



Sierra Leone: The Revolutionary United Front

Ismail Rashid

Sierra Leone represents one of the most successful cases of UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding. More than 10 years after the declared cessation of its decade-long conflict in 2002, the country remained relatively stable.¹ Three successful national elections were held in 2002, 2007, and 2012. Two of them (2007 and 2012) resulted in the defeat of the theretofore incumbent Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) government by the opposition All People's Congress Party (APC). Thus, a key test for nascent democracy—the peaceful transition of power to an opposition party—albeit fraught with tension, occurred twice in the decade following one of the most brutal African civil wars in modern times. This is a major achievement that should not be overlooked.

The UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), established in 1999, was a critical factor enabling stabilization. It started inauspiciously, however, with the peacekeepers initially failing to recognize the volatility of the situation, and especially the threat posed by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Even after signing the Lomé Peace Agreement in 1999, the RUF remained intent on seizing state power, unwilling to relinquish control over lucrative diamond areas, and hostile to international peacekeepers. Despite UNAMSIL's initial misreading of the nature of the threat, and other organizational and leadership stumbles, it was able to establish a well-resourced and robust force. Supported by the UK and several West African countries, it eventually dislodged the RUF from its captured territories. The Sierra Leone intelligence services, police, and army were then overhauled as part of a larger strategy of reconstituting state authority, building democratic institutions and practices, and reestablishing a functioning society and economy. All were the crucial elements for consolidating peace and ensuring stability, and the Sierra Leone experience has provided valuable insights about the challenge of confronting illicit power before, during, and after civil conflict and political transition.

It can also be argued that the lessons from Sierra Leone have done more to inform current international thinking on stabilization issues than any other conflict of the past twenty-five years. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Advisory Council (OECD DAC) leaned heavily on the UK and UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) experience when it drafted its *Handbook on Security System Reform* in 2005-6.² Also, the lessons from Sierra Leone have significantly informed subsequent DPKO guidelines and best practices; the ways in which war crimes tribunals are established and conducted continue to be heavily influenced by the Special Court for Sierra Leone; and, out of this conflict in particular, the Kimberley Process for regulating world trade in so-called blood diamonds was established.³

¹ The Sierra Leone civil war is generally defined as covering the decade between 1991 and 2002.

² OECD DAC, *OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform: Supporting Security and Justice*, Feb. 25, 2008, www.oecd.org/governance/governance-peace/conflictandfragility/oecdachandbookonsecurity-systemreformsupportingsecurityandjustice.htm.

³ Kimberly Process, "The Kimberley Process (KP)," 2015, www.kimberleyprocess.com/en/about.

The Conflict and Its Causes

The Sierra Leone conflict defies the usual easy characterization of conflicts in Africa. It was not ethnic, religious, or ideological. Instead, its origins lay partly in Sierra Leone's precarious condition after gaining its independence from British colonial rule in 1961. During 1961-91, successive postcolonial governments, civilian and military, proved unable to establish policies or implement programs reflecting the collective interests and aspirations of their citizenry within a rapidly changing global system.⁴ The government could not provide clean water, dependable electricity, decent education, or affordable health services.⁵ Like other African governments, the APC regime could not fund its own government or national development programs, putting the country at the mercy of harsh World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment programs.⁶ For almost two decades, the APC repressed its opponents, conducted fraudulent elections, and fostered a culture of corruption and impunity.⁷

Student disaffection over this state of affairs and over repressive government actions gave rise to the RUF. Radical college student leaders helped recruit Foday Sankoh and other Sierra Leoneans for military training in Benghazi, Libya, for an armed revolution against the APC regime in 1987. By 1989, the students had completely abandoned their revolutionary project, but they had laid the foundation for a brutal civil war that would bleed Sierra Leone for a decade. Sankoh and two other Libyan trainees, Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray, would eventually link up with Charles Taylor, head of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), whom they had met in Libya in 1988. Taylor had started his own revolution against Samuel Doe's regime in Liberia in 1989. That war-ravaged nation gave Sankoh and his comrades a fertile recruiting ground and a launching pad for their war in Sierra Leone.

Taylor viewed the RUF as part of a greater panWest African "revolutionary" enterprise to replace repressive dictatorial governments.⁸ The NPFL's and RUF's combined training, recruitment, and resource networks stretched across Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Côte D'Ivoire, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Libya.⁹ Taylor's support for the RUF in Sierra Leone reflected not only his pan-West African revolutionary ambitions but also his willingness to reciprocate for Sankoh and comrades' participation in the Liberian war. But as the 2004 Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report later revealed, more cynical strategic considerations underpinned this support. Taylor wanted to disrupt the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitor-

⁴ Adekeye Adebajo, *Building Peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 38-39.

⁵ See Magbaily Fyle, ed., *The State and the Provision of Social Services in Sierra Leone since Independence, 1961-1991* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1992); Earl Conteh Morgan and Mac Dixon-Fyle, *Sierra Leone at the End of the Twentieth Century: History, Politics, and Society* (Washington, DC: Peter Lang, 1999), 91-117.

⁶ During the precivil war period, the APC governed the country from 1968 to 1992. Beginning in 1978, it was the sole political party in Sierra Leone to have legal status.

⁷ Abdul Karim Koroma, *Sierra Leone: The Agony of a Nation* (Freetown, Sierra Leone: Andromeda, 1996), 242.

⁸ Ibrahim Abdullah, "Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front / Sierra Leone," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 2 (1998): 203-35.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 220.

ing Group's (ECOMOG's) deployment and its use of Sierra Leone as a base for Liberian operations. He also sought to counter anti-NPFL groups that coalesced in Sierra Leone and threatened his rapacious NPFL and mercenary troops' access to Sierra Leone's diamonds.¹⁰ As the Commission noted, during the first year of the war, "NPFL commandos with a patent obsession for self-enrichment . . . choose to indulge themselves in looting and mining activities."¹¹

It was Sankoh who announced (over BBC African Service) that the invasion of March 1991 represented the start of the armed phase of the liberation struggle to rid Sierra Leone of the APC government and establish "a just, democratic, and egalitarian society."¹² But it was Taylor who determined the operation's timing, strength, control, and direction. Of the roughly 2,000 troops who crossed into Sierra Leone, RUF combatants numbered only about 360. Charles Taylor's NPFL commandos numbered 1,600. Command of the field operations of the invasion was vested in two NPFL generals: Francis Mewon (Kailahun, Eastern Front) and Oliver Vandy (Pujehun, Southern Front). Materiel for the operation—trucks, 4x4 vehicles, AK-47s, and rocket-propelled grenades—came from Taylor. Taylor had pushed Sankoh, who was waiting for his own independent arms supplies from Libya, into invading Sierra Leone much earlier than Sankoh had planned. But although Taylor withdrew his NPFL troops from Sierra Leone after a year, his support and initial shaping operations had set the RUF on the path to becoming a lethal and intractable illicit power structure.

When it began in 1991, the NPFL/RUF invasion of Sierra Leone had two military objectives. First, the invaders wanted to control the main route to Koindu and establish a forward base, where they could await reinforcements from Liberia. Second, they aimed to capture the most significant military garrison in the eastern region: Moa Barracks, in Kailahun district. Not only were the barracks expected to yield weapons and ammunition, but their capture would deny the Sierra Leone army and ECOMOG support for their operations in eastern Sierra Leone, and in Liberia to the south and east. Possession of the base would also put the RUF in a position to capture Kenema, Sierra Leone's third-largest city.

The insurgents quickly overran major towns in Pujehun and Kailahun districts and were poised to attack Bo, Kenema, and Kono districts, but despite waves of victory during 1991-92, they ultimately failed in their military objectives. The 1,000 RUF and NPFL troops who attacked Moa Barracks in Daru, Kailahun district, found it heavily defended by Sierra Leonean and Guinean troops that had been quickly relocated from their ECOMOG contingent in Liberia. The RUF/NPFL's military plans were derailed, but the insurgents nonetheless caused a major shift in Sierra Leone's political leadership and, more significantly, in the nature of the war itself.

The fighting created the opportunity for a group of young Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF) officers to depose the decrepit APC regime of Major General Momoh on April 29, 1992. The officers labeled their new administration the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) and pledged to end the war quickly, reduce cor-

¹⁰ Sierra Leone TRC, *Witness to Truth: Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, vol. 3A (Accra, Ghana: GPL Press, 2004), 118, www.sierra-leone.org/Other-Conflict/TRCVolume3A.pdf.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹² Zubairu Wai, *Epistemologies of African Conflicts: Violence, Evolutionism, and the War in Sierra Leone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 95.

ruption, and restore multiparty democracy. Headed by Captain Valentine Strasser, the NPRC received enthusiastic support from a disaffected population.¹³ The NPRC quickly expanded the RSMLF from about 5,000 to 15,000 troops, drawing mostly from unemployed, poorly educated urban youth. Bolstered by the increased numbers and supported by Guinean soldiers and Nigerian airpower, the NPRC successfully flushed the RUF insurgents from nearly all their captured towns in the eastern and southern regions.

In response to its defeat by the NPRC in open warfare, the RUF resorted to guerrilla tactics, employing small, highly mobile units in stealth attacks and ambushes of military and civilian convoys. The RUF also engaged in extensive “false flag” operations, dressing combatants as RSMLF soldiers and targeting civilians, to discredit the Sierra Leone military. The RUF aimed to weaken the government by crippling its administrative and security apparatuses, and to shut down all major industrial and commercial activities and capture the diamondiferous regions. The RUF also wanted international attention and wanted to force the government to negotiate.

By late 1995, the RUF had achieved some of its aims after effectively shutting down the operations of Sierra Rutile in Bonthe district, and Sierra Leone Ore and Metal Company in Moyamba district. The RUF also overran the diamondiferous areas in the eastern and southern regions, securing access to a resource that would help it finance its military campaign and transform it into a transnational criminal enterprise.

The RUF guerrilla campaign produced a number of responses. First, a “sobel” – soldier by day, rebel by night – phenomenon emerged as RSLMF officers began collaborating with the RUF.¹⁴ Sobel activities so discredited the RSLMF that the army became unwelcome in several areas of the country. This led to the establishment of Kamajors, a civil defense militia initially made up of hunters who sought to defend their communities from RUF and renegade soldiers. Over the course of the war, these militias, or Civil Defense Forces, cropped up all over the eastern, southern, and northern regions. Even Freetown had its own Civil Defense Unit.

The NPRC also contracted foreign mercenaries – Jersey-based Gurkha Security Services, and Executive Outcomes (EO), a South African mercenary outfit – to train the RSLMF, provide logistics, fight the war, and protect diamond areas. The Gurkha presence proved to be of limited military value, but EO personnel effectively supported government counterinsurgency operations against RUF bases around Freetown and in mining areas.¹⁵

RUF guerrilla successes forced the NPRC into peace negotiations. Sankoh flew to Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, and spent 10 months negotiating what would be the first of several peace accords with the NPRC government.

The Abidjan Peace Agreement, signed in November 1996, established a cease-fire and granted amnesty to RUF members.¹⁶ It also called for the Disarmament, Demobiliza-

¹³ Joseph A. Opala, “Ecstatic Renovation: Street Art Celebrating Sierra Leone’s 1992 Revolution,” *African Affairs* 93 (1994): 195-218.

¹⁴ Although he was never formally tried, the Commission singled out Captain Tom Nyuma, NPRC deputy secretary of state for defense, as “foremost among the officers who put his personal interests ahead of his constitutional duties.” Sierra Leone TRC, *Witness to Truth*, vol. 2, 52.

¹⁵ EO’s services, costing over \$1 million a month, became difficult for the country to sustain and were terminated in 1997.

¹⁶ Sierra Leone Web, “Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF/SL),” 2015, www.sierra-leone.org/abidjanaccord.html.

tion, and Reintegration (DDR) of armed combatants, transformation of the RUF into a political organization, and creation of a set of joint institutions to implement its provisions. Ultimately, the agreement failed because neither the government nor the RUF had the will or international support to implement it, and both sides repeatedly breached the cease-fire. Tellingly, Sankoh did not return from Côte d'Ivoire to Sierra Leone after signing the accord. Instead, he embarked on a tour of various African countries, ostensibly to raise financial support for the RUF's transformation into a legitimate political party.¹⁷

Clumsy handling of the army by the civilian government of Tejan Kabbah, elected in 1996, led to renewal of the conflict. The Kabbah administration had inherited an army that it did not trust, and that the public also distrusted because of its "sobel" activities and undisguised opposition to democratic elections and civilian rule. The mistrust was not unwarranted. On May 25, 1997, a group of disgruntled soldiers freed Major Johnny Paul Koroma, who been imprisoned for treasonable offenses, and staged a military coup, forcing the Kabbah government and thousands of Sierra Leoneans into exile in neighboring Guinea. The trigger for the coup was the government's attempt to downsize the army and reduce its rice rations, which had already been mostly siphoned off by senior officers, to the detriment of the lower ranks.¹⁸

The Armed Forces Redemption Council (AFRC), as the junta was called, naively invited the RUF to join it, form a "people's army," and end the war. Sankoh, in Nigeria awaiting charges of illegal possession of arms, endorsed the move, and the acting RUF commander, Sam Bockarie, moved into Freetown with thousands of mostly juvenile RUF commandos. The TRC later observed:

This effort to end the war worked briefly in getting the RUF out of the bush but it was counterproductive. It endorsed the assertion that the army was in connivance with the "rebels." This stiffened the people's resolve not to have anything to do with the new "people's army." All commercial enterprises closed shop; schools and offices remained closed for much of the nine months that the AFRC was in power. About eighty percent of the armed forces had forsworn their allegiance to the constitution and the elected government and joined the People's Army established by the AFRC.¹⁹

In response, the two international organizations that had underwritten the Abidjan Peace Agreement – ECOWAS and the United Nations – condemned the coup, and the United Nations imposed an arms embargo on the junta.

ECOMOG troops, supported by loyal RSLMF soldiers and Kamajors, eventually dislodged the renegade AFRC soldiers and their RUF allies from Freetown in February 1998, enabling the Kabbah government to return to power. But although ECOMOG secured some of the larger towns in the north and east, it could not decisively defeat the AFRC or RUF. Thus, the restoration of the Kabbah government belied the fact that the country had virtually returned to all-out war. After Kabbah announced the disbandment of the army, ECOMOG and Kamajors effectively became the principal defenders of the country's security. Vengeful recriminations by the Kabbah government, Kamajors,

¹⁷ The Libyan Ambassador to Ghana, Mohamed Talibi, reportedly gave Sankoh \$500,000 for humanitarian assistance and to help transform the RUF into a political movement. About \$7,000 went to buying arms for the RUF; Sankoh spent the rest. See SayIt, "Charles Taylor Trial," April 14, 2010, <http://charles-taylor.sayit.mysociety.org/hearing-14-april-2010/witness-dct-306-on-former-oath#s183095>.

¹⁸ Sierra Leone TRC, *Witness to Truth*, vol. 3A, 235.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 247.

and ordinary civilians against junta members and collaborators did not engender stability, and the RUF “vowed to make the country ungovernable.”²⁰ For its part, the AFRC set its sights on retaking Freetown and reinstalling the military junta.

The AFRC engaged in mass recruitment and the abduction of civilians.²¹ Eventually, it had 2,000 fighters armed with AK-47s, machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and heavy mortars. The AFRC blazed a trail of destruction and atrocities, forcing ECOMOG troops to pull back from major towns in the northern region. The RUF, with arms reportedly provided by Charles Taylor in Liberia and Blaise Compaoré in Burkina Faso, raced through Kono and Makeni and on to Freetown. The RUF then joined the AFRC, using thousands of civilians as human shields, in reentering Freetown on January 6, 1999.

The government and ECOMOG misjudged the scale and intensity of the attack, with horrendous consequences for the city.²² According to the Commission, it “. . . quickly evolved into one of the most concentrated spates of human rights abuse and atrocities against civilians perpetrated by any group or groups during the entire history of the conflict.”²³ ECOMOG, replenished by fresh battalions from Nigeria and supported by the Kamajors, succeeded in pushing AFRC and RUF combatants out of the city, but the retreating combatants left a horrific trail of mutilation, death, and destruction of government and private property. By May 1999, the financial and human cost of counterinsurgency operations had also become burdensome for Guinea, Ghana, and Nigeria, the main contributors to ECOMOG. Over 800 ECOMOG troops (mostly Nigerian) had been killed, and the operation was costing Nigeria \$1 million a day.²⁴ Since it had become painfully obvious that the conflict could not be resolved by military force, international pressure mounted on the Kabbah government to recognize the RUF and negotiate with Sankoh.²⁵

The Peace Settlement

The RUF’s particular brand of militaristic orientation gave it four characteristics that made the peace process more difficult in subsequent negotiations than they had been in Abidjan.

- First, by 1999, leadership and power in the RUF had become concentrated in the hands of hard-core militarists. A credible political wing never developed within the organization.
- Second, because the RUF’s main recruitment method had been kidnapping and coercion, some of its senior political cadre by this time, including those participating in the peace negotiations, were themselves abductees. For these men, whose

²⁰ Ibid., 297; Zubairu Wai, *Epistemologies of African Conflicts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 110.

²¹ Sierra Leone TRC, *Witness to Truth*, vol. 3A, 316.

²² Jimmy Kandeh, “Subaltern Terror in Sierra Leone,” in *Africa in Crisis: New Challenges and Possibilities*, ed. Tunde Zack-Williams, Diane Frost, and Alex Thompson (London: Pluto, 2002).

²³ Sierra Leone TRC, *Witness to Truth*, vol. 3A, 326.

²⁴ Ismail Rashid, “The Lomé Peace Negotiations,” *Accord 9* (2000): 26-33, www.c-r.org/sites/default/files/Accord%2009_5The%20Lome%20peace%20negotiations_2000_ENG.pdf.

²⁵ Lansana Gberie, *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2005), 157.

families had been murdered before their eyes and who were inducted into the RUF at an impressionable age through use of drugs and extreme violence, the RUF was all the family they knew, and they had nothing to go back to should the RUF cease to exist. They were invested in seeing it continue and prosper.

- Third, while the rank and file had become fiercely loyal to Sankoh and various field commanders, the RUF never developed the necessary organizational discipline or accountability mechanisms that would have prevented many of the egregious crimes committed during the war.
- Finally, it had become deeply wedded to criminal diamond- and arms-smuggling networks in Liberia and Guinea. Peace meant loss of profit, and they now had a long-term source of funding and a web of business interests throughout the illicit economy that made them a formidable force and an intractable foe.

Ironically, even though the RUF had been less successful militarily, it went into the peace negotiations in Lomé, Togo, in a stronger position than the renegade soldiers of the AFRC, who had spearheaded the deadliest and most disruptive military actions of the conflict's final phase.²⁶ The AFRC did not play a major part in the negotiations, nor was the signature of its leader, Johnny Paul Koroma, on the final document. The Kamajors, expecting that the government would adequately protect their interests, also did not play a significant role.

The Lomé agreement, which took two months to negotiate, built on the Abidjan Peace Agreement. Once again the parties agreed on a cease-fire and established a group, chaired by the UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL), established in 1998, to monitor it. The parties reiterated the grant of an "absolute and free pardon," amnesty, and immunity from prosecution to Foday Sankoh and "combatants and collaborators" from all sides of the conflict.²⁷ They agreed on the need for ex-combatants from the RUF, Kamajors, and RSLMF to be disarmed, demobilized, and reintegrated into society and given the opportunity to be absorbed into a newly restructured and retrained national security force. A Commission for Consolidation for Peace and a committee of seven, under the chairmanship of ECOWAS, were tasked with implementing the treaty. The parties also quickly agreed on provisions for safeguarding humanitarian assistance and fostering human rights.²⁸

Just as in the Abidjan negotiations, the thorniest issues in Lomé were power sharing and withdrawal of foreign troops. The RUF entered the Lomé negotiations in May 1999 determined to win at the negotiating table what it could not win on the ground: state power. For Sankoh and RUF, "power-sharing and transitional government meant sub-

²⁶ Virginia Page Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents' Choices after Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), 69.

²⁷ Lomé Peace Agreement, Kroc Institute Peace Accords Matrix, 1999, <https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/provision/amnesty-lom-peace-agreement>. The UN special envoy, Francis Okelo, attached a disclaimer excluding egregious war crimes, genocide, and major violations of international humanitarian law from the amnesty provision. This proved important later for the Special Court that was set up to try those most responsible for war crimes in Sierra Leone.

²⁸ Rashid, "The Lomé Peace Negotiations," 26-33.

stantial control over the state apparatus.”²⁹ The RUF demanded 11 ministerial positions, 11 parastatal positions, six ambassadorships, and the mayoral leadership of Freetown. It also demanded immediate withdrawal of ECOMOG troops from Sierra Leone.

Steadfastly arguing the need to protect the existing 1991 Constitution, the Kabbah government eventually conceded four ministerial and three deputy ministerial positions. In an act akin to posting the fox to guard the henhouse, Sankoh was made chairman of the Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development (CMRRD), with the rank of a vice president. The Kabbah government had effectively conceded control over the diamond fields and other resources to him and RUF until 2002, when the next national elections were to be held. The RUF could not force ECOMOG out of the country, however. It had to accept that ECOMOG’s forces would be beefed up, and its mandate reoriented to peacekeeping and supporting UNOMSIL in the DDR process.

Despite the euphoria that greeted the signing of the Lomé Agreement, many questions remained about its implementation: How committed was the RUF to both the written provisions and the spirit of the document? And could the RUF delegates in Togo actually sell the treaty to the field commanders in Sierra Leone? Despite his public posturing, Sankoh’s hold over RUF was uncertain, especially after two years in a Nigerian jail. The RUF’s ability to transform itself from a military outfit into a credible political party also remained in question. The agreement, with its suggestions for creating a trust fund, training RUF members, and receiving support from the SLPP government, may have grossly overestimated RUF’s capacity to change.

The RUF as an Illicit Power Structure

A Military Structure in Search of Power

During the Lomé peace negotiations, the international community remained deeply aware of the egregious crimes committed by various factions in the Sierra Leone civil war, but failed to realize the extent to which the RUF had become a militaristic criminal organization with connections to international crime syndicates. Even Reverend Jesse Jackson’s impolitic comparison of Sankoh to Nelson Mandela could not obscure the reality that the RUF was not a credible political movement.³⁰ RUF leaders justified their atrocities, rapacious activities, and systematic destruction of the country largely on the general sense of public disaffection with the APC regime and, after its ouster, the poor performance of the NPRC and SLPP governments. Despite Foday Sankoh’s many BBC interviews and incoherent “ideological” lectures to terrified communities overrun by the RUF, until 1995 many Sierra Leoneans did not know that the RUF even had political objectives.

The RUF’s first significant revelation of its political project for Sierra Leone – a short statement, “About RUF” (Mar. 23, 1994), and a pamphlet, *Footpaths to Democracy* (1995) – appeared initially in the UK.³¹ These documents contained an eclectic assemblage of ideas and slogans encompassing pan-Africanism, Qaddafi’s *Green Book* socialism, libera-

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Gberie, *A Dirty War*, 158.

³¹ RUF, “Footpaths to Democracy,” Sierra Leone Web, 2014, www.sierra-leone.org/AFRC-RUF/footpaths.html.

tion theology, and liberalism. The central theme of the documents was RUF's desire to "revolutionize" and violently "remake" state and society in Sierra Leone. Neither document contained a clear or coherent political program of how this was to be done, except through the endemic violence that Sierra Leoneans were experiencing at that time.

Within the motley group recruited from Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Ghana, and Nigeria and assembled in Liberia in early 1991, Sankoh had gained preeminence based on his age, military experience, and close relations with Charles Taylor. The top brass of the nascent RUF was drawn from a small group of militants trained in Libya and Burkina Faso. Some of them were experienced in combat, having fought as part of the "special forces" of West African mercenaries in the earlier NPFL campaign in Liberia, against Doe in 1989 and 1990. Ultimately, it was Sankoh, strongly supported by Taylor, who provided military direction and control.³²

Once in Sierra Leone, the RUF attracted individuals and groups who had deep-seated grievances or felt alienated from the ruling APC regime and who bought into Sankoh's pronouncements about creating a just society. Others saw RUF and its war simply as an opportunity to loot or settle personal scores. In the mining areas of the eastern region, the RUF got much support from the illicit miners – mainly young school dropouts living by their wits. They joined the RUF because it protected them and gave them access to choice mining sites. Moreover, their everyday work culture as gangs under the control of a headman fit well with RUF fighting formations. During the guerrilla phase of the conflict, the kidnapping of civilians, especially young children, and their use as carriers, spies, sex slaves, and combatants became much more widespread and systematic. The use of illegal drugs to embolden RUF combatants also became rampant.

The RUF operated an effective chain of personal loyalties, from the juvenile soldiers in its "Small Boys Unit" to the battlefield commanders and right up to "Papay," as RUF members affectionately called Sankoh.³³ The RUF high command was composed of "battlefield combatants and other frontline operatives," with Sankoh at the helm.³⁴ The TRC later identified 21 people who were members of the high command at different times, but noted that it was "unrealistic to talk about a permanent hierarchy" and "difficult to discern any consistent and centralized vertical structure of leadership."³⁵ Nonetheless, RUF combatants' loyalty to Sankoh was particularly strong during 1994-96, when his control over the organization was unassailable. Many senior commanders who could have challenged his leadership had been killed earlier, in 1991-93. A RUF War Council, under the Chairmanship of S. Y. B. Rogers, a former civil servant, also met regularly to discuss the war and peace efforts. Its responsibilities were more political and administrative than martial, and as with the high command, its membership was unclear. The relationship between the two RUF structures is obscure, as is the extent to which Sankoh or his loyal commanders were answerable to the War Council.

³² See Sierra Leone TRC, *Witness to Truth*, vol. 2, 48.

³³ The Small Boys Unit (SBU) was a group of children under the age of 15 who were forcibly recruited by the RUF as militants. Originally, the children were taken to carry ammo, food supplies, and equipment to the fighters, but as the war progressed, they were taken to special work camps where the boys were trained for war and the girls were made into sex slaves. Once they were sent out to fight, they plied the trades they were taught, and engaged in the murder of innocent civilians, including those close to their families.

³⁴ Sierra Leone TRC, *Witness to Truth*, vol. 2, 48.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

As the RUF gained recognition and was drawn into peace negotiations, an internal rift began to open. The Abidjan Agreement had called for the organization to be transformed into a legitimate political party, but the RUF clearly lacked the capacity to do so, and the subsequent attempt by some RUF leaders to ensure the organization's participation in the political process created conflict between those who were supportive and those who were not. Those supporting the RUF's participation in the political process had little to show in concrete power gains or incentives from the Abidjan agreement; thus, they could not effectively sell the agreement to the die-hard militarists.

From 1997 until Sankoh's ouster in 2000, his grip over the RUF weakened even as his international profile rose. Following the Abidjan Peace Agreement in late 1996, the newly elected Kabbah government tried to help change the RUF's leadership. It colluded with Nigeria's military government to arrest Sankoh on arms-possession charges at Murtala Mohammed Airport in Lagos, on March 12, 1997. The Kabbah government then supported the attempt by some senior members of the RUF War Council – Fayia Musa, Ibrahim Deen-Jalloh, and Philip Palmer – who had been more supportive of the Abidjan Agreement, to replace Sankoh as leader. Their coup attempt failed after Sam Bockarie, whom Sankoh had anointed as interim leader, arrested the three leaders, Musa, Deen-Jalloh, and Palmer, effectively ending any opportunity for legitimization of the RUF under the Abidjan Accord.³⁶

The RUF and Blood Diamonds

During Sankoh's absence, Sam Bockarie became the RUF's unchallenged leader. During his reign, there was no indication that the RUF War Council ever met or that battle group and battlefield commanders were called in for consultation and planning. Instead, on Sankoh's advice, Bockarie established strong ties with Charles Taylor, who had been elected president of Liberia, and sought his guidance. Taylor provided Bockarie and the RUF leadership with facilities and communications equipment in Monrovia, which he claimed were for facilitating the organization's peace efforts. In reality, these facilities became the base for the RUF (and AFRC) leadership to work jointly with Taylor in training and equipping RUF, planning attacks in Sierra Leone, and exploiting revenues from Sierra Leone diamonds to acquire weapons.³⁷

Liberia's role as a hub of criminal activity is evident in the discrepancy between the records of its production of diamonds and the Antwerp figures of diamond imports from Liberia, vis-à-vis the two sets of figures for Sierra Leone in the same years. (See table 8.1.) Throughout the 1990s, Liberian diamond production averaged 100,000 to 150,000 carats per year, but imports recorded from the country ranged from 658,000 to 12,320,000 carats. Sierra Leone, with a greater production capacity of 8,500 to 347,000 carats, recorded exports to Antwerp ranging from 221,000 to 831,000 carats.³⁸

³⁶ Musa later became a witness in the trial of Charles Taylor in 2010. SayIt, "Charles Taylor Trial," Apr. 16, 2010, <http://charles-taylor.sayit.mysociety.org/hearing-16-april-2010/witness-dct-306-on-former-oath>.

³⁷ Taylor's activities during this period were included in the criminal charges that would later be brought against him in the Special Court for Sierra Leone when, in 2011, he was convicted for aiding and abetting various crimes committed by the AFRC/RUF during 1996-2002.

³⁸ Ian Smillie, Lansana Gberie, and Ralph Hazleton, "The Heart of the Matter: Sierra Leone Diamonds

8.1 Diamond production and exports from Sierra Leone and Liberia to Antwerp, 1990-98 (thousands of carats)

		1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Sierra Leone	Production	78	243	347	158	255	213	270	104	8.5
	Antwerp Imports	221	534	831	344	526	455	566	803	770
Liberia	Production	100	100	150	150	100	150	150	150	150
	Antwerp Imports	5,523	658	1,909	5,006	3,268	10,677	12,320	5,803	2,558

Source: Adapted from Smillie, Gberie, and Hazleton, "The Heart of the Matter," 32.

All the various armed factions in Sierra Leone benefited from the illegal sale of Sierra Leonean diamonds, but the RUF took the lion's share. In 1999-2001 alone, it siphoned off approximately \$70 million of the \$138 million worth of diamonds illegally exported from the country.³⁹ The trade in blood diamonds by the RUF (and AFRC) attracted "businessmen" from South Africa, Israel, Ukraine, and the UK who were willing to provide or transport arms and ammunition and, in some cases, hard drugs to the RUF. Diamond trafficking also paid for Ukrainian and Burkinabé mercenaries who contributed their military expertise. RUF leaders and Taylor took large commissions from some of these illegal transactions.⁴⁰

By the time negotiations started in Lomé, the RUF had been battered by ECOMOG, but it remained highly militarized and criminalized. Sankoh's signature on the Lomé Agreement suggested that RUF had negotiable interests, encoded in the provisions of the agreement. This was only partly true, however. Those in the RUF who felt positive about the agreement started disarming and demobilizing. Those with nonnegotiable criminal interests could not be brought to the table. Even with Sankoh being offered the chairmanship of CMRRD, there was no way to negotiate with hard-core leaders such as Bockarie, who wanted to maintain long-term control of the diamond areas. Taylor, who played the role of peacemaker, also schemed to preserve his influence over the RUF, keep his access to profits from its trade in diamonds and arms, and continue to use members of the organization against his enemies in Liberia. Thus, his interests could not be publicly negotiated. By late 1999, these irreconcilable differences produced violent conflict between factions loyal to Bockarie and those loyal to Sankoh.

Owing to this intra-RUF schism over relinquishing control of the diamond fields, the Lomé Agreement began to unravel within six months. Despite the RUF's political gains and Sankoh's award of the potentially powerful chairmanship of the CMRRD,

and Human Security," report, Partnership Africa Canada, 2000, 32, <http://cryptome.org/kimberly/kimberly-016.pdf>.

³⁹ Diane Frost, *From Pit to Market: Politics and the Diamond Economy in Sierra Leone* (Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2012), 76.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

the RUF acted in a manner that clearly demonstrated a lack of commitment to the peace process. It refused to observe the cease-fire, remained on a belligerent war footing, and continued to attack government troops and international peacekeepers. It hampered the DDR process, stirring up impatience and disaffection among those combatants willing to disarm. Sankoh denounced the transformation of UNOMSIL, which was strictly an observer mission, to UNAMSIL, and the increase of its forces. Sankoh condemned the start of the deployment of UNAMSIL as illegal and inconsistent with the Lomé Agreement, which had mentioned only UNOMSIL and ECOMOG. According to UN reports, "Every effort made to explain the link between UNAMSIL and article XVI of the Lomé Agreement met with a pretense at understanding, only for UNAMSIL to be denounced again shortly thereafter."⁴¹

Most egregiously, on May 6, 2000, the RUF exploited the confusion created by the transition from ECOMOG to UNAMSIL, by kidnapping and disarming 498 UN peacekeepers who had been hastily deployed in Makeni, Magburaka, Kambia, and Kailahun.⁴² The next day, the RUF shot down a UN helicopter. The UN peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone tottered on the brink of collapse, and a wave of panic swept through Freetown amid rumors that the city was in danger of a third invasion from RUF and AFRC. The UK and other Western countries asked their citizens to leave the country. As the RUF increased its activities to oppose the peace process through violent means, all hope of transforming it to a licit organization whose fundamental interests might be reconcilable was gone.

The International Strategy and Its Impact

Saving the Mission

The crisis that UNAMSIL faced in May 2000 had little to do with the mandate it was given when established by UN Security Resolution 1270 (1999). UNSCR 1270 authorized a force of 6,000, later increased to 11,000 by Resolution 1289 (February 2000). But UNAMSIL was not only tasked to facilitate implementation of Lomé's key provisions and empowered to use force to defend itself. Its mandate was notable because it authorized UNAMSIL to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence. This was a more proactive style of UN peacekeeping, which the numbers did not support. The mismatch between capabilities and requirements stemmed largely from the United Nations' misreading of the operational environment in Sierra Leone, especially the RUF's intransigence, and an assumption that ECOMOG forces would remain in Sierra Leone to help maintain the peace. As Funmi Olonisakin, an expert in peace and security, put it, "In hindsight, the two assumptions of UNAMSIL's planners . . . that the RUF would abide by the terms of the Lomé Agreement, and that the UN could cope with challenges after ECOMOG's withdrawal – proved disastrously wrong."⁴³ As a result of its failure to fully

⁴¹ "Report to 3rd Joint Implementation Committee meeting, May 13, 2000, 18," quoted in Shalini Chawla, "United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone: A Search for Peace," www.idsa-india.org/an-dec-00-10.html.

⁴² Funmi Olonisakin, *Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone: The Story of UNAMSIL* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2008), 57-58.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 61.

grasp the scope of the challenge ahead, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) proposed deploying only 6,000 troops and selected the highly regarded Indian diplomat and soldier Major General Vijay Kumar Jetley as force commander. DPKO thought that selecting a non-West African commander might better project UNAMSIL's neutrality, but Jetley's credentials and UN neutrality meant little to RUF.

DPKO's assumption that ECOMOG would remain active in Sierra Leone was quickly invalidated by newly elected Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo's decision to withdraw Nigerian troops from the country. Though some Nigerian troops were later rehatted as UN peacekeepers, lack of coordination between UNAMSIL's deployment and ECOMOG's withdrawal created major problems that the RUF and the AFRC exploited. Newly arrived UN peacekeepers immediately found themselves in a volatile operating environment, with insufficient intelligence and no clear orders on how robustly they should respond to RUF threats and hostile actions. UNAMSIL's difficulties were further compounded by dissatisfaction over an Indian general's appointment as force commander. Despite having two Nigerians in the UNAMSIL top leadership—Oluyemi Adeniji as special representative of the secretary-general, and Brigadier General Mohammed Garba as deputy force commander—Nigerian officials felt that overall command of the troops should have been given to a West African and that West Africans should constitute the bulk of the peacekeeping force.⁴⁴

This disaffection led to further squabbles over subordinate leadership positions, deployment strategies, and chain of command, with troops taking orders from their home countries rather than from the force commander. A May 2000 confidential internal report by Jetley exposed the deep divisions within the mission. Although never officially submitted to the UN Security Council (UNSC), the report was widely circulated among its members. Jetley's report highlighted the former ECOMOG troops' disaffection, suggested the RUF's preference for ECOMOG over UNAMSIL, and accused senior ECOMOG members of stealing Sierra Leonean diamonds. Allegations that its soldiers engaged in illicit trade with the RUF had long dogged ECOMOG. Nonetheless, the Jetley report sparked hostility from Nigerian diplomats and military officials, who called for his removal.⁴⁵

The crisis of May 2000 produced two sets of responses that ultimately saved the Lomé Agreement and prevented the country from plunging into all-out conflict again. The first came in the form of short-term decisive military actions by the UK, the now progovernment (and reintegrated) AFRC, and Kamajors and loyalist segments of the Sierra Leone military.

As mentioned earlier, the AFRC had not taken an active part in the Lomé negotiations. Afterward, in an extraordinary series of statements, the AFRC's leadership declared, "We herald the dawn of a new era. The war has ended. The era of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation has come." The AFRC declared an end to its war against the government, announced its commitment to the peace accord, and begged the people's forgiveness for the wrongs committed by the AFRC and its members.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 82. Olonisakin points out that it was not so much an issue of political sensitivity as of remuneration, since only the force commander was paid on a UN scale, whereas the deputy force commander retained his (much lower) regular salary.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 81-85.

⁴⁶ Sierra Leone Web, "Statement on the Historic Return to Freetown, Sierra Leone, of the Leaders of the

Their action stabilized the situation in Freetown, saved UNAMSIL, and crippled Sankoh's leadership over the RUF. In response to the RUF's abduction of UNAMSIL troops, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had asked the UK, U.S.A., and France to deploy a rapid-reaction force in Sierra Leone to save the mission. But it was the UK, acting independently of the United Nations, that ultimately intervened and changed the course of the conflict.⁴⁷

The first UK intervention, code-named "Palliser," began on May 7, 2000, with the dual objectives of rescuing UK and other foreign nationals from the volatile situation in the country and saving the tottering peacekeeping mission. British troops quickly secured Lungi airport, repelled a RUF attack, and set up defensive positions in various parts of Freetown. The British evacuation of its and other nations' citizens during Palliser sent mixed signals. On the one hand, it underscored the fragility of the situation in the city. On the other, as President Kabbah conceded in his memoir, it raised public confidence and served as a deterrent to the RUF.⁴⁸

Complementing Operation Palliser were equally decisive actions by civic groups and progovernment factions of the AFRC, led by Johnny Paul Koroma, against Sankoh. In reaction to the kidnapping of the UN troops, and rumors of another impending invasion of the city, hundreds of Sierra Leonian citizens and politicians marched to Sankoh's residence on May 6 and May 8, 2000, to preempt the invasion. With the knowledge and tacit support of government officials including Kabbah, Koroma and his AFRC loyalists in the military coordinated the arrest of prominent RUF officials in the city and orchestrated a violent retaliation against Sankoh's security guards. On May 8, Sankoh's RUF security detail, faced with hundreds of angry demonstrators, panicked and killed 21 protestors. The West Side Boys (a splinter group that had supported the AFRC), Kamajors, and other government operatives who had infiltrated the civic demonstration, then killed a number of Sankoh's RUF security guards. Sankoh escaped but was apprehended ten days later and detained without trial by the government of Sierra Leone, in accordance with emergency powers of detention.

The West Side Boys, even at their peak, numbered no more than 600. They were never believed to have any affiliation with the RUF and were known for their bizarre dress, extreme violence, and heavy drug use (mostly palm wine and heroin, purchased with illicit diamond revenues). At the time, they were portrayed as a criminal gang with no political purpose, enabled by the perpetual lawlessness and social breakdown of the country. A 2008 article in the *Journal of Modern African Studies* offered an alternative view of the West Side Boys as an effective military unit employing military and political techniques to achieve defined goals, but there is scant evidence to support that view. More likely, they are just another example of how illicit power structures arise opportunistically in a security and governance vacuum.

Alliance of the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council," Oct. 3, 1999, www.sierra-leone.org/AFRC-RUF/AFRC-100399.html. See also "Position Statement of the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)," Sept. 18, 1999, www.sierra-leone.org/AFRC-RUF/AFRC-091899.html.

⁴⁷ Adekeye Adebajo and David Keen, "Sierra Leone," in *United Nations Interventionism, 1991-2004*, ed. Mats Berdal and Spyros Economides (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 246-73.

⁴⁸ Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, *Coming Back from the Brink in Sierra Leone* (Accra: EPP Book Services, 2010), 158.

The second UK intervention and show of force, Operation Barras, took place almost four months after Palliser. It was a much smaller operation, triggered by a monumental miscalculation by an errant faction of the West Side Boys. On August 25, 2000, they seized 11 UK troops on patrol in the strategic Okra Hills area and refused to release them through negotiations. The UK then launched Operation Barras on September 10, 2000, dismantling the base and freeing all hostages but one British officer, who died in the fighting. The operation eliminated the West Side Boys as a military threat to Freetown, effectively destroying the group. It also opened the flow of road traffic between Freetown and other regions of the country and helped ease the deployment of UNAMSIL troops to regions outside the city.

Defeating the RUF

Rather than merely reacting to breaches of the agreement with short-term military operations designed only to address the immediate security threat, the Sierra Leone government and the international community made their second round of responses to the May 2000 crisis based on a much deeper understanding of RUF as an illicit power structure. They now recognized that the RUF was not a political movement committed to peace, but rather a criminal organization driven by material greed. This realization motivated the Sierra Leone government to work closely with UK military experts to develop a strategic campaign plan that would either ensure total military defeat of the RUF or finally conclude the conflict on terms that would enable the peace process to succeed. The plan entailed severing RUF from its Liberian strategic center of gravity, particularly the planning and arms support provided by Taylor. It also aimed to restrict RUF profits from the illegal diamond trade through Liberia and Guinea. Crucially, the plan envisioned isolation and disruption of RUF's operational center of gravity by pushing for government control and investment in the diamondiferous areas. The plan, conducted in five major phases, included tactical coordination between the retrained Sierra Leone Army (SLA), Kamajors, Sierra Leone Police (SLP), and Guinean armed forces, with operational support, training, and equipment to be provided by the UK. Through its International Military Assistance Training Team (IMATT), the UK had started retraining units of the Sierra Leone armed forces in 1999 with the aim of making them a more democratically accountable, effective, and sustainable arm of the Sierra Leonean government.⁴⁹

Even as the plan was being written in January 2001, various elements of its first two phases were already unfolding on the ground. The confidence building and disruption of RUF command centers envisaged in the first phase were already under way in late 2000, with a string of SLA/AFRC/Kamajor victories that cleared parts of the northern access to Lunsar and Makeni. RUF incursions into Guinea, over a trade dispute with Guinean soldiers and to support Taylor in his war against the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, triggered a massive Guinean offensive against the RUF, decimating its top leadership and effectively destroying its operational center of gravity in Sierra Leone by early 2001.⁵⁰ This broke the RUF's will to fight and weakened

⁴⁹ British Army, "The British Army in Africa," 2015, www.army.mod.uk/operations-deployments/22724.aspx.

⁵⁰ Lansana Gberie, "Destabilizing Guinea: Diamonds, Charles Taylor and the Potential for Wider Hu-

its ability to hold on to the diamond fields by force. It also impeded RUF's ability to be resupplied through Guinea.⁵¹ Already cut off from its supply routes through Liberia, the RUF found it much harder to replenish weapons and ammunition.

While the RUF was being systematically defeated on the battlefield, authority within the organization was shifting from the more truculent leaders, such as Bockarie, to others, such as Issa Sesay, who were willing to work with UNAMSIL and the Sierra Leone government. By 2000, Bockarie had effectively relocated to Liberia, partly due to international pressure on Taylor to control him and also as a result of factional struggle within the RUF. In November 2000, RUF field commanders nominated Issa Sesay to take over from the incarcerated Sankoh. Nigerian President Obasanjo and Malian President Alpha Konaré persuaded Sankoh to accept the decision.

Sesay, a battlefield commander with considerable influence on RUF field combatants, displayed a genuine commitment to the peace process and implementation of the Lomé Agreement—a commitment thus far absent in RUF leadership. In Abuja, Nigeria, he signed a cease-fire with the government, agreeing to the unfettered deployment of UN peacekeepers across the country, the release of all arms that RUF had seized from UNAMSIL, and recommencement of the DDR process. Sesay later signed a second agreement in Abuja, with the government and in the presence of ECOWAS and UN officials, to relinquish RUF areas of control and allow conduction of the 2002 national elections. Transfer of control over the diamond fields to the government marked a significant milestone in the strategic campaign plan drawn by the Sierra Leone government and UK military advisers.

Consolidating UNAMSIL

The strategic campaign plan aimed to strengthen the government as well as UNAMSIL and its activities, but there is no indication that the UN peacekeeping force participated directly in its implementation. The United Nations did, however, undertake a series of complementary actions designed to strengthen UNAMSIL, diminish Liberian support for the rebels, and restrict the flow of blood diamonds from Sierra Leone and other conflict areas in Africa. The UNSC increased UNAMSIL's mandated troop strength from 6,000 in May 2000 to 17,500 by March 2001. UNSC Resolution 1313, adopted on August 4, 2000, set out a number of high-priority tasks and gave the mission teeth, authorizing it to "decisively counter the threat of RUF attack."⁵² In response to West African demands for African leadership of the mission, Lieutenant General Daniel Opande of Kenya replaced Major General Jetley as force commander. Opande received broad acceptance and respect from the troops, enabling him to consolidate command and control within the UN contingent. He directed UNAMSIL efforts in the pacification and disarmament of RUF combatants in Kono, Kambia, and Makeni. The appointment of Major General

man Catastrophe," Occasional Paper no. 1, Partnership Africa Canada, Oct. 2001, www.pacweb.org/Documents/diamonds_KP/1_dastabilizing_Guinea_Eng_Oct2001.pdf.

⁵¹ Sierra Leone TRC, *Witness to Truth*, vol. 3A, 460.

⁵² UNSC, Resolution 13, S/RES/1313 (2000), 4 Aug. 2000, operative para. 3; UNSC, "Fifth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone," July 31, 2000, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/554/71/PDF/N0055471.pdf?OpenElement>.

Martin Agwai of Nigeria to replace Brigadier General Garba, who had been part of the controversy surrounding Jetley, also helped stabilize the mission.

UNAMSIL itself was reorganized with the addition of two deputy special representatives of the secretary-general to coordinate political and administrative affairs and governance and stabilization. The operating forces received better military equipment, maps, and communications capabilities. Perhaps most importantly of all, they developed better predeployment reconnaissance and information gathering and processing, which strengthened their ability to respond rapidly and appropriately to events on the ground. A significant contributor to this capacity was the improvement in the military information cell that UNOMSIL had established at UNAMSIL headquarters in the Mammy Yoko Hotel.

In neighboring Liberia, the international tide turned sharply against Charles Taylor, weakening his influence and ability to destabilize Sierra Leone. He was denounced for his military and criminal activities in Sierra Leone and Guinea. UNSC Resolution 1343 of March 7, 2001, strengthened the arms embargo against Liberia and banned its diamond exports. Thanks in part to an effective media campaign orchestrated by Global Witness and other nongovernmental organizations, the embargo on Liberia's diamond trade signaled a real shift by the international community against the traffic in conflict diamonds. The UN Security Council had already identified conflict diamonds as a major source of financing for armed conflict, especially in Angola, and UNSC 1295, passed in April 2000, had pushed for measures to curtail the circulation of such diamonds. The diamond industry responded by adopting a resolution and developing the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme to ensure that rough diamonds reaching the international marketplace were conflict free. The scheme, which came into operation in 2003 after the conflict in Sierra Leone had effectively ended, has faced criticism from some of its initial backers, including Global Witness and Partnership Africa Canada.⁵³ It has had some positive impact, however, on countries such as Sierra Leone, as evidenced by rising official exports of diamonds certified under the Kimberley Process. In 2012, Sierra Leone officially and legally exported 532,555 carats of diamonds, compared to 77,370 carats in 2000, when the mines were under RUF control.⁵⁴

The events of 2000 also signaled a major attitudinal shift in the international community (United Nations, supported by the UK and the United States) toward more activist and robust enforcement of peace in Sierra Leone. RUF fighters participated in the DDR program, and by January 18, 2002, when the conflict was formally declared over, 24,352 RUF combatants had been disarmed. In addition to the general amnesty granted by the Lomé Agreement, combatants were further enticed with a mixture of small cash payments (300,000 Leones, or US\$125) and various skills-training programs for participating in the DDR process. Many RUF members subsequently participated in the truth and reconciliation process.⁵⁵

⁵³ See, for example, James Melik, "Diamonds: Does the Kimberley Process Work?" *BBC News*, June 28, 2010, www.bbc.com/news/10307046.

⁵⁴ See Bank of Sierra Leone, "Annual Report and Statement of Accounts 2001," www.bsl.gov.sl/pdf/Annual_Report_2001_complete.pdf; Bank of Sierra Leone, "Annual Report 2012," www.bsl.gov.sl/pdf/Annual_Report_2012.pdf.

⁵⁵ Article XXVI of the Lomé Agreement called for creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission

In 2002, the United Nations and the Sierra Leone government set up a hybrid special court that indicted 13 key leaders from RUF, Kamajors, and AFRC who were most responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity during the latter phases of the war. Although there was a clear desire to end impunity and punish egregious violations of international humanitarian law, global fatigue was already setting in around long and costly international tribunals, such as those for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. In opting for a hybrid court with a limited number of indictments, the United Nations aimed for a less costly, “targeted and efficient” mechanism.⁵⁶ Despite this strategy, the court attracted criticism over its cost (which exceeded \$200 million), mandate, and ultimate legacy. The court oversaw the successful conviction and incarceration of nine of the indictees, including Charles Taylor. Sankoh, former deputy defense minister Chief Samuel Hinga Norman⁵⁷, Bockarie, and Koroma were indicted but died either before being apprehended by the court or during the trial.

By the time the court started work in January 2002, the RUF was no longer an effective militia or criminal organization. It no longer controlled diamonds or any other national resources, and it had lost the capacity to derail the peace process through violence or intimidation. As envisioned in the Lomé Agreement, the remnants of RUF leadership organized themselves into a political party and participated in the 2002 national elections (the first since the conflict). Despite a lingering sense of insecurity in different parts of the country, the 2002 elections proceeded fairly well, and Kabbah was reelected in a landslide. The RUF Party (RUF), led by Alimamy Pallo Bangura, received less than two percent of the vote, while Johnny Paul Koroma, heading the Peace and Liberation Party, received three percent. The elections were mostly peaceful, and RUF accepted defeat without resorting to violence.⁵⁸

UNAMSIL’s Strategy for Security Sector Reform

The stable environment created by the extensive deployment of UN peacekeepers and their successful disarmament of the various armed groups enabled the Sierra Leone government, the UK, and other international partners to focus on longer-range projects of consolidating peace, extending government authority, and rebuilding the Sierra Leonean state, society, and economy. These projects also coincided with the goals envisaged in phases 35 of the strategic plan drawn up by the government and UK military advisers.

within three months of the signing of the agreement. Parliament enacted the Commission in 2000. It began in 2002 and, after collecting information and hearing testimony in 2003 and 2004, presented its final report in 2004. See Sierra Leone TRC, “Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report,” 2004, Sierra Leone Web, www.sierra-leone.org/TRCDocuments.html.

⁵⁶ Michael Miklaucic, “Justice in the Balance: Taking Stock of International War Crimes Tribunals,” in *Civilians and Modern War: Armed Conflict and the Ideology of Violence*, ed. Daniel Rothbart, Karina Korostelina, and Mohammed Cherkaoui (New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁵⁷ Samuel Hinga Norman was founder and leader of the Civil Defence Forces, commonly known as the Kamajors. Although the Kamajors supported the Kabbah government against the RUF, Hinga Norman was indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone for war crimes and crimes against humanity, and recruitment of child soldiers. He died on February 22, 2007, before he could be convicted, while undergoing medical treatment in Senegal.

⁵⁸ The RUF did not participate in the 2007 elections, and in the recently concluded 2012 national elections, its presidential candidate, Eldred Collins, received around 13,000 votes, or 0.6 percent of the total.

The two major processes that international partners addressed with the Sierra Leone government were security sector reform and poverty reduction.⁵⁹ Both processes were grounded in the widely embraced paradigm that security and development are inextricably connected. Throughout the peacebuilding project in Sierra Leone, international and local stakeholders worked to maintain this connection.

Reforming the Sierra Leone Police

The Kabbah government recognized that restoring and professionalizing the Sierra Leone Police was a priority if long-term stability was to be achieved. With financial and technical support from the UK, the Sierra Leone government undertook an extensive security sector reform program involving the national intelligence services, police, army, and judiciary. For the police reform effort, it appointed Keith Biddle, a retired British senior police officer, as inspector general of the SLP. He would lead the restructuring and rebuilding of the police force from 1999 to 2003.

Biddle faced a monumental challenge. War, retirement, and desertion had reduced the SLP's numbers from a prewar high of 9,317 to around 6,600 in 1999. More than 900 serving police officers had been killed during the conflict, and many police stations had been destroyed. With the assistance of the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project, funded by the UK's Department for International Development, Biddle oversaw the rebuilding of police stations and barracks and the strengthening of the force to 9,500. He went beyond recruitment, overseeing extensive retraining and restructuring throughout the whole SLP.

To create opportunity and promote professionalism, Biddle reduced the number of ranks in the force from 22 to 10 and opened promotion to younger talented officers. Sixty senior officers were retrained at the Police Staff College at Bramshill, UK.⁶⁰ In a controversial move, the Special Security Division (SSD), the hated paramilitary police unit created by the repressive APC president, Siaka Stevens, was kept on, but it was also retrained and redesignated the Operational Support Division (OSD). Doing so allowed the SLP to hold on to experienced members of the force and prevented them from becoming a disaffected opposition. Another factor weighing in favor of retention was the minimal public outcry against the OSD, thanks to SSD officers' heroic defense of Freetown in 1999. UNAMSIL's Civilian Police component also helped by reinstating SLP presence throughout the country and restoring confidence in the force.

Biddle placed greater emphasis on accountability to civilian control and emphasized community policing, an approach known in Sierra Leone as "local needs policing."⁶¹ From 2004, Local Policing Partnership Boards, which included citizens working voluntarily with the police on preventing crime, were set up at each police station. The Domestic Violence Unit was upgraded to a Family Support Unit (FSU), with a broader role in investigating domestic violence, sexual offenses, and cruelty against women and chil-

⁵⁹ Peter Albrecht and Paul Jackson, "Security System Transformation in Sierra Leone, 1997-2007," GFN-SSR and International Alert, 2009, 37, <http://issat.dcaf.ch/content/download/33989/486204/file/Security%20System%20Transformation%20in%20Sierra%20Leone,%201997-2007.pdf>.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁶¹ Bruce Baker, "Sierra Leone Police Reform: The Role of the UK Government" (paper, GRIPS State-Building Workshop: Organizing Police Forces in Post-Conflict Peace-Support Operations, Jan. 27-28, 2010).

dren. By 2007, 230 people manned 30 FSUs across the country. Overall public perception of the SLP improved. In particular, its professional performance during the 2002, 2007, and 2012 elections stands as a testament to the reform process's positive impact.⁶²

In 2003, a Justice Sector Task Force was established to widen the narrow focus on the SLP into a sectorwide approach on issues of policing and justice. In 2005, the task force became the Justice Sector Development Program, which, in 2007, helped the government map out a Justice Sector Reform Strategy and Investment Plan. The plan's four main goals were "safer communities through strengthening police; better access to justice through improving quality of local courts and providing paralegal services; strengthened rule of law through addressing corruption and maladministration; and improved justice service delivery through improving the performance of justice institutions."⁶³ The UK's Department for International Development supported the strategy with a £30 million grant (roughly US\$[2007]60 million) over three years. While there has been some progress, reforming the justice sector remains a major challenge due to the lack of skilled personnel, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient financial resources, and resistance from entrenched interests within the sector.

Rebuilding the Intelligence Service and the Sierra Leone Army

The outbreak and prolongation of the civil war and various military coups during 1991-99 reflected systemic and repeated failures in intelligence, which the Kabbah government, with the UK's assistance, sought to remedy. The government's ongoing ability to counter threats to security and stability would require a robust yet accountable intelligence architecture that could facilitate information gathering, transmission, and analysis from the districts, through the provinces, and on to the national level. This architecture was created during 1999-2002. The National Security Council, Office of National Security, and a host of other national and local structures were created to collect, process, and act on information important to national security. Parliament gave legal force to the reforms in the Sierra Leone National Security and Central Intelligence Act of 2002.⁶⁴

Rebuilding the Sierra Leone armed forces proved to be the most expensive and time-consuming aspect of the UK-led security sector reform project. Nonetheless, it has been crucial to maintaining the peace and stability that Sierra Leone has enjoyed since the cessation of fighting in 2000 and the completion of UNAMSIL's mandate in 2005.

During 1997-99, Kabbah had seriously contemplated disbanding the SLA. Minister of Internal Affairs Charles Margai met with President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica in Arusha, Tanzania, in 1998 to learn about Costa Rica's experience without an army. But General Maxwell M. Khobe, whom Kabbah had appointed chief of defense staff, argued that it would be unwise to turn battle-tested veterans loose in a volatile environment with no army in place to either absorb or subdue them. He also pointed out that some of the Si-

⁶² Kadi Fakondo, "Reforming and Building Capacity of the Sierra Leone Police, 1999-2007," in *Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone 1997-2007: Views from the Front Line*, ed. Peter Albrecht and Paul Jackson (Geneva: DCAF, 2010), 161-170.

⁶³ Clare Castillejo, "Building Accountable Justice in Sierra Leone," FRIDE Working Paper no. 76, Jan. 2009, 3, http://fride.org/download/WP76_Building_Accountable_Eng_ene09.pdf.

⁶⁴ National Security and Central Intelligence Act 2002, Supplement to *Sierra Leone Gazette* vol. CXXXII, no. 42, July 4, 2002, www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2002-10.pdf.

erra Leone soldiers had performed creditably during the war. Khobe recommended that instead of being disbanded, the army should be restructured, retrained, and reduced in size.⁶⁵ He died before the radical restructuring of the military began, but his recommendation was largely accepted, and the IMATT assumed the task of implementation.

Military reform and the DDR process were inextricably entwined. During the DDR process, nearly 2,500 former Kamajor, ARFC, and RUF combatants were screened, trained, and absorbed as part of the Military Reintegration Program.⁶⁶ Under Operation Cheetah, the Freetown military garrison was trained to become a rapid-reaction force with the capacity to deploy quickly and respond more effectively to security threats to the city. Under Operation Reassurance in 2006, retrained units were deployed in particularly vulnerable areas, especially border points. With revised and newly developed training manuals, veteran soldiers were retrained in how to function in a democratic environment.

From 2003 on, new recruits who were expected to be the core of the new breed of soldiers began training at Benguema Military Barracks.⁶⁷ As this new blood was being brought into the reconstituted military, older and long-serving officers were retired. By 2010, the army had been downsized from around 15,000 during the war to 10,500 in 2006. The strength of the army was further reduced to around 8,500 in 2012.⁶⁸ In the process, its command-and-control structures, administration, maintenance, personnel management systems, and training regimes were completely overhauled. The legacy of rape, abduction, sexual assault and other crimes against women has been an ongoing challenge that both the UK and the Sierra Leone government were determined to address in the SSR process. For its part, the military is still making serious efforts to recruit and train women and promote qualified individuals to command and leadership roles.⁶⁹

The restructuring of the army followed reorganization of the Ministry of Defense. The IMATT led the effort. The team was funded and staffed largely by the UK, with support from Canadian, U.S., and West African military experts.⁷⁰ To restructure toward greater effectiveness and accountability, the Defense Ministry established two parallel organizations: the Joint Force Command, headed by the chief of the defense staff, and the Joint Support Command, headed by a civil servant as director general. Both were under the direction of the deputy minister of defense and the president. IMATT officers who oversaw the reorganization of the ministry felt that the joint command structure would minimize the ability of a single military officer to mobilize troops and other resources for

⁶⁵ Osman Gbla, "Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone," in *Challenges to Security Sector Reform in the Horn of Africa*, ed. Len le Roux and Yemane Kidane, ISS Monograph Series no. 135, May 2007, 21, <http://dspace.africaportal.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/31144/1/M135FULL.pdf?1>.

⁶⁶ Emmanuel Osho-Coker, "Governance and Security Sector Reform," in *Albrecht and Jackson, Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone*, 109-18.

⁶⁷ Author interviews with national security officials, IMATT officers, and senior RSLAF military commanders, who preferred to remain anonymous, Aug. 2007, Freetown. Around 2003, IMATT also set up a new institution, the Horton Military Staff Academy, for training junior and senior officers.

⁶⁸ Alfred Nelson-Williams, "Restructuring the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces," in *Albrecht and Jackson, Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone*, 119-48.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ The total number of IMATT officers has varied over the years. In 2007, it stood at around 105, of whom 88 were British, 11 Canadian, 3 American, 2 Nigerian, and 1 Jamaican. The tour of duty is normally six months, with some spending up to a year.

a coup. The restructuring of the ministry faced criticism, however. Joe Blell, then deputy minister of defense, regarded it as “far too complex” for Sierra Leoneans.⁷¹ The creation of equivalencies in the grades and ranks of officials in the military and civilian wings of the ministry also caused resentment. The army top brass disliked seeing civilians with no military experience or extensive employment record receive the equivalent rank of colonels, brigadiers, and generals.⁷²

The restructuring of the SLA has not resolved all its perennial problems. Although IMATT officers praised the “seamless” integration of the former combatants of the SLA, AFRC, RUF, and Kamajors into the new force, their training has been criticized as “hurried.”⁷³ Military transport and equipment remains inadequate, and maintenance has been a recurrent problem.⁷⁴ Compensation, decent billeting, fuel, and promotions remain contentious issues as the Sierra Leone government struggles to finance an army of over 8,500 troops. The retirement of old soldiers created tensions during and after the reorganization process. There was fiscal pressure to reduce numbers fast. But a number of former senior military officials still had loyal followers, and for this reason, the IMATT in particular was worried about the possible consequences of putting too many former soldiers out on the streets. This led to a decision to make the retirements deliberately incremental despite financial concerns.

Pensions and payments to the families of officers killed and wounded added to fiscal tensions.⁷⁵ The Sierra Leone government was concerned about disbursing pension money before an independent verification committee could establish the amounts to be paid over and above salary, so it began to renege on its obligations to this group of pensioners. Ultimately, the UK’s Agency for International Development made the interim payments – again, for security reasons. No one wanted disaffected former combatants on the streets, unable to support themselves and nursing a grievance against the government.

Still, these problems have not yet produced any serious security crisis.⁷⁶ The soldiers of the new army are aware of the public’s deep mistrust and of how their involvement in politics and conflict in the 1990s alienated them from the public. In the 2007 and 2012 elections, the military remained neutral in its posture, and public perception has improved greatly.⁷⁷ Notably, because of the security reform program, Sierra Leone police and military officers have been deployed to support African Union and UN peacekeeping operations in Haiti, Sudan, Somalia, Lebanon, and Nepal.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Albrecht and Jackson, *Security Sector Transformation*, 99-100.

⁷² Interviews with security officials, IMATT officers, and senior RSLAF military commanders, who preferred to remain anonymous, Aug. 2007, Freetown.

⁷³ Osman Gbla, “The Role of External Actors in Sierra Leone’s Security Reform,” in *When the State Fails: Studies on Interventions in the Sierra Leone Civil War*, ed. Tunde Zack-Williams (Uppsala: Pluto Press, 2012).

⁷⁴ Interviews with security officials, IMATT officers, and senior RSLAF military commanders, who preferred to remain anonymous, Aug. 2007, Freetown.

⁷⁵ Emmanuel B. Osho-Williams, “Governance and Security Sector Reform,” in *Albrecht and Jackson, Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone*, 109-18.

⁷⁶ These problems continue to plague the military. See Ken Josiah, “The Defender – Voice of the Institution or a Political Publication?” *Sierra Express Media*, May 8, 2012, www.sierraexpressmedia.com/?p=40126.

⁷⁷ Interviews with security officials, IMATT officers, and senior RSLAF military commanders, who preferred to remain anonymous, Aug. 2007, Freetown.

⁷⁸ See S. O. Williams, “A New Dawn in the RSLAF,” *Sierra Express Media*, Mar. 26, 2012, www.sierraexpressmedia.com/?p=37362.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Recommendations

The restoration of peace and stability in Sierra Leone offers a number of valuable lessons regarding interrelationship between power structures, conflict resolution, and peacekeeping in war-ridden and volatile contexts.⁷⁹

Analyze insurgents and illicit power structures properly. The Sierra Leone conflict and peace process underscored the importance of devoting more resources to understanding the nature of insurgent groups – their strategies and motivations, structure, and sources of support – so that national, regional, and international actors develop a coherent strategy for responding to them. Ignorance of RUF's true nature nearly scuttled the Lomé Agreement and the UNAMSIL mission. As late as 1999, the government of Sierra Leone, ECOMOG, the United Nations, and their supporters in the international community still clung to a set of expectations about RUF's transformation into a legitimate political actor – expectations that the RUF had neither the intent or the capacity to meet. The international community also misdiagnosed the RUF's entire motivation for being. The subsequent kidnapping of peacekeeping troops merely exposed what the international community should have long known: that the RUF had no regard for international law and human rights and that its objectives were fundamentally irreconcilable with the peace process.

Engage regional actors. The role of regional actors, especially ECOWAS and West African heads of state, was important in preventing the Sierra Leone interventions from failing completely, as happened in Somalia. ECOWAS leaders took the early initiative of trying to keep the peace when the Sierra Leone conflict was not high on the UN agenda. The personal diplomacy of the various leaders, including peacemakers such as Konan Bédié of Côte d'Ivoire, Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo, and Alpha Konaré of Mali, were crucial in getting RUF and the Sierra Leone government to sign the two peace agreements in 1996 and 1999, and the two Abuja agreements in 2000 and 2001. Equally important was regional leaders' role in helping neutralize powerful illicit actors such as Charles Taylor and Blaise Compaoré, who had enabled and empowered the RUF at critical points in the conflict.

ECOMOG troops' performance was checkered, however, due to unclear mandates and insufficient resources, peacekeeping skills, and experience. And yet, despite the shortcomings, they helped contain the Sierra Leone war and twice saved the elected Kabbah government. ECOMOG troops' mixed performance up to 2000, and the exemplary performance of those rehatted under UNAMSIL afterward, showed what can be achieved when UN and regional organizations work together. The United Nations'

⁷⁹ See Clifford Bernath and Sayre Nyce, "A Peacekeeping Success: Lessons Learned from UNAMSIL," in *International Peacekeeping: The Yearbook of International Peacekeeping Operations*, vol. 8, ed. Harvey Langholtz, Boris Kondoch, and Alan Wells (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2004), 119-42; Matthias Goldmann, "Sierra Leone: African Solutions to African Problems?" in *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law* 9 (July 2005): 475-515.

deployment of sufficient resources, peacekeeping expertise, and strong oversight contributed to the West African troops' effective performance. The UNAMSIL experience also highlights the need for the international community to support efforts by regional organizations.

Give robust mandates to international peacekeeping and enforcement. The UNAMSIL experience shows that in complex and prolonged conflicts involving an illicit power structure willing to use violence to oppose the peace process, international peacekeeping with inadequate intelligence and planning, limited mandates, and constrained personnel and logistical capacity cannot be effective. While speedy deployment is important, it can be disastrous without proper planning and preparation. The subsequent strengthening of UNAMSIL's enforcement mandate, provision of combat-capable troops and intelligence resources, and reorganization of the force proved crucial to transforming the volatile situation.

As the Report on the Panel of United Nations Peace Operations (Brahimi Report) suggested and as UNAMSIL's experience revealed, missions must have clear, achievable priorities and tasks, not only in peacekeeping and peacebuilding but also in peace enforcement.⁸⁰ The defeat of recalcitrant West Side Boys factions, effective DDR of former combatants, recovery of the diamondiferous areas, extension of government authority to all parts of the country, and support for democratic elections by the end of 2002 are examples what can be achieved by a UN Peace Operation that has clear and achievable priorities and is empowered by sufficient mandates and robust capabilities.

Implement quick-impact projects and sustained peacebuilding. Quick-impact projects – for example, reconstruction of basic infrastructure such as bridges, schools, community centers, health facilities, and even places of worship – also generated tremendous goodwill in Sierra Leone. These actions helped change UNAMSIL's image and public perception in a short time from one of derision to one of support, especially after the mission demonstrated its ability to confront violent threats against it.

Embrace the challenge of comprehensive security sector reform. The UNAMSIL experience also showed that for robust peacekeeping to succeed, it must be accompanied by sustained institution building across the security system. The mission became extensively involved in the process of strengthening democratic institutions and practices, civil society, human rights, and gender equity in society. Policing development was deliberately joined with the development of other justice sector institutions, and reform of the SLA and the intelligence services was accompanied by equally robust restructuring to ensure democratic civilian participation and control. DDR and SSR processes were linked to ensure that former combatants did not become disaffected spoilers of the reform process. Significantly, those who had suffered at the hands of security forces during the conflict – particularly women – were actively recruited to become part of the new order, whether as members of the security forces themselves or as part of community outreach and dialogue programs. For a mission confronted by an illicit power structure that may

⁸⁰ UN General Assembly, Security Council, "Report of the Panel on United Nations Special Operations," A/55/305 – S/2000/809, Aug. 21, 2000, www.unrol.org/files/brahimi%20report%20peacekeeping.pdf.

be violently opposed to the peace process, a dual strategy is essential: come prepared to defend the mandate and peace process by creating an environment conducive to peace, and then provide more attractive peaceful alternatives and institutions that can support long-term reconciliation and effectively manage the competition for wealth and power.

Enlist (and follow) leadership from the UNSC. The active response and leadership by the UN secretary-general, the UNSC, and, in particular, the UK after the May 2000 hostage-taking crisis saved UNAMSIL. As Sierra Leone's former colonial ruler and an influential permanent member of the UNSC, the UK provided advocacy and leverage that translated into robust support for peace negotiations, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and peace enforcement in Sierra Leone. Its willingness to use military force to safeguard the UN peacekeeping mission sent a powerful signal to the AFRC and RUF insurgents.

Link DDR with rebuilding the security sector. The UK-sponsored security sector reform program, though implemented separately from UNAMSIL, complemented and strengthened the mission's overall goal of ensuring long-term stability. The program's implementation showed some positive effects of linking disarmament of combatants with absorption of some of them into an army that was being remodeled. This linkage fulfilled an important provision of the Lomé Agreement while rebuilding the capacity of the state's security forces.

Conclusions

The misreading of RUF's criminal character and militaristic intentions after it signed the Lomé Peace Agreement initially led the United Nations to misjudge the Sierra Leone situation and to adopt a strategy that ultimately jeopardized its peacekeeping mission. Decisive military actions by the UK and elements of the Sierra Leone military and Kamajors saved the mission from complete collapse. The strengthening of UNAMSIL's size and peace enforcement capacity, supported by a concerted plan of action to defeat and diminish RUF's operational capacity and cut it off from Charles Taylor, eventually stabilized the situation. Coupled with UK national commitment, a restructured UNAMSIL mission was able to complete the DDR program, extend government authority throughout the country, and support national elections in 2002. The TRC laid the foundations, imperfect instruments though they were, for postconflict national reconciliation and healing, and the Special Court underlined the international commitment to curtail impunity and to prevent and punish gross violations of international humanitarian law. The Kimberley Process constrained the illegal traffic in conflict diamonds, which had been one of the main enablers of the illicit economy, and the main revenue source for the RUF and its allies. With UN and UK support, Sierra Leone's intelligence and security forces were restructured, retrained, and equipped to anticipate and contain further conflict. Democratic control over the armed forces, though imperfect, was established.

Though defeated, the RUF has not disappeared. In accordance with the Lomé Agreement, it eventually became a political party that has participated peacefully in two national elections, polling around two percent of the vote in 2002 and less than one percent in 2012. Despite the United Nations' significant achievements in restoring peace and stability in Sierra Leone and helping rebuild state institutions, the picture is still far

from rosy. Sierra Leone remains at the bottom of the UNDP Human Development Index. It continues to wrestle with deep social and economic challenges despite possessing tremendous natural resources and benefiting from more than two decades of IMF- and World Bank-supported poverty reduction assistance. National elections in 2007 and 2012 were conducted amid great anxiety and accompanied by widespread threats of violence.

Nonetheless, the achievements in restoring peace and security should not be understated. Coups and further violent conflict have been prevented so far. The three most recent Sierra Leonean governments have been stable, and various governmental institutions, though riddled with problems, function relatively well. In particular, the 2014-15 Ebola crisis highlighted significant gaps in the Sierra Leonean government's ability to manage a national crisis, but it should also be noted that at no time during the pandemic was the government in danger of collapse. That in itself indicates progress, and where there is progress, there is hope.