in the Lomé Peace Accord being signed on 7 July 1999.⁴⁹ According to this accord, Sankoh would be awarded with a government post with responsibilities for Sierra Leone's mineral wealth—thus arguably granting the RUF leader the prize that he had been fighting for since 1991.

The first deployment of United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) peacekeepers took place in the late autumn of 1999,⁵⁰ but failed to enforce the peace agreement. Several episodes in 2000 demonstrated that the RUF did not intend to abide by the Lomé Peace Accord. However, with UNSC Resolution 1289 (2000) doubling the initial size of UNAMSIL, the capture of Sankoh in May 2000, and the deployment of British forces in the summer of 2000, the RUF was once again forced to negotiate with Kabbah in autumn 2000. On 10 November 2000, a peace agreement was signed in Abuja, with a second agreement signed in Abuja on 2 May 2001. In January 2002, the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDD) declared the 'war over'.

Monitoring and enforcement mechanisms

UNSC Resolution 1132 (1997) established a sanctions committee for collecting and collating violations submitted by states, as well as considering applications for

⁴⁵ It has been argued that one can compare the initial impact of the introduction of sanctions and the military junta's willingness to agree to a timetable for restoration in the Sierra Leone and Haiti cases. In both cases, these initial positive developments were also subsequently regarded merely as a ruse. See Cortright and Lopez (note 44), p. 172.

⁴⁶ UN Security Council Resolution 1156, UN Document S/Res/1156, 16 Mar. 1998.

⁴⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 1171, UN Document S/RES/1171, 5 June 1998.

⁴⁸ UN Security Council Resolution 1171, UN Document S/RES/1171, 5 June 1998.

⁴⁹ Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 'IRIN special report on the peace process', 6 July 1999. IRIN reports are available at <<http://www.irinnews.org>>

⁵⁰ UNAMSIL was established by UN Security Council Resolution 1270, UN Document S/Res/1270, 22 Oct. 1999.

petroleum imports by the actors designated above.⁵¹ As stated above, ECOWAS and Sierra Leone's democratically elected government were tasked with implementing the embargo, including the authority to halt 'inward maritime shipping in order to inspect and verify their cargoes and destinations'. However, sanctions committee reports have highlighted the fact that 'full governmental control or monitoring of the border are virtually impossible within the resources available in the region', and have called for assistance to help in this regard.⁵² However, these calls for specific mechanisms to assist with monitoring and enforcing the arms embargo and other sanctions have not been answered, and although not explicitly contained within the mandates of either the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMISL) or the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), they became one of the sources for reports of alleged and actual violations of the arms embargo.⁵³

The main responsibility for reporting on suspected violations and adherence to the arms and petroleum embargo fell on ECOWAS. It was requested to report to the sanctions committee every 30 days on developments in relation to the arms and petroleum embargo.⁵⁴ ECOMOG demonstrated its commitment to punish those violating the ECOWAS embargo, when Nigerian aircraft attacked a Ukrainian cargo ship suspected of bringing arms to Sierra Leone on 6 September 1997.⁵⁵ However, Sierra Leonean and ECOMOG forces on the ground generally struggled to monitor and enforce the embargo, with no specific teams tasked with monitoring entry points at airports or borders.⁵⁶

In December 1998, the sanctions committee reported that it 'considered a number of violations of the sanctions regime',⁵⁷ while ECOMOG force commander Major General Timothy Shelpidi stated that the Liberian government of Charles Taylor was known to be violating UNSC Resolution 1171 (1998) by supplying RUF forces with arms.⁵⁸ Officials from ECOMOG, Sierra Leone, the UK and the USA also accused Liberia and Burkina Faso of violating the arms embargo in 1999 and 2000,⁵⁹ with UNOMISL also confirming violations of the embargo by these states.⁶⁰ The sanctions committee also received reports on a number of alleged violations by these states from other sources.⁶¹

⁵¹ UN Security Council Resolution 1132, UN Document S/Res/1132, 8 Oct. 1997.

⁵² United Nations, Report of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1132 (1997) concerning Sierra Leone, UN Document S/1998/1236, 31 Dec. 1998, p. 4.

⁵³ UNOMISL was established by UN Security Council Resolution 1181, UN Document S/Res/1181, 13 July 1998. UNAMSIL was established by UN Security Council Resolution 1270, UN Document S/Res/1270, 22 Oct. 1999.

⁵⁴ Cortright and Lopez have commented positively upon the links forged between the UN and ECOWAS sanctions committees. Cortright and Lopez (note 44), pp. 173–74.

⁵⁵ US Department of State, *Sierra Leone Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997*, Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 30 Jan. 1998, <<http://www.sierra-leone.org/usds013098.html>>.

⁵⁶ Cortright and Lopez (note 44), pp. 173–75.

⁵⁷ United Nations (note 52), 31 Dec. 1998, p. 6.

⁵⁸ See e.g. IRIN, 'UN sanctions committee chairman ends visit', 10 Dec. 1998; and IRIN, 'ECOMOG commander accuses Liberia of arms shipments', 29 Dec. 1998.

⁵⁹ IRIN, 'Army chief accuses Taylor', 12 Mar. 1999; IRIN, 'ECOMOG says it intercepted arms smugglers', 22 Dec. 1999; and IRIN, 'ECOMOG warns "warmonger presidents"', 8 Apr. 1999.

⁶⁰ United Nations, Sixth report of the Secretary General of the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone, UN Document S/1999/645, 4 June 1999, pp. 3–4.

⁶¹ United Nations, Report of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1132 (1997) concerning Sierra Leone, UN Document S/1999/1300, 31 Dec. 1999, p. 4; and United Nations, Report of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1132 (1997) concerning Sierra Leone, UN Document S/2000/1238, 26 Dec. 2000, p. 6.

A number of reports also surfaced at this time highlighting the connections between diamond exports from Liberia and arms purchases for the RUF.⁶² On 5 July 2000, UNSC Resolution 1306 (2000) not only established sanctions prohibiting the import of Sierra Leonean diamonds, but also established a panel of experts to report upon ‘possible violations’ of the arms embargo and ‘links between the trade in diamonds and trade in arms and related materials’.⁶³ The Panel of Experts reported on a number of instances of connections between the trade in Sierra Leonean diamonds and arms, highlighting the roles played by Taylor’s Liberian government and Burkina Faso in particular.⁶⁴ This panel’s findings were then used to justify UNSC Resolution 1343 (2001), which imposed an arms embargo on Liberia, a ban on the transfer of rough diamonds from or through Liberia and a travel ban on selected individuals in Liberia.⁶⁵ UNSC Resolution 1343 (2001) demanded that ‘the Government of Liberia immediately cease its support for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone and for other armed groups in the region’. It represented the first instance of a UNSC arms embargo being placed upon a state for secondary support in the supply of arms to a rebel group also targeted by a UNSC arms embargo.

In the sanctions committee reports from 2005, the chairman stated that ‘the time might be ripe for the Security Council to revisit the legal basis of its measures concerning Sierra Leone’.⁶⁶ At the time of writing, the arms embargo on non-governmental forces in Sierra Leone remains in place.

Arms transfers during the arms embargo

Knowledge of the extent of the arms transfers that circumvented the arms embargoes imposed on Sierra Leone in 1997 and 1998 remains limited. The disarmament programme that ran from September 1998 to January 2002 collected 42 300 weapons and 1.2 million rounds of ammunition. The majority of the weapons collected were SALW, but data on the origins of the arms and ammunition have not been fully revealed.⁶⁷ It is very difficult to estimate the proportion of arms and ammunition smuggled into Sierra Leone during the arms embargo that these figures represent, but one can be confident that it represents only a fraction. For example, with 72 500 combatants passing through DDR programmes, the number of weapons collected is only roughly at a ratio of one weapon for every two demobilized combatants. However, of the 12 500 weapons that had been recovered by May 2000, just over 5000 were AK-type assault rifles. The remainder consisted of 940 G-3 rifles, 440 FAL rifles as well as

⁶² Pratt, D., *Sierra Leone: The Forgotten Crisis* (Report to the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, 23 Apr. 1999); and Smilie, I., Gberie, L. and Hazelton, R., *Heart of the Matter: Sierra Leone, Diamonds and Human Security* (Partnership Africa Canada: Ottawa 2000).

⁶³ UN Security Council Resolution 1306, UN Document S/Res/1306), 5 July 2000. The prohibition on diamond exports expired on 4 June 2003 following the expiration of UNSC Resolution 1446 (2002).

⁶⁴ United Nations, Report of the Panel of Experts appointed pursuant to Security Council resolution 1306 (2000), paragraph 19, in relation to Sierra Leone, UN Document S/2000/1195, 14 Dec. 2000.

⁶⁵ UN Security Council Resolution 1343, UN Document S/Res/1343, 7 Mar. 2001.

⁶⁶ United Nations, Report of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1132 (1997) concerning Sierra Leone, UN Document S/2005/44, 25 Jan. 2005, p. 4. Reiterated in United Nations, Report of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1132 (1997) concerning Sierra Leone, UN Document S/2005/843, 30 Dec. 2005, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Bradley, S., Maughan, P. and Fusato, M., ‘Sierra Leone: disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR)’, Findings Infobriefs no. 81, Oct. 2002 (World Bank Africa Region), <<http://www.worldbank.org/afr/findings/infobeng/infob81.pdf>>.

other rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers and mortars. All weapons were originally produced in western and eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and the USA.⁶⁸

Known arms transfers to the Kabbah regime during both UNSC Resolution 1132 (1997) and UNSC Resolution 1171 (1998) are considered below, along with transfers to the AFRC and RUF rebel forces for the period 1997–2001. It should of course be noted that information on arms transfers to the Kabbah regime is more reliable than information for transfers to the AFRC and RUF forces. This is because monitoring state-to-state transfers is more transparent than monitoring arms transfers to non-state actors/rebels subject to an UN arms embargo.

Table 2. Summary of possible/suspected sources and secondary support for transfers of arms and other military equipment to warring factions in Sierra Leone before the arms embargo

Recipient	Source of arms	Secondary support	Non-state actors
Kabbah government	Bulgaria, China, Netherlands, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, UK		Sandline International
AFRC	Libya	Burkina Faso, Liberia, Libya	
RUF	Bulgaria, Slovakia, Ukraine	Burkina Faso, Liberia, Libya, Niger	

Arms transfers to the Kabbah government and allies

Kabbah's 'government in exile' may have lacked a conventional army, but the Kamajors, ECOMOG and various PMCs, including Sandline International, represented forces on the ground that were supporting the restoration of the Kabbah regime. In July 1997, Rakesh Saxena of the Jupiter Mining Company agreed to underwrite the purchase of arms for use by the Kamajor militias, to be arranged by the PMC Sandline International.⁶⁹ The British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Peter Penfold, had suggested that Kabbah contact Sandline International to assist with counter-insurgency planning. On 15 January 1998, Kabbah signed an end-user certificate for 2500 assault rifles, 180 rocket launchers, 50 machineguns and ammunition, which were purchased from the Bulgarian firm Arsenal.⁷⁰

The arms sourced from Bulgaria did not play a major role in the ECOMOG and Kamajor militia military offensive against the AFRC regime in February 1998, although Sandline International apparently gave advice on air strikes, provided tactical intelligence, ancillary equipment and 'all the rotary air support'.⁷¹ According to a British liaison officer in Sierra Leone at the time, the ECOMOG Task Force Commander

⁶⁸ United Nations (note 64), p. 31.

⁶⁹ Musah (note 9), p. 99.

⁷⁰ Legg and Ibbs (note 13), p. 27. There are a number of varying reports on the value and volume of the Sandline arms shipment. The standard assumption is that 35 tonnes of weapons arrived in Sierra Leone on 22 Feb. 1998. However, one account states that 21 tonnes of Bulgarian guns and ammunition were delivered. 'Embarrassment deepens over UK-Sierra Leone deal', Reuters, 6 May 1998. Another source claims that 28 tonnes were delivered. Pratt (note 62). Reuters claimed that US\$10 million worth of arms were delivered. 'British minister hung out to dry over arms deal', Reuters, 5 May 1998.

⁷¹ Keen (note 1), p. 216.

issued 250 assault rifles, 10 machineguns and 100 000 rounds of ammunition to Hinga Norman's Kamajors on 2 March 1998.⁷² In his capacity as Defence Minister, Sam Hinga Norman oversaw the arming of the Kamajor militias and the continuing use of PMCs.⁷³

The British Parliament instigated a number of investigations into the extent to which the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) had knowledge of the transfer.⁷⁴ One of the main focuses of a Foreign Affairs Committee report regarded the targets of the arms embargo. It was suggested that the resolution's 'reference to Sierra Leone here could also be construed in different ways':

Did it mean the military Junta? Did it mean any force operating in Sierra Leone? Did it include President Kabbah, still recognised as the democratically elected Head of State of Sierra Leone, but no longer in the country? Did it include ECOMOG forces in Sierra Leone?⁷⁵

The FCO official position was apparently that the arms embargo applied to all forces in Sierra Leone and also forces aligned with the Government of Sierra Leone. Officially, the British Government supported the restoration of the Kabbah government, but unlike EOCWAS, it did not openly support the use of force. The UN Assistant Secretary General (Legal Affairs) stated that the arms embargo implicitly did not apply to ECOMOG. President Kabbah argued that it did not apply to the government-in-exile and therefore he did not believe that he was breaking the arms embargo by placing an order with Arsenal.⁷⁶ Therefore, the lack of precision and clarity with regard to the target of the resolution did lead to arms transfers that some parties regarded as permissible, while others regarded them as illegal. The fact that the sanctions committee was not alerted to this transfer leads one to question the status of this transfer, and the British investigations did little to settle the matter either. It was therefore left to UNSC Resolution 1171 (1998) to clarify the situation. But did this therefore mean that UNSC Resolution 1132 (1997) was a blanket coverage arms embargo?

Following the introduction of UNSC Resolution 1132 (1998), the UK became the main arms supplier to the military and security forces of the Government of Sierra Leone, providing SALW and ammunition in the period 1998–2000.⁷⁷ Bulgaria, China and South Africa also offered SALW and other military equipment as donations or in the form of loans in this period.⁷⁸ However, the most significant military acquisitions were arguably the two Mi-24 combat helicopters acquired from Ukraine, which arrived in Sierra Leone in April 1999.⁷⁹ Several Mi-26 heavy transport helicopters were leased

⁷² Legg and Ibbs (note 13), p. 72.

⁷³ Booker, S., 'Sierra Leone: prospects for peace and stability', *Sierra Leone: Prospects for Peace and Stability*, House of Representatives, 23 Mar. 1999, p. 67; IRIN, 'Defence Ministry arms militia', 21 Dec. 1998; and Musah (note 9), pp. 100–105.

⁷⁴ Legg and Ibbs (note 13); British House of Commons, *Foreign Affairs – Second Report, Sierra Leone* (printed 3 Feb. 1999).

⁷⁵ British House of Commons (note 74), point 13.

⁷⁶ Legg and Ibbs (note 13).

⁷⁷ IRIN, 'Britain to ship arms', 7 Oct. 1999; IRIN, 'Britain to send more military equipment', 14 July 2000; British Ministry of Defence, 'FAQ's on Sierra Leone', 4 Aug. 2000, <<http://www.mod.uk/index.php3?page=477>>; Taylor-Norton, R. and MacAskill, E., 'Exit strategy linked to weapons aid', *The Guardian*, 24 May 2000, p. 3; Taylor-Norton, R. and McGreal, C., 'Sierra Leone children carry British guns', *The Guardian*, 25 May 2000, p. 5.

⁷⁸ See the register of arms transfer below.

⁷⁹ Clayton, A., 'Helicopters for Sierra Leone', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 5 May 1999, p. 20; IRIN, 'Government buys combat helicopters', 28 Apr. 1999; 'Gunships for Sierra Leone', *Air Forces Monthly*, June 1999, p. 15; and Venter, A. J., 'Taking control in Sierra Leone', *Jane's International Defence Review*, no. 9 (2000), p. 62.

from Russia in 2000,⁸⁰ while a variety of military vehicles and trucks have been donated by the Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK in recent years.⁸¹ Thus, by 2000 the pro-government forces' armoury was regarded as 'well-equipped'.⁸²

Arms transfers to the AFRC, 1997–98

Although there is insufficient open source data to enable an accurate assessment to be made of the impact of the threat of the arms embargo upon the international arms purchases of the AFRC, there were rumours that during the summer of 1997 the junta sought arms from Libya.⁸³ Although the veracity of this single source remains uncorroborated, considerable credence has been given to the suggestion that during the UN arms embargo, the AFRC used the same arms suppliers, brokers and transport routes that the RUF had been using since 1991.⁸⁴ To assist with embargo-busting arms deliveries by air, the AFRC regime reportedly developed the Magburaka airstrip, with several arms deliveries allegedly made at this site during the autumn of 1997.⁸⁵

Unsurprisingly, after elements of the AFRC joined the RUF rebels in fighting the restored Kabbah regime, little distinction was made between arms supplies and suppliers to the RUF and AFRC as separate entities. Therefore, the following section addresses arms deliveries to all rebel groups from 1998 onwards.

Arms transfers to the RUF, 1998–2002

In contrast to the inventory of the 1991 invasion force, which relied primarily upon small arms, the RUF's arsenal in the January 1999 attack on Freetown featured artillery, mortars, multiple rocket launchers and MANPADS, in addition to a range of assault rifles, machineguns and RPG anti-tank weapons.⁸⁶ The findings of the UN Panel of Experts on Sierra Leone report suggested that arms continued to be purchased in Central and Eastern Europe, in particular Bulgaria, Slovakia and Ukraine, through arms brokers before being flown to, and then through, Libya, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire or Liberia.⁸⁷ Planes, helicopters, trucks and boats were reportedly used to transport arms from Liberia to the RUF forces in Sierra Leone, and also used to ferry diamonds and other goods back to the arms brokers and Taylor regime. With reports that 60 per cent of Sierra Leonean diamonds were smuggled through Liberia with the other 40 per cent being smuggled through Burkina Faso, it is clear that comparisons with the Liberian

⁸⁰ Rosvertol Heli Plant's deputy general designer, Alexei Samusenko, has been quoted as stating that the Government of Sierra Leone had leased four Mi-26 helicopters from Russia. 'Mi-26 helicopter operations up', *Helicopter History Website*, <<http://www.helis.com>> (accessed 22 Jan. 2002).

⁸¹ Jollah, T., 'Dutch donate 50 military vehicles to Sierra Leone', *Concord Times*, 10 Dec. 2004; United Nations (note 66), p. 4; United Nations, Twenty-Fourth report of the Secretary General of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UN document S/2004/965, p. 4.

⁸² Truth and Reconciliation Commission (note 1), vol. 3, p. 458; Malan, Mark, 'Security and military reform', Malan, M. et al, *Sierra Leone: Building the Road to Recovery*, ISS Monograph Series 80 (ISS: Pretoria, Mar. 2003), p. 98.

⁸³ 'Freetown denies request to Libya', *Financial Times*, 11 June 1997, p. 5.

⁸⁴ Berman (note 17), pp. 22–23; Keen (note 1), pp. 215–16; and Truth and Reconciliation Commission (note 1), vol. 3b, pp. 76–77.

⁸⁵ United Nations, *Third Report of the Secretary General on the Situation in Sierra Leone*, UN Document S/1998/103, 5 Feb. 1998, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission (note 1), vol. 3a, pp. 317–18.

⁸⁷ United Nations (note 64), pp. 33–42. For a more detailed discussion of arms transfers to Liberia in this period see the report in this series on Liberia.

case are valid, as Sierra Leone's rebel forces used resources extracted from the territory that their forces held to fund their arms acquisitions and campaigns.⁸⁸

As noted above, UNSC Resolution 1343 (2001) imposed an arms embargo on Liberia for its role in supporting and arming the RUF.⁸⁹ This was despite the fact that the Taylor regime had publicly renounced its support for the RUF and on 12 January 2001 called on it to lay down its arms.⁹⁰ Although the Panel of Experts' report also stated that Burkina Faso was also 'actively assisting' in contravening UNSC Resolution 1132 (1997), it was not made the subject of a UN arms embargo.⁹¹

It should be noted that ECOMOG and UNAMSIL forces also served as a means by which rebel forces could acquire arms and military equipment. In the previous section it was noted that elements within the Guinean contingent of ECOMOG sold or exchanged arms and ammunition for diamonds and looted goods, and this practice allegedly continued during the arms embargo. For example, it has been alleged that the RUF purchased a BM-21 122-mm multiple rocket launcher from Guinean troops shortly after the invasion of Freetown in January 1999.⁹² The RUF also relieved ECOMOG and UNAMSIL forces of arms, armoured vehicles and other military equipment on several occasions,⁹³ although it is tempting to ask questions about Guinean troop complicity in RUF seizures of arms and equipment.

As noted above, Sankoh was placed under house arrest in 2000 and although his field commanders such as Sam 'Mosquito' Bockarie (also spelled as Bockerie) continued to pose security problems, in September 2004 the Government of Sierra Leone assumed primary responsibility for security. In 2005, UNAMSIL was reporting that the security situation in Sierra Leone was much improved, with no external threats on the horizon, although the 'overall situation remains fragile'.⁹⁴

IV. Conclusions

Sanctions had no effect on the RUF's ability to wage war and strengthen its bargaining position through gains on the battlefield.⁹⁵

A number of deficiencies with UNSC Resolution 1132 (1997) have been highlighted by various commentators, such as 'ambiguity about the provision of military services and training'; the introduction of an arms embargo in the middle of a civil war; and the fact that the UNSC was not particularly interested in events taking place in this part of the world. It has been argued that once again 'sanctions . . . failed to achieve their objectives in part because they were not properly monitored or enforced'.⁹⁶ Similar

⁸⁸ See also the case study in this series on Liberia.

⁸⁹ UN Security Council Resolution 1343, UN Document S/Res/1343, 7 Mar. 2001.

⁹⁰ United Nations, Ninth report of the Secretary General of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UN document S/2001/228, 14 Mar. 2001, p. 5.

⁹¹ United Nations (note 64), p. 48.

⁹² Truth and Reconciliation Commission (note 1), vol. 3b, p. 30.

⁹³ Details on the arms and military materiel seized can be found in: United Nations, Third report of the Secretary General of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UN Document S/2000/186, 7 Mar. 2000, pp. 3–4; and United Nations, Fourth report of the Secretary General of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UN document S/2000/455, 19 May 2000, p. 4.

⁹⁴ United Nations, Twenty-fifth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UN Document S/2005/273, 26 Apr. 2005, p. 11.

⁹⁵ Cortright and Lopez (note 44), p. 173.

⁹⁶ Cortright and Lopez (note 44), p. 173.

observations have been recorded in the cases of arms embargoes against Angola and Liberia.

As in these cases, control of resource-rich regions has not only been regarded as one of the underlying causes for the conflict, but also one of the means by which warring factions have been able to fund their arms acquisitions. By the turn of the millennium the fact that the UN was beginning to introduce sanctions on diamond exports in direct connection to arms smuggling can be regarded as an important step. Of course, the Sierra Leone case was not the first in which this link had been made (Angola being an earlier example). But it was the first case in which secondary sanctions were imposed on a state (Liberia) for facilitating arms transfers in violation of an arms embargo.

Although the reports of the Panel of Experts and UNAMSIL noted that much of the military equipment transferred to both governmental and rebel forces in the 1990s came from the former Communist Bloc, the findings of the DDR programmes have revealed that considerable quantities of Belgian, British, German and US military equipment were also recovered.⁹⁷ Certainly west European states have been keen to provide the Government of Sierra Leone with arms and equipment since 1998, but it is interesting to note increased reports of Chinese arms and military equipment flowing into the country since this time also.

Chronology

Dates directly related to UNSC arms embargo decisions are highlighted in bold.

1985	Major-General Joseph Momoh appointed as successor to Siaka Stevens
24 December 1989	NPFL invasion of Liberia from the Côte d'Ivoire
24 August 1990	RSLMF deployed in Liberia as part of ECOMOG force
23 March 1991	Revolutionary United Front (RUF) launches insurgency from Liberia
29 April 1992	Military coup led by Captain Valentine Strasser ousts Momoh. National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) military junta established
December 1993	Strasser announces a unilateral ceasefire
December 1994	RUF announce ceasefire
February 1995	RUF advance on Freetown stopped by NPRC forces and ECOMOG
March 1995	Strasser signs contract with Executive Outcomes (EO)
May 1995	EO arrive in Sierra Leone
August 1995	National consultative conference calls for elections to be held in February 1996.
16 January 1996	Strasser ousted in coup led by Brigadier-General Julius Maada Bio
25 Feb.–7 Mar. 1996	Peace negotiations between RUF and NPRC in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire
26 February 1996	Presidential and parliamentary elections take place.
15 March 1996	Ahmed Tejan Kabbah elected president with 60 per cent of the vote in second round of presidential elections
16 March 1996	RUF announce ceasefire

⁹⁷ United Nations (note 64), p. 33–34.

22 Mar.–3 Apr. 1996	Peace negotiations between Kabbah and Sankoh in Yamoussokro, Côte d’Ivoire
29 March 1996	Kabbah sworn in as president
10 October 1996	Kabbah addresses the UN General Assembly and requests sanctions against RUF in case they do not comply with Yamoussokro peace agreement
30 November 1996	Kabbah and Sankoh sign the Abidjan Accord in Côte d’Ivoire
31 January 1997	EO officially leave Sierra Leone
March 1997	Foday Sankoh is arrested on an arms charge in Nigeria
25 May 1997	Kabbah ousted in coup led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma. Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) military junta established
26 May 1997	OAU condemns coup and calls for immediate restoration of Kabbah and constitutional order
1 June 1997	Koroma invites RUF to join the ruling military junta government
26 June 1997	ECOWAS meeting in Conakry calls for the restoration of Kabbah and proposes a three-pronged strategy towards this end
11 July 1997	Sierra Leone suspended from the Commonwealth
29 July 1997	Koromah broke off talks with ECOWAS (Abidjan)
July 1997	Sandline International hired by allies of Kabbah to provide ‘logistical support’ for a counter coup
August 1997	AFRC announce 4-year plan for return to civilian rule.
29 August 1997	ECOWAS meeting in Abuja calls for a ‘general and total embargo’ on supplies of oil and arms to Sierra Leone
August 1997	Nigerian, Ghanaian and Guinean troops in Freetown became ECOMOG II
8 October 1997	UNSC Resolution 1132 (1997) embargo on the sale and supply of oil and arms to Sierra Leone. Empowers ECOWAS to enforce the embargo
October 1997	Sandline International arranges for a shipment of arms to pro-Kabbah forces in Sierra Leone
23 October 1997	Conakry Agreement signed
Jan.–Feb. 1998	ECOMOG and Kamajor forces attack AFRC forces in Freetown
15 February 1998	AFRC/RUF leave Freetown, taken by Nigerian troops
22 February 1998	Sandline International arms shipment arrives
10 March 1998	Kabbah reinstated as president
16 March 1998	UNSC Resolution 1156 (1998) lifts petroleum embargo
5 June 1998	UNSC Resolution 1171 (1998) establishes arms embargo on RUF/rebels and selective travel ban
June–Oct. 1998	Major offensives by RUF/AFRC, reaching Freetown
13 July 1998	UNSC Resolution 1181 (1998) establishes UNOMSIL
27 July 1998	Legg and Ibbs report published
January 1999	AFRC/RUF rebels invade and control large parts of Freetown
18 May 1999	Ceasefire agreement concluded between Kabbah and RUF
25 May 1999	Peace negotiations between Kabbah and RUF in Lomé (Togo)

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7 July 1999	Lomé Peace Accord signed, backed by UN, OAU, Commonwealth and Togo.
19 August 1999	Nigerian president Obasanjo informs the UN Secretary-General that Nigeria will be withdrawing 2000 peacekeepers per month
20 August 1999	UNSC Resolution 1260 (1999) expands UNOMSIL
22 October 1999	UNSC Resolution 1270 (1999) establishes UNAMSIL, authorizing deployment of up to 6000 UN peacekeepers
12 January 2000	Liberian Government publicly renounces its support for the RUF and calls on it to lay down its arms
7 February 2000	UNSC Resolution 1289 (2000) expands UNAMSIL, authorizing deployment of up to 11 100 military personnel
17 May 2000	Sankoh captured in Freetown and imprisoned by the government of Sierra Leone
19 May 2000	UNSC Resolution 1299 (2000) expands UNAMSIL, authorizing deployment of up to 13 000 military personnel
May–June 2000	British military intervention in Freetown
13 June 2000	UK accuses Taylor of arming RUF and EU Foreign Ministers agree to British request for suspension of aid to Liberia
5 July 2000	UNSC Resolution 1306 (2000) prohibits importation of rough diamonds from Sierra Leone
19 July 2000	Charles Taylor publicly admits links to RUF
4 August 2000	UNSC Resolution 1313 (2000) extends UNAMSIL's mandate
14 August 2000	UNSC Resolution 1315 (2000) recommends establishing a Special Court for war crimes and human rights violations in Sierra Leone
10 November 2000	Peace Agreement Abuja I signed by Kabbah government and RUF
19 December 2000	UN Panel of Experts' report on Sierra Leone published
21 December 2000	UNSC president calls for all West African states to cease 'military support for armed groups in neighbouring countries'
7 March 2001	UNSC Resolution 1343 (2001) imposes embargoes on arms, diamonds and targeted travel ban against Liberia for assisting RUF
30 March 2001	UNSC Resolution 1346 (2001) expands UNAMSIL, authorizing deployment of up to 17 500 military personnel
2 May 2001	Peace Agreement Abuja II signed by Kabbah government and RUF
18 January 2002	National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDD) declares the 'war over'
May 2002	Kabbah wins presidential elections
July 2002	UK troops leave Sierra Leone
July 2002	Sankoh dies of natural causes while waiting to be tried for war crimes
June 2004	War crimes trials begin
December 2004	Last UNAMSIL peacekeepers leave Sierra Leone
April 2005	Charles Taylor faces war crimes charges at Sierra Leone Court

Glossary

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
CDF	Civil Defence Forces
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Cease-Fire Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EO	Executive Outcomes
NCDD	National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PLA	People's Liberation Army (China)
PMC	Private military companies
RSLMF	Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SSD	Special Security Division
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia
UNOMSIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNROCA	United Nations Register of Conventional Arms
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

Register of arms transfers

This register lists a selection of reported transfers of weapons, ammunition and other military equipment to Sierra Leone between 1990 and 2007.

Table 3. Known and suspected arms transfers prior to the UN arms embargo, 1990–October 1997

Recipient/ supplier (S)	No. delivered	Weapon	Year(s) of deliveries	Comments	Source
Momoh regime					
S: China	1 000	AK-type assault rifles	1991?		Berman, E. G., <i>Re-Armament in Sierra Leone: One Year After the Lome Peace Agreement</i> , Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper 1 (Small Arms Survey: Geneva, Dec. 2000), p. 21
	50	machine guns	1991?		
	10	twin-barreled anti-aircraft guns	1991?		
	?	60mm, 82mm, 120mm mortars	1991?		
	?	ammunition / mortar	1991?		
Egypt	80 boxes	7.62mm ammunition	?	Free donation	Berman, p. 21
Guinea	?	artillery shells	?		Berman, p. 21
Nigeria	2 500	rifles	?		Berman, p. 21
	?	ammunition	?		
Ukraine	?	?	?	USD1 million worth of Arms	'Export of Ukrainian arms prevented', <i>World Weapons Review</i> , no. 157, 14 Apr. 2004, 1993, p. 8
NPRC regime					
S: Belarus	1	Mi-24 combat helicopter	1995	Leased by Executive Outcomes from Soruss Air	Keen, D., <i>Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone</i> (Palgrave: New York, 2005), p. 151–52
	1–2	Mi-17 helicopter	1995	Leased by Executive Outcomes from Soruss Air	Dokubu, C., "An army for rent": private military corporations and civil conflicts in Africa: the Case of Sierra Leone', <i>Civil Wars</i> , vol. 3, no. 2, (2000), p. 58; Keen, p. 151–52; and Berman, p. 22
	?	RPG-2	1995?	Barter deal	Venter, A. J., 'Sierra Leone's mercenary war', <i>International Defence Review</i> , vol. 11 (1995), p. 67; and Berman, p. 22

Romania	75-100 500 500 ? ? ?	RPG-9 'M-16 type' assault rifles with grenade-launcher rifles LMG HMG 60mm, 120mm mortars BTR-80 APC BMP-2 IFV Mi-17 helicopter Mi-24 combat helicopter	? ? ? ? pre-1994 pre-1994 1995? 1995		
Russia	8-10 4-10				Berman, p. 22; and Venter, p. 8 Berman, p. 22; and Venter, p. 8 Berman, p. 22
Ukraine	1 1			Delivered in 1995. Two were ordered for USD 9 million but only one Mi-24E was delivered	Hooper, J., 'Sierra Leone: the war continues', <i>Jane's Intelligence Review</i> , Jan. 1996, p. 43
Kabbah government					
S: China	?	AK-type assault rifles	?	Smuggled into Sierra Leone by <i>Kamajors</i> through Burkina Faso and Mali	Fifthen, D. C., <i>Diamonds and War in Sierra Leone: Cultural Strategies for Commercial Adaptation to Endemic Low-Intensity Conflict</i> (PhD Thesis, University College London, 1999), p. 77 Fifthen, p. 77
Russia Ukraine	2 2	RPG-7 anti-tank weapon Mi-24B combat helicopter T-72 tank	? 1997 1997	Smuggled into Sierra Leone by <i>Kamajors</i> through Burkina Faso and Mali Polish military surplus Transferred to Ukraine in 1995	Reported in Belarus 1998 submission to UNROCA for transfers in 1997 Reported in Poland 1996 submission to UNROCA for transfers in 1995
RUF					
S: Libya	?	arms / ammunition	1996	USD 500 000 worth of arms And ammunition	Truth and Reconciliation Commission, <i>The Final Report of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone</i> (Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Freetown, 2004), vol. 3b, p. 69
?	?	arms / ammunition	1991	Arms probably sourced from Europe by the NPFL and its backers	

Table 4. Known and suspected arms transfers during the UN arms embargo period, October 1997–present

Recipient/ supplier (S)	No. delivered	Weapon	Year(s) of deliveries	Comments	Source
Kablah government-in-exile (1997-28)					
S: Bulgaria	2500	assault rifles	1998	Arranged for government-in-	Legg, T. and Ibbs, R., <i>Report of the Sierra Leone Arms Investigation</i> , return to an address of the honourable House of Commons dated 27 June 1998, p. 27
	180	rocket launchers	1998	Exile by Sandline International.	
	50	machineguns	1998	Delivered to ECOMOG for	
	?	ammunition	1998	distribution to <i>kamajors</i> . Part of USD 1.5 million order	
RUF / AFRC					
S: Libya	?	arms / ammunition	1999	Delivered via Liberia	Human Rights Watch, <i>Neglected Arms Embargo on Sierra Leone</i> (New York, 15 May 2000)
Slovakia	?	ammunition	1999	Ammunition delivered to Liberia and shipped to the RUF	Musah, A., 'A country under siege: state decay and corporate military intervention in Sierra Leone', eds A. Musah and K. K. Fayemi, <i>Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma</i> (Pluto: London and Sterling, Va., 2000), p. 109.
Ukraine	3000	AKM assault rifles	1999	Brokered by Leonid Minin, using a Burkina Faso EUC, and transferred to RUF	United Nations, Letter dated 31 December 1999 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 985 (1995) concerning Liberia (S/1999/1301), 31 Dec. 1999; and HRW Letter to President Compaoré, Human Rights Watch, 28 Mar. 2000
?	?	12.7mm / 14.5mm anti-aircraft guns	?		
?	?	SA-7 MANPADS	?	Delivered by helicopter from Liberia	Pratt, D., <i>Sierra Leone: The Forgotten Crisis</i> (Report to the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, 23 Apr. 1999)
?	?	arms / ammunition	2000	Delivered by truck from Liberia	United Nations, Report of the Panel of Experts pursuant to resolution 1306 (2000), paragraph 19, in relation to Sierra Leone, UN Document S/2000/1195, 14 Dec. 2000, p. 35
?	60	122mm rockets	1999	Delivered by truck from Liberia	'Liberia selling arms for diamonds', BBC News, 6 June 2000
?	?	MANPADS	?	Via Liberia	Human Rights Watch, <i>Neglected Arms Embargo on Sierra Leone</i> , (New York, 15 May 2000)
Eastern Europe	?	arms / ammunition	1997- 2000	Arms supplied via Burkina Faso, Liberia and Niger by brokers such as Talal El-Ndine, Simon Rosenblum, Gus van Kouwenhoven	Venter, A. J., 'Taking control in Sierra Leone', <i>Jane's International Defence Review</i> , 9/2000, p. 60 UN Document S/2000/1195, p. 34

Table 5. Known arms transfers to the Kabbah government, June 1998–present

Recipient/ supplier (S)	No. delivered	Weapon	Year(s) of deliveries	Comments	Source
Kabbah government					
S: Bulgaria	?	?	?	Bulgarian government loan To buy US\$3.75m worth of arms	Berman, E. G., <i>Re-Armament in Sierra Leone: One Year After the Lome Peace Agreement Peace Agreement</i> , Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper 1 (Small Arms Survey: Geneva, Dec. 2000), p. 23
China	?	SALW	1999		Berman, p. 23
	1	naval vessel	2005?		UN document S/2005/273, p. 3
Netherlands	50	'military vehicles'	2004	Donation	Jollah, T., 'Dutch donate 50 military vehicles to Sierra Leone', <i>Concord Times</i> , 10 Dec. 2004.
Russia	3-4	Mi-26	1999	Lease	'Jaswant rule out pullout from Sierra Leone', 16 June 2000, < http://www.rediff.com/news/2000/jul/16ajs.htm >; 'Mi-26 Helicopter Operations Up', <i>Helicopter History Site</i> , < http://www.helis.com >.
South Africa	?	Military equipment	?		Berman, p. 23
UK	7500	rifles	1999	Total deal est. value	Taylor-Norton, R. and McGreal, C., 'Sierra Leone children carry British guns', <i>The Guardian</i> , 25 May 2000, p. 5
	24	81mm mortars	1999		
	132	LMG	1999		
	2 million	ammunition rounds	1999		
	2000	mortar shells			
	10 000	SLR	2000		
	5 million	7.62mm ammunition rounds	2000		Taylor-Norton, R. and MacAskill, E., Exit strategy linked to weapons 'aid', <i>The Guardian</i> , 24 May 2000, p. 3
	4000	mortar shells	2000		IRIN, 'Britain to send more military equipment', 14 July 2000, < http://www.irinnews.org >.