

Working Paper Series

Working Paper 31

**Resolving Intractable Conflicts
in Africa: A Case Study of
Sierra Leone**

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September 2004



Desk top publishing: *Ellen Muntinga*

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Foreword

This report was prepared within the framework of the research project ‘Resolving Intractable Conflicts in Africa’ executed by the ‘Clingendael’ Conflict Research Unit on behalf of the Netherlands Ministry for Foreign Affairs. This project focuses on conflict management and resolution strategies and in particular on the role of external actors in the coming about of peace agreements. Based on three seemingly ‘intractable’ conflicts (Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sudan), this research aimed at drawing policy lessons pertinent to the effectiveness of international mediation in African conflicts. Other research products delivered in the framework of this project include:

- Emeric Rogier, *Cluttered with Predators, Godfathers and Facilitators: The Labyrinth to Peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, CRU Working Paper 23, July 2003;
- Emeric Rogier, *Rethinking Conflict Resolution in Africa. Lessons from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Sudan*, CRU Occasional Paper, Clingendael Institute, July 2004.

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List of Abbreviations

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All Peoples Congress
CDF	Civil Defence Forces
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EO	Executive Outcomes
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
OAU	Organization of African Unity
RSLMF	Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces
RSLAF	Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNOMSIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone

Executive Summary

The war in Sierra Leone, which raged between 1991 and 2002, shares many features with other 'intractable' African conflicts characterized by a profusion of warring parties, the resort to extreme violence and brutal methods, the disposal of natural resources that generate greed, as well as a general background of state collapse. This conflict therefore long seemed without end, an observation corroborated by the fact that five years of attempts to bring peace through a negotiated settlement produced very poor results. Yet Sierra Leone is, at the time of writing (Summer 2003), a country at peace slowly progressing on the path towards stability and democracy. The purpose of this study is to assess which factors have allowed events to unfold in such a way, and in particular what type of international, regional, and local actions have been undertaken in order to bring the war to an end.

A number of factors contributed to the intractability of the Sierra Leone conflict. First, the conflict took place in a failed state, characterized, *inter alia*, by a critical political and security vacuum. Second, the number of warring parties increased over the years, contributing to blurring the picture and jeopardizing mediation attempts. Thirdly, the motives of these parties also proved an aggravating factor: less driven by grievances than greed (and the exploitation of diamonds), some belligerents had more interests in the continuation than the settlement of the conflict. Lastly, a badly intentioned neighbour (Liberia) played an important part in the process, fostering the conflict throughout the period.

Such an inauspicious context required a hard-nose strategy to restore peace in the country. Unfortunately, this was initially not the case and three agreements concluded between 1996 and 1999 successively failed. A number of lessons can be drawn from these repeated failures. First, certain parties played a spoiling role that might have been foreseeable. Second, peace accords collapsed because key provisions aiming at addressing the causes of the conflict and making peace sustainable (monitoring and enforcement mechanisms) were either lacking or not specific enough. Finally, third-party actors may play a central role in promoting a resolution process as they may exert pressure (or not) on local players to enter into negotiations, legitimize (or stigmatize) a designated actor, shape the political outcome of the settlement, as well as ultimately decide to confront (or not) peace spoilers and enforce peace.

By contrast, the process initiated after May 2000, which ended with the successful completion of the disarmament process in January 2002, shed light on the decisive factors that ultimately played a part in the conflict's resolution. Actually, the end of the war in Sierra Leonean conflict owes a great deal to an evolution of the international strategy. A series of actions were then undertaken both to weaken the RUF and to support the government in order to change the military balance and compel the rebels to disarm. First, international military intervention (and in particular the deployment of UK troops and their commitment with regard to the training of the Sierra Leonean army) clearly contributed to changing the climate prevailing in Sierra Leone, boosting confidence on the government's side and creating anxiety as far as the rebels were concerned. In addition, the British military support offered to the UN mission (UNAMSIL) helped to restore the United Nations' credibility. Likewise, the strengthening and enhancing of the United Nations' mission also proved

important, in particular in the perspective of maintaining the peace once it was achieved. Second, international pressure was exercised on the rebels and their foreign sponsors through sanctions taken in 2000 and 2001. In so doing, the regional dimension of the conflict was finally addressed. Although these measures were taken far too late and their impact on the ground remains disputable, they contributed to place Liberia under international scrutiny, making it more difficult for Taylor to spoil the peace process.

While each case is specific, this conflict offers room for some general comments on contemporary peacemaking. First, Sierra Leone illustrates once again that the resolution of a conflict requires a thorough analysis of the nature of the war and a no less comprehensive response. In this country, the main mistake has been to give credit to the RUF, which was considered as defending a cause and thus was accepted as a suitable negotiating partner and, even more detrimental, as a credible governmental party. Moreover, the root causes and the perpetuating factors of the conflict (state failure, the regional dimension and diamond issues) were initially not addressed. Ultimately however, the conflict could only be brought to an end once simultaneous actions were taken to strengthen the government, ostracize the RUF, exert pressure on Charles Taylor and try to prevent illegal diamond exploitation from fuelling the conflict.

A correlative and somewhat disturbing conclusion that can be drawn from the Sierra Leonean case is that promoting a negotiated settlement that equally rewards the warring parties may not necessarily be the best way to restore peace. Indeed, the resolution of the Sierra Leonean conflict did not derive from the conclusion of a peace agreement between equal parties (as experienced in vain between 1996 and 2000), but from a totally different approach based on the deliberate weakening of one of the belligerents that was no longer considered credible nor legitimate. While legitimacy is a highly subjective notion, three criteria may be used to assess whether a belligerent party can be deemed a legitimate and reliable partner: the fact that it actually represents a significant part of the population (and correlatively, the extent of its popular support); the existence of a substantive political agenda (bearing in mind that power for power does not make for a political agenda); and the fact that it refrains from resorting to extreme violence, in particular against civilian populations. A party that does not fulfil the first two conditions and proves particularly brutal may be considered as illegitimate and dealt with accordingly. The involvement of this type of actor indeed adds to the intractability of conflict since such a belligerent is prone to be more interested in war (or disorder) than in peace, if only because of the economic benefits that it draws from the conflict. The priority in such a setting is therefore to neutralize these spoilers, either by defeating them or by ensuring that they do not have the means to jeopardize the process. Thus, the conflict in Sierra Leone ultimately ceased when the RUF was compelled to disarm, not when the rebels were offered power and control over diamond resources. By means of consequence, the Sierra Leonean case shows that in certain instances international actors seeking an end to a war cannot, and indeed should not, avoid taking sides.



Introduction

On 17 January 2002, the Sierra Leonean disarmament process was officially declared completed, putting an end to a decade-long conflict. The war that had been raging in the country since March 1991 had until then seemed yet another of those intractable African conflicts characterized by a profusion of warring parties, the resort to extreme violence and brutal methods, the disposal of natural resources that generate greed, as well as a general background of state collapse. To add to the apparent hopelessness of the situation, Sierra Leone is located in a region marred with conflict and was subject to influence from a badly intentioned neighbour, Liberia. Accordingly, the conflict was for a long period considered as without end, an observation corroborated by the fact that five years of attempts to bring peace through a negotiated settlement produced very poor results. Yet Sierra Leone is, at the time of writing (Summer 2003), a country at peace slowly progressing on the path towards stability and democracy. The purpose of this study is therefore to assess which factors have allowed events to unfold in such a way, and in particular what type of (international, regional, local) actions have been undertaken in order to bring the war to an end. In accordance with the terms of reference provided by the Clingendael Institute, the first section is dedicated to analysis of the causes and nature of the conflict. The second part, which covers the period from 1996 until 2000, then focuses on the failed attempts to bring peace. The effective resolution of the conflict is the topic of the third part, which will also include some considerations about the current situation in order to highlight, *inter alia*, the fragility of the peace process.

I. The Sierra Leonean Conflict: Causes and Characteristics

When Sierra Leone became independent from Great Britain in 1961, the future of the small country seemed rather bright. The only West African state to host a widely recognized university, Sierra Leone was also seen as a model of coexistence among various ethnic groups and seemed well engaged on the way to democracy with the establishment of a recognized multi-party system. The first Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai, from the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), is usually portrayed as a capable leader, genuinely committed to building a unified and democratic country.¹ As for the economy, the prospects were far from gloomy, not least because of the country's natural resources, which included diamonds (both alluvial diamonds and kimberlite deposits). These were not available in huge quantities but were of high quality and thus value.²

That bright picture, however, faded quickly, with the country falling into mismanagement and political instability following the first Prime Minister's death in 1964. The latter's brother, Albert Margai, ruled the country until 1968. His governing manners were allegedly poor, but the main responsibility for Sierra Leone's political and economic collapse is commonly attributed to his successor, Siaka Stevens from the All People's Congress (APC) party. Presiding over the country from 1968 to 1985, Stevens undertook to weaken the institutions and the economy in order to concentrate power and wealth in his own hands (as well as in his inner circle). He declared Sierra Leone a one-party state in 1977, while corruption, patronage and resort to violence became his trademark.³ His designated successor, General Joseph Momoh, inheriting a country undermined by years of bad governance and deliberate pillaging, proved unable to reverse the trend and to avoid genuine state failure. In March 1991, shortly after Sierra Leone reached such a desperate condition, a rebel movement called the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) launched attacks at the border with Liberia in the eastern part of the country, propelling Sierra Leone into the decade-long war that stands at the heart of this study. The goal of the first section is to provide information on the conflict, namely its nature, main players, chronology and main characteristics.

¹ John L. Hirsch, *Sierra Leone: Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy*, International Peace Academy Occasional Paper Series, 2001, p. 28; and Arthur Abraham, 'Dancing with the Chameleon: Sierra Leone and the Elusive Quest for Peace', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2001, p. 205.

² *Report of the Panel of Experts appointed pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000)*, paragraph 19 in relation to Sierra Leone, S/2000/1195, 20 December 2000, § 65; and Ian Smillie, Lansana Gberie and Ralph Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter: Sierra Leone, Diamonds and Human Security*, Partner Africa Canada, 2000, section 4, p. 40.

³For an in-depth analysis of Stevens' rule, see William Reno, 'Sierra Leone: Warfare in a Post-State Society', in Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, World Peace Foundation, Brookings Institution Press, 2003, chapter three.

1. Why? Origins and Perpetuation of the Conflict

Identifying the main causes of a conflict is often a controversial exercise that puts defenders of various schools of thought at odds. Sierra Leone is no exception, and most analyses have been carried out to explain the causes of the conflict. Depending on the authors, economic and social grievances, political and security aspects, or the fight for control of natural resources, are considered to be the main sources of the conflict. None of the experts, however, favour an ethnic-oriented approach, although the existence of differences and oppositions among the three main ethnic groups making up the country are widely acknowledged. And very few analysts give credit to the mid-1990s' attempts to describe Sierra Leone as a precursory example of forthcoming twenty-first century barbarous and evil-like conflicts.⁴

What is striking about Sierra Leone is that most of the authors who have written about the conflict do not completely exclude explanations based on factors other than the ones that they consider most important. This leads to thinking that the origins of the conflict are actually difficult to disentangle and that, more than real *causes* for the conflict, one should identify various *conditions* that, coupled together, have made the country ripe for conflict. In addition, it appears that most of those factors not only played a role in triggering the conflict, but also contributed to prolonging the war, thus acquiring the status of war-perpetuating mechanisms. For the purpose of this study, and keeping in mind that understanding those conditions is necessary in order to make a critical appraisal of the various attempts at resolving the conflict, three aspects are singled out and presented: state failure; diamonds; and regional politics.

State Failure

One important feature of Sierra Leone, which is omnipresent in the literature, is the growing weakness of the state throughout the 1970s and 1980s, ultimately leading to its collapse in the 1990s.⁵ As William Reno puts it, the failure of the Sierra Leonean state does not derive from a sudden vacuum of power, but from a deliberate strategy pursued by political leaders to undermine state structures, public services and institutions while monopolizing economic resources.⁶ While corruption and mismanagement had already started to plague the country between 1964 and 1968, Siaka Stevens is certainly the one who systematically worked to weaken the state in order to ascertain his personal power and to take control of the economic resources and means of the country.

The failure of the Sierra Leonean state helps us to understand how the conflict developed, or, to put it bluntly, how a few attacks launched by a handful of 'rebels' finally developed into a full-scale conflict, causing tens of thousands of victims and the displacement of half of the country's

⁴ For an account of the different interpretations, see Stephen P. Riley, *Liberia and Sierra Leone: Anarchy or Peace in West Africa?*, Conflict Studies No. 287, Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, February 1996.

⁵ Robert I. Rotberg makes a difference of state weakness, state failure and state collapse. All situations are characterized by the difficulties encountered by state institutions to deliver basic services to their citizens, but there is a gradation between each of them, the last one experiencing a total vacuum of authority. An important point that characterizes both failure and collapse is the presence of violence (civil conflicts), most often directed against the government or regime. For details, see Robert I. Rotberg, 'Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators', in Rotberg (ed.), *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, pp. 5-10.

⁶ William Reno, 'Sierra Leone'.

population.⁷ First and foremost, state failure in Sierra Leone translated into a security vacuum, deriving from Stevens' will to undermine the army and the rule of law. His reasons were probably to protect himself against a potential *coup* (in 1967, a series of *coups* and counter-*coups* had deprived him from his electoral victory, and he again faced a *coup* attempt in 1971). Consequently, an important feature of his legacy was the weakness of the army, which was deliberately understaffed and ill-equipped and which thus proved unable to react properly to the first acts of rebellion launched by the RUF.⁸ Later, despite attempts by General Momoh and his successor Valentine Strasser to recruit thousands of troops between 1991 and 1995, the Sierra Leonean army's records remained particularly poor, unable either to defeat the RUF or to prevent the development of rebel-like behaviour within its own ranks. Parallel to weakening the army, Stevens also encouraged the development of a climate of disorder, which allowed him to maintain control of the country and to plunder its resources.⁹ Accordingly, he sponsored the emergence of militias and private security groups, mostly comprised of marginalized youth, which contributed to the development of a culture of violence that was particularly vivid in the diamond zones. Violence actually became omnipresent in the political and economic sectors, thus laying the ground for a civil conflict to erupt.

Second, the failure of the state in Sierra Leone translated into economic predation and misappropriation of state resources. Stevens and his partners managed to take hold of most of the country's economic resources and to dominate the whole spectrum of the economy, be it formal or informal. In order to do so, they took advantage of creditors' recommendations to reduce state participation in the economy and to privatize (to their own profit) many state-owned businesses. Not surprisingly, such a pattern was initially developed in diamond production, but was then pursued in many other sectors of the economy.¹⁰ Assuming power when the state was close to bankruptcy, General Momoh proved unable to reverse the trend towards total economic collapse.¹¹ The consequences for the country were twofold: first, the state lacked fiscal revenue; and second, ordinary citizens were deprived both of economic opportunities and social assistance. Grievances and frustration could only grow in such a context.

Finally, the failure of the Sierra Leonean state spread into all public sectors. Education, health, electricity and gas supply, even television and radio, all of these state-controlled services ceased progressively to be delivered. By the beginning of the 1990s, most civil servants were no longer receiving any salary and were thus making the 'best' use that they could of state-owned property in order to make a living, ransacking their offices, stealing all that could be stolen, selling their normally free-of-charge services. Teachers started to ask their students to pay for their education, contributing to the exclusion of a growing part of the youth population. Hundreds of professional workers left the

⁷ Precise statistics on the Sierra Leonean conflict are difficult to obtain. In June 2001, the World Bank estimated that the conflict had caused the deaths of approximately 20,000 people and the displacement of 2.5 million others (internally displaced persons and refugees); see World Bank Fact Sheet, *Sierra Leone Disarmament Programme and Donor Conference*, 5 June 2001, pp. 1-2.

⁸ It also seems that the inability of the government to take immediate and appropriate action against the RUF resulted from an undervaluation of the rebellion, which was perceived as nothing more than border skirmishes, and perhaps from a deliberate strategy to weaken a region considered as opposed to APC rule. See Abraham, 'Dancing with the Chameleon', p. 209; and Paul Richards, 'Rebellion in Liberia and Sierra Leone', in Oliver Furley (ed.), *Conflict in Africa*, Tauris Academic Studies, London and New York, 1995, chapter 7, pp. 147-149.

⁹ Reno, 'Sierra Leone', p. 78.

¹⁰ Reno, 'Sierra Leone', p. 83; and Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter*, section 4.

¹¹ John Hirsch actually describes Momoh's 'seven-year tenure' 'as the period of the country's economic collapse'; Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, p. 30.

country . Even currency started to be lacking. Needless to say, corruption and patronage reached unprecedented levels.¹² This delinquescence ultimately earned Sierra Leone the despairing title of the ‘least developed country’ in the world in 1990.¹³

During the course of the conflict the situation worsened to the point of total state collapse. The various governments attempting to rule the country in the 1990s proved unable to restore state authority throughout the territory. After 1998, the government even lacked an official army to guarantee the security of the state and of its citizens, and had to rely on foreign peacekeepers and on local militias to deliver that essential service. Such a situation definitely contributed to prolonging the conflict, in particular since the rebels could build on that vacuum to conquer territory and make illegal economic profits, which in turn allowed them to continue fighting.

Diamonds

Such a situation is all the more tragic as Sierra Leone was, and still is, a rich country, with abundant natural resources such as cocoa, gold, bauxite, rutile, iron ore, coffee and, of course, diamonds. But as with several other African countries, Sierra Leone’s natural wealth has in fact generated more suffering than anything else. The link between diamonds and the conflict is, however, a much-debated issue and the question is often raised as to whether the former can be included among the causes of the latter. It will be argued here that although this link does exist, it is perhaps not direct. Although it seems true that the conflict in Sierra Leone would probably never have lasted such a long time without diamonds, it is also an overstatement to say that the conflict erupted because the RUF wanted to take control of diamond fields, and even more hazardous to assume that diamonds were at the heart of social and economic grievances that triggered the conflict.

To make it simple, the relationship between diamonds and the conflict in Sierra Leone can be described as a double one: first, diamonds undoubtedly contributed to and aggravated state failure (which in turn facilitated the eruption of conflict); and second, they no less undoubtedly contributed to prolonging the conflict. The role of diamonds in state failure is manifold, and is amply documented in various sources.¹⁴ To sum up, three different aspects of that relationship can be identified. Politically, diamonds provided the incentives and resources for the leaders’ personal enrichment and were instrumental in fuelling a system based on corruption and patronage (through, for instance, the allocation of mining and trading licences). As regards the economy, diamond production was of utmost importance for the state since it represented an invaluable source of fiscal revenue and foreign currency. However, this economic weight also proved a weakness, and diamonds have been at the origin and heart of the state’s resource misappropriation. In that regard, it is worth noting that Stevens started to take control of the state’s assets with the ‘nationalization’ of official diamond production.

Finally, diamonds are also closely connected to the security issue: mining regions were indeed the first to experience lawlessness and violence, leading to the establishment of the first private security firms in order to protect mining companies.¹⁵ Above all, the development of illegal mining activities

¹² Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, p. 30; Reno, ‘Sierra Leone’, pp. 76-77; Joe A.D. Alie, ‘Background to the Conflict (1961-1991): What Went Wrong and Why?’, in Anatole Ayissi and Robin-Edward Poulton (eds), *Bound to Cooperate: Conflict, Peace and People in Sierra Leone*, UNIDIR, Geneva, 2000, chapter 1, pp. 29-30.

¹³ *UNDP Human Development Report 1991*.

¹⁴ See in particular Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, pp. 25-31; Reno, ‘Sierra Leone’, pp. 83-84; and Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter*, section 4. For a brief history of Sierra Leonean diamonds, see Annexe 1.

¹⁵ Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter*, section 4, pp. 39-42.

contributed to creating a violent climate that was precursory of the forthcoming war - it is therefore not surprising that some of the 'San-san' boys, as illegal miners were called, ended up in the highest hierarchy of the RUF (the most famous being Sam Bockarie). And of course, diamonds offered opportunities for organized crime networks to enter the country and establish connections that most probably later served the illegal arms' trade.¹⁶

If diamonds' role in triggering the conflict is sometimes subject to discussion, the fact that the gems have played a major part in fuelling the conflict (in particular because of the source of money that they represented) is for its part usually uncontested.¹⁷ Diamonds have undoubtedly become the main - if not the sole - motive for all of the parties to continue the war. As early as 1992, the RUF had taken control of the Kono district, a region rich in diamonds. In the following years, the government attempted on a number of occasions to retake control over the diamond fields from the RUF.¹⁸ However, according to the Panel of Experts appointed by the United Nations Security Council to report on diamonds and arms in Sierra Leone, it was only after 1995 that the RUF really became involved in diamond mining and smuggling on a huge scale.¹⁹ In the meantime, individuals like Sam Bockarie (a former illegal diamond miner) had acquired more influence within the movement and probably played an important role in refocusing the rebels' strategy on diamonds.²⁰ From then on, it can be argued that diamonds have been among the RUF's major war aims. Moreover, the issue of 'conflict diamonds' is not the sole responsibility of the rebel movement. Other actors, such as Sierra Leonean army soldiers, local militia fighters and (perhaps) members of the peacekeeping forces have also been involved in mining and trading stones.²¹ Finally, it also seems that private actors have seized the opportunity provided by the war to 'enter the market', without hesitating to forge alliances with the warring parties whenever necessary.²²

Diamonds have thus become the centre of a vicious circle (they are sold to buy arms, which in turn allow conquering diamond zones) that generates extremely high economic profits for those who control it. Such a context thus gives a very specific dimension to the conflict, since the parties' interests do not appear to be to find a solution but on the contrary to sustain a war that generates so much profit. Any attempt to solve the conflict should consequently not focus only on finding a political solution but also on finding a way to prevent the parties from benefiting from the situation. As will be seen in the following sections, such a path was not followed until 2000-2001, ten years after the conflict started.

¹⁶ Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter*, section 4, pp. 43-45; and S/2000/1195, Part I.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Paul Richards, *The Political Economy of Internal Conflict in Sierra Leone*, Clingendael Working Paper No. 21, August 2003, p. 22.

¹⁸ For instance, the Kono diamonds fields were retaken from the RUF in summer 1995 (just after Executive Outcomes' arrival in Sierra Leone); see S/1995/975, § 25.

¹⁹ S/2000/1195, § 67.

²⁰ Sam Bockarie, who had joined the RUF in 1992 and had become its 'battle group commander' and 'high command', is known to have kept a close eye on diamond business - so close that a dispute originating on diamonds ultimately drove him to confront Sankoh and to flee in exile to Liberia, where he was reportedly killed in May 2003 (S/2000/1195, § 67-77; and IRIN - West Africa: 'Bockarie's death boosts chances for peace', 9 May 2003).

²¹ More details are given in the next section (Who?) on those actors and their relationship to diamonds.

²² The authors of the report *The Heart of the Matter* have provided detailed information regarding what they call 'junior companies', that is 'small' (compared to De Beers) diamond companies involved in Sierra Leone that would have developed strong links - including indirect military aid or supplies - with the government in exchange for diamond concessions (Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter*, section 5, pp. 50-63).

Finally, the link between diamonds and the arms' issue must be stressed. In spite of an embargo declared in 1997 (first by ECOWAS and then endorsed by the United Nations), quantities of weapons have entered Sierra Leone in the course of the war, most of them purchased thanks to diamond money.²³ Actually, the diamonds/weapons relationship brings us to the regional dimension of the conflict, since weapons traded against diamonds came from or through neighbouring countries, first and foremost Liberia, but also Burkina Faso, Niger and Côte d'Ivoire.²⁴

The Regional Dimension

As for the two previous aspects, the regional issue (which is mostly related to Liberian President Charles Taylor's involvement in Sierra Leone) has to be taken into account both to understand the causes of the conflict and perpetuation of the war. Observers and international actors initially seemed rather reluctant to recognize the importance of the role played by Taylor in Sierra Leone. This may be related to the fact that at the time Taylor was 'only' one Liberian rebel among others and thus attracted less attention than he would later, especially after his election as President of Liberia in 1997.²⁵ It is, however, now widely acknowledged that Taylor has been a key actor, directly connected to the RUF, since the beginning of the war in Sierra Leone. His relationship with the RUF's leader, Foday Sankoh, actually dates back to the end of the 1980s. Both were trained in Libya and were involved in Blaise Campaore's seizure of power in Burkina Faso.²⁶ Between 1988 and 1991, Sankoh and his associates travelled extensively to Liberia in order to gather support for their cause, while RUF fighters occasionally fought alongside Taylor's rebel movement, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), which had launched an insurgency in Liberia in December 1989.²⁷ In return, Taylor offered important support to the RUF, providing weapons, training, financial help and even fighters to the Sierra Leonean movement. Significantly, the 1991 RUF attacks were also staged from NPFL territory.²⁸ The RUF was thus initially so close to Taylor's NPFL that some observers have described it as its 'Sierra Leonean branch'.²⁹ This is probably not accurate, since the RUF had its own command and strategy and was in fact created slightly earlier than the NPFL, but the links between the two were

²³ Actually, the RUF has also developed a habit of obtaining arms through capture during military confrontations with the SLA, ECOMOG or UNAMSIL (see S/2000/1195, § 178-179; and Eric G. Berman, *Rearmament in Sierra Leone: One Year after the Lomé Peace Agreement*, Small Arms Survey, Occasional Paper No. 1, December 2000, pp. 17-19).

²⁴ As documented in the report of the Panel of Experts mandated by the UN Security Council to enquire about that issue in 2000, see S/2000/1195, part two and in particular § 194-197.

²⁵ In 1995, the UN Secretary-General referred to Liberia in one sentence of his first report on Sierra Leone, which reads as follows: 'given the links between the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, certain regional and other countries have taken the decision to provide military assistance to Sierra Leone' (S/1995/975, § 23). Nothing more is said to underline Liberia's responsibility in the conflict or to pressure Taylor to stop supporting the RUF. Afterwards, nothing was ever added about Liberia until 1998 (S/1998/486, 9 June 1998, § 12 and 29-32). Far from being anecdotal, such an omission may help in understanding the difficulties encountered in solving the conflict, when one major actor was never mentioned, let alone targeted.

²⁶ S/2000/1195, § 180. The exact details and date of the first meeting of the two leaders remain unclear. On this debate, see Ibrahim Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the RUF/Sierra Leone', *The Modern Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2, June 1998, p. 220.

²⁷ Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction', p. 220. See also S/2000/1195, §180.

²⁸ For a detailed account of the extent to which the RUF was backed by Taylor, see Riley, *Liberia and Sierra Leone*, p. 13. See also S/2000/1195, § 180.

²⁹ Jean-Marc Balancie and Arnaud de la Grange (eds), *Mondes rebelles: Acteurs, conflits et violences politiques*, Vol. 1 (Amériques, Afrique), éditions Michalon, 1996, p. 297. See also Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction', p. 203, for a critique of that view.

extremely tight and remained so during most of the conflict.³⁰ Charles Taylor's motives to back up the RUF are manifold: in addition to the fact that he was in a way returning the RUF's previous assistance, he also had his own reasons for opposing General Momoh (who was then in power in Sierra Leone). In 1988, he had been arrested and jailed in Freetown while he was attempting to convince Momoh to help him overthrow Samuel Doe, the Liberian President. And in 1991, when the first attacks were launched, Momoh was actively supporting the Nigerian-led ECOMOG, the Economic Community of West African States' Ceasefire Monitoring Group, which was deployed in Liberia and in fact opposed the NPFL.³¹ Finally, and although it is less often mentioned with regard to the war's origins, diamonds may well have boosted Taylor's interest in supporting the RUF. Liberia had been involved in trading (illegally) Sierra Leonean diamonds for a long time and it seems highly improbable that Taylor had not realized the profits that could be made from destabilizing such a rich country.³²

Even more documented than the Liberian President's role in triggering the conflict is his involvement *during* the conflict. There is now little doubt that Charles Taylor's participation in the conflict, a fact that he himself has lately acknowledged, accounts much for the war's long duration.³³ Here, again, diamonds and weapons must be mentioned to understand Taylor's economic interest in prolonging the conflict.³⁴ Liberia has in fact been at the heart of bidimensional trafficking (arms and diamonds) that has fuelled the Sierra Leonean war for years. Accordingly, it has been in the interest of Taylor and his associates to sustain the war in order to uphold these economic gains. Political motives can also be added to these economic considerations: while the Liberian President and his inner circle certainly seized the opportunity to develop their personal wealth, this trafficking also provided Taylor's NPFL with the necessary resources to maintain and develop its own military capacity. In the context of the Liberian war raging until 1997, and of a renewed rebellion challenging Taylor after 1999, that aspect is also of importance to understand Taylor's political motives for continuously destabilizing Sierra Leone. Finally, it can be added that this policy was not restricted to Sierra Leone, even if this may appear as the most obvious case. Indeed, Taylor is considered more and more as having developed an agenda to destabilize the whole region, including other countries such as Guinea and more recently Côte d'Ivoire.³⁵

³⁰ As documented by the Panel of Experts mandated by the United Nations Security Council to enquire about the situation in Sierra Leone in 2000, S/2000/1195, § 182-193.

³¹ Charles Taylor is even said to have openly threatened Momoh with war; see Reno, 'Sierra Leone', p. 92; Alie, 'Background to the Conflict (1961-1991)', p. 15; and Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter*, p. 48.

³² On Liberia's long-lasting involvement in the illegal diamond trade, see S/2000/1195, §81; or Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter*, pp. 47-48.

³³ On Taylor acknowledging his support for the RUF, see Cllr. Tiawan S. Gongloe, 'The Liberian Government Finally Admits Support for the RUF', *Perspective*, 27 November 2002. The most serious proof of Taylor's involvement with the RUF comes from the indictment of the Liberian President by the Sierra Leonean Special Court for war crimes committed during the conflict.

³⁴ See, for instance, and to quote only the most important studies, S/2000/1195, §2 and 81-89; Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter*, section 4.6; Lansana Gberie, *West Africa: Rocks in a Wrong Place*, The Diamonds and Human Security Project, Occasional Paper No. 9, Partnership Africa Canada, May 2003, pp. 5-6.

³⁵ These assumptions have recently been recognized by the UN Security Council (see, for instance, Resolution 1408 (2002), preamble; and 1478 (2003), preamble). On Liberia and regional destabilization, see also Global Witness, *The Usual Suspects: Liberia's Weapons and Mercenaries in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone*, March 2003.

Charles Taylor and Liberia's involvement in the Sierra Leonean conflict as early as 1991 suggests that the situation in Sierra Leone, which could at first sight appear as rather simple (a small rebel group opposed to an official government), was in fact much more complex. That complexity, which was confirmed over the following years when the conflict took the country into real turmoil, derives in particular from the growing number of actors - local, regional and international players - that became involved in the course of the war.

2. Who? Main Parties to the Conflict

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF)

The first and main actor on the rebel side has often been described as a rather mysterious movement, whose goals, strategy and ideology were hard to appraise for observers, especially until 1996. In fact, that opacity probably derives from the absence of a real political agenda, despite attempts by the RUF's leaders to position themselves as champions of the oppressed masses.³⁶ The movement was initially established in the late 1980s by a former army corporal (Foday Sankoh), a university graduate (Abu Kanu) and a Freetown suburb activist who had fought alongside UNITA in Angola (Rashid Mansaray), all three of whom had spent some time in Libyan training camps. Its stated goal was to liberate the people of Sierra Leone from a corrupt and oppressive government. However, as many authors have noted, the RUF's methods quickly appeared to contradict that claim: instead of liberating people, the RUF would attack rural and civilian populations, loot, kill and humiliate ordinary citizens, often abducting some of them.³⁷ As a whole, the RUF appeared to be a grouping of brutal people, consisting of marginalized youth, former illegal diamond miners, foreign (mainly Liberian and Burkinabe) fighters and, later on, more and more abducted people who were converted to the cause. The leaders of the movement were most probably driven by a thirst for power and/or economic predation, while the rank and file followed because they had been brainwashed, were under the influence of drugs, or because they lacked any alternative solution. This was especially true for those, most often children, who had been forced to commit atrocities against members of their community or family and were tattooed with RUF letters.³⁸

In short, the RUF could be characterized by its lack of popular support, the absence of any political and ideological agenda, its brutal methods and the very close links maintained with Charles Taylor and Liberia. While accepting to negotiate after 1995, it has recurrently shown political 'bad

³⁶ On the RUF's lack of a political agenda, see Ibrahim Abdullah and Patrick Muana, 'The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone', in Christopher Clapham (ed.), *African Guerrillas*, James Currey, Fontain Publishers and Indiana University Press, 1998, pp. 191-192: 'it is neither a separatist insurgency in a specific demand ... nor a reformist insurgency with a radical agenda superior to the regime it sought to overthrow. Nor does it possess the kind of leadership that would be necessary to designate it as a warlord insurgency ... It is ... without any significant national following nor ethnic support. ... It has remained a bandit organization'. The authors add further: 'the RUF does not have any programme of societal transformation ...; it does not have the intellectual capital that movements such as RENAMO and UNITA have'. See also ICG, *Time for a New Military and Political Strategy*, 11 April 2001, pp. 14-15.

³⁷ Abdullah and Muana, 'The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone', p. 179; Abraham, 'Dancing with the Chameleon', pp. 207-298; Adekaye Adebajo and David Keene, 'Banquet for Warlords', *The World Today*, July 2000, p. 8; and John L. Hirsch, 'War in Sierra Leone', *Survival*, Vol. 43, autumn 2001, p. 150.

³⁸ Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction', pp. 226-227; and Richards, 'Rebellion in Liberia and Sierra Leone', pp. 139-141 and 158.

faith' and proved unwilling to live up to its commitments. Moreover, the RUF quickly engaged into economic predation, trading diamonds for arms and thus contributing to further impoverishment of the country. Finally, the RUF experienced many splits and crises occurring either within its ranks or with its former allies. The first internal tensions appeared as early as August 1992, and led to the execution of two of the 'founding fathers' of the movement, Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray, who disagreed with Sankoh's violent methods.³⁹ Two other major internal crises occurred in 1997 and 1999, opposing Foday Sankoh to other RUF members, and ultimately ending to the leader's advantage.⁴⁰ In addition to these internal troubles, another crack in 1999 opposed the RUF to Johnny Paul Koroma and the AFRC, one of its former allies.⁴¹ Such chaotic events and swinging alliances, which contributed to blurring the picture regarding the RUF, most probably added to difficulties in brokering a peace agreement. In that regard, the evolution of the Sierra Leonean army is also telling.

The Sierra Leonean Army (SLA)

Directly confronting the RUF, the Sierra Leonean army also experienced chaotic developments throughout the 1990s, with no less than two military *coups* being staged and with part of the army switching alliances and even entering into collaboration with its official enemy. The SLA, which had deliberately been weakened by Siaka Stevens, comprised only 3,000 personnel at the end of the 1980s.⁴² When General Momoh started to take the RUF's threat seriously (which required a few weeks after the first attacks), he decided to expand the army: 6,000 men were recruited, but these were admittedly 'drifters, rural or urban unemployed ... hooligans, drug addicts and thieves'.⁴³ Such new recruits did not differ much from those who joined the RUF's ranks at the same time and thus behaved in somewhat the same way - illegally mining diamonds and eventually pillaging the areas under their control. This is called the 'sobel' phenomenon: soldiers during the day become rebels during the night. Not surprisingly, the army's situation did not improve at all in such circumstances. With the same causes producing the same consequences, a further attempt by the military regime succeeding General Momoh to reinforce the army mainly attracted a clique of unemployed youth and members of gangs or criminal networks, who quickly became 'sobels'. Diamonds played an important role, since most of the incentives for soldiers to participate in illegal activities were related to diamond mining, trading or stealing. By 1994, the military forces totalled about 14,000, but the army had also earned a terrible reputation and was nearly as feared as the RUF - and ultimately proved unable to defeat the rebels.⁴⁴

³⁹ Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction', p. 226.

⁴⁰ In 1997, in the context of the blocked implementation of the Abidjan peace agreement, Foday Sankoh suffered an 'internal *coup*' that attempted to remove him as the RUF's leader. This strategy ultimately failed and the RUF members involved fell into a trap organized by field commanders loyal to Sankoh. Some were released in 1999, while others are still unaccounted for; see Hirsch, *Sierra Leone, Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy*, pp. 55-56; and Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction', p. 230. In 1999, another crisis opposed Sankoh this time to one of his field commanders, Sam Bockarie, in relation to the diamond business. The crisis ended in military confrontation and finally compelled Bockarie to flee in exile to Liberia; see S/2000/1195, § 71-76.

⁴¹ Koroma was leader of the AFRC, a military junta that had seized power in 1997 and had invited the RUF to exercise power jointly. On the crisis, which actually involved military confrontation between the former allies, see S/1999/1003, § 7; and S/1999/1023, § 7.

⁴² Reno, 'Sierra Leone', p. 85.

⁴³ According to Momoh's Foreign Minister, quoted in Reno, 'Sierra Leone', p. 86.

⁴⁴ Statistics taken from S/1995/975, § 22. Similar numbers are given by most authors. On the state of the army, see Reno, 'Sierra Leone', p. 86; Hirsch, *Sierra Leone, Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy*, pp. 36-37; and Abdullah and Muana, 'The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone', pp. 182-183.

From then on, civilians started to distrust their army and the relationship between the soldiers and the normal population and civilian governments (when they were in power) deteriorated drastically. It is an important phenomenon to take into account, not least because the absence of a loyal and trustworthy army aggravated the security vacuum inherited from Siaka Stevens and ultimately contributed to complete state collapse. Incidentally, this also led to the emergence of a parallel group of combatants, the Civil Defence Forces (which will be presented below). This further impeded the search for a solution to the conflict, in particular because of the absence of a national security force that could be tasked with monitoring the implementation of the military provisions of a peace process.

A final characteristic of the Sierra Leonean army is its involvement in politics. In 1992, a first *coup* staged by junior officers ousted Momoh and brought to power a National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), headed by army officers who promised to bring radical changes to the country, defeat the RUF and put an end to the corruption system. They were greeted with some hope by the Sierra Leoneans. Although they proved unable to keep their promises, they finally organized elections in 1996 and accepted to relinquish power. But in May 1997, the army once again became involved in a violent *coup*, which brought to power a military junta that associated army officers (the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council - AFRC) and the RUF. Contrary to the NPRC, which was plagued with the 'sobel' phenomenon but had not cultivated violence as a way of governing and had finally accepted to start a democratization process, the junta proved extremely violent and imposed a rule of terror on Sierra Leoneans.

After ECOMOG forcefully removed the junta from power in 1998, the state of the armed forces became even more complex. The army was officially disbanded and the restored government developed plans to rebuild a new army.⁴⁵ But in fact the country was left without an army, a situation that lasted until May 1999, when the first 562 new troops completed three months of training.⁴⁶ This was especially problematic since some former soldiers had actually managed to escape to the bush with the RUF and were continuing the war against the restored government, as well as against ECOMOG and UN peacekeepers who had by then begun to deploy in the country. Occasionally, but more and more frequently as time passed, former junta associates also fought against each other. The remaining soldiers had been imprisoned during ECOMOG offensives that had led to the fall of the junta and were supposed to be demobilized. Paradoxically, however, some were progressively 'reinducted' into ECOMOG during summer 1998 in order to assist in combating the RUF and the remaining AFRC. This strategy contributed to further blurring of the picture with regard to the status of the armed forces.⁴⁷

It thus appears that the Sierra Leonean army is a much more complex actor than could be deemed at first sight. The SLA can in fact be considered as having played a major part in the difficulties in bringing peace to Sierra Leone, for at least three reasons, related: 1) to the 'sobel' phenomenon; 2) to the infamous role played by the army during the years 1997-1998, when the junta was in power; and 3) to the tense relationship between the (civilian) government and its army. Furthermore, the SLA's inability to fight the RUF led to the emergence of two other groups of fighters: the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) on the one hand; and a private security firm, Executive Outcomes, on the other.

⁴⁵ S/1998/750, § 31.

⁴⁶ S/1999/645, § 21-22.

⁴⁷ S/1998/750, § 31 and following reports.

The Civil Defence Forces (CDF)

The CDF encompasses in fact six different local defence groups that appeared as early as 1993-1994 in reaction to the RUF's looting and in the context of general disillusionment regarding the army. The most important of these groups, the *Kamajors*, comes from south-eastern Sierra Leone and mostly consists of Mende people.⁴⁸ The other groups include the Tamaboros (in the north-east), the Donsos (from Kono district, in the east) and the Kapras (from the north).⁴⁹ These groups initially consisted of traditional hunters and rural youth, who organized themselves in order to defend their villages and areas. Contrary to the army, they enjoyed some decisive advantages: posted in their chiefdoms, they knew perfectly well the regions in which they were operating and could thus confront the RUF in their own battlefield - the bush. Initially at least, their deployment in their areas of origin allowed for tighter control of the fighters, since these remained under traditional moral sanctions.⁵⁰ Last but not least, they also enjoyed real popular support, illustrated by the fact that many expelled rural populations decided to regain their villages from the RUF by sending their young people for *Kamajor* training. Indeed, the CDF is the only armed group ever to have been popular among Sierra Leone's population, a popularity that eventually grew even more when it became a close ally of the government that was elected in 1996. These advantages, coupled to the fact that it received training from Executive Outcomes, the private security firm contracted by the NPRC in 1995, resulted in a number of military successes. The CDF is in fact the only Sierra Leonean actor to have ever proved able to resist the RUF.

Its popularity and success, however, should not conceal a few facts about the *Kamajors* and the CDF. First, they did not prove better than the other actors when confronted with the option of illegal diamond mining.⁵¹ Second, it is now acknowledged that the *Kamajors* also committed human rights' violations against their opponents - and against civilian populations perceived as supporting the rebels, especially after 1998 or when operating outside their traditional areas.⁵² Third, the *Kamajors* were highly politicized and maintained close links with Kabbah (the President of Sierra Leone, who was elected in 1996). After their leader Hinga Norman was nominated to the post of Deputy Defence Minister in 1996, the *Kamajors* were in fact often depicted as 'a private army' for Kabbah and his party, the SLPP, in particular since the national army was weak in 1996-1997 and inexistent after 1998. Such politicization impacted on the conflict dynamics (the special relationship between the SLPP and the *Kamajors* allegedly added to growing frustration within the army in 1996-1997 and could have contributed to the May 1997 *coup*), as well as on peace processes (as the CDF was not for a long time targeted by DDR processes, it never truly demobilized).⁵³ Finally, it may be worth noting

⁴⁸ The spelling varies greatly according to the sources: *Kamajo*, *Kamajoi* and *Kamajoh* are some of the forms encountered. The spelling *Kamajor* has been retained for this study because it seems to be the most common and is furthermore the one used in United Nations documents. On the beginnings of the *Kamajors*, see Abdullah and Muana, 'The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone', p. 185; and Reno, 'Sierra Leone', p. 87.

⁴⁹ S/1998/486, § 16.

⁵⁰ See Abdullah and Muana, 'The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone', p. 185; and Chris Squire, 'Bound to Cooperate: Peacemaking and Power-Sharing in Sierra Leone', in Ayissi and Poulton, *Bound to Cooperate*, p. 61.

⁵¹ It even seems that joining the *Kamajors* was for some young people more a way to secure their mining activities than to defend their communities; see Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter*, p. 65.

⁵² See all UNSG reports after 1998, the sections on human rights. This led in particular to the indictment by the Special Court for Sierra Leone in March 2003 and subsequent arrest of Hinga Norman, the leader of the *Kamajors* and also Deputy Defence Minister since 1996.

⁵³ The CDF's role and status was still, in 2003, at the heart of a contentious debate; see S/2003/321, § 8 and 72 and section III.

that the CDF ultimately introduced an ethnic dimension to the conflict, as its groups are constituted along ethnic lines. In particular, the *Kamajors* are of Mende origin, which is also the case for most SLPP supporters, while the army is dominated by northerners (Limba and Temne) as a legacy of Stevens' APC time.⁵⁴ However, as noted in the first section, ethnicity is not considered to have played a major role in the conflict. A much more decisive factor has been the direct involvement of external actors in the conflict, including Executive Outcomes.

Executive Outcomes (EO)

Executive Outcomes, a South African security company, was established in 1989 and recruited mostly among former South African soldiers who had fought on behalf of the apartheid regime. It had been involved in the Angolan conflict before being contracted in Sierra Leone by the NPRC in April 1995, at a time when the RUF was gaining terrain and was starting to threaten Freetown.⁵⁵ Executive Outcomes, with a mere 200 soldiers, was the first actor to prove capable of changing the military balance in Sierra Leone. In association with the CDF, it succeeded in pushing RUF rebels away from Freetown and defeating them in a number of other areas, including diamond fields, although remaining out of reach of the RUF's stronghold in Kailahun. Its actions, coupled with those of the CDF, were most certainly decisive in the RUF's acceptance to negotiate in 1996. And its departure, enshrined in the Lomé agreement but most probably deriving from financial considerations, was followed by a new military upsurge from the RUF. The role played by Executive Outcomes thus highlights that one of the reasons for the intractability of the Sierra Leonean conflict was actually the lack of any credible military force facing the rebel movement. Executive Outcomes' involvement was, however, not free from diamond-related interests, as illustrated by the fact that one of its first military actions was to push the RUF away from the Kono diamond fields.⁵⁶ This also sheds light on the very strong links between diamonds and security and conflict, as well as on the role played by private actors in the conflict.

ECOMOG

The last actor to have played a major role in the war is the international force sent by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).⁵⁷ ECOMOG deployment was initially foreseen in 1997 in order to enforce ECOWAS sanctions and the embargo that were decided against the military

⁵⁴ ICG, *Time for a New Military and Political Strategy*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Actually, this was not the first attempt in Sierra Leone to rely on private security forces. Well before the beginning of the conflict, diamond firms had been compelled to contract private companies in order to secure their installations and productions; see Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter*, p. 41. The NPRC had also made a first attempt with the Ghurka Security Guards, a British firm, whose members however failed and even lost their commander, Robert Mackenzie, in a RUF ambush in January 1995. See Balancie and de la Grange, *Mondes rebelles*, p. 301; and Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, p. 38.

⁵⁶ According to the report by Hirsch, *The Heart of the Matter*, Executive Outcomes had been introduced to the Sierra Leonean government by Branch Energy Ltd, a private company linked to a Canadian firm called DiamondWorks. Despite constant denials by these two firms that they had any corporate relations with Executive Outcomes, Branch Energy obtained a 25-year lease on diamond concessions in Kono, just one month after Executive Outcomes had allowed the Sierra Leonean government to retake control of the region. See Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter*, pp. 56-62; and Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, pp. 38-39.

⁵⁷ The name ECOMOG comes from the Monitoring Group initially established by ECOWAS to monitor the ceasefire in Liberia in 1990.

junta that had seized power earlier in May 1997.⁵⁸ In February 1998, following the collapse of the Conakry peace plan brokered by ECOWAS, ECOMOG troops stationed in Sierra Leone launched an attack on the AFRC-RUF coalition, which ultimately led to the liberation of Freetown and the fall of the junta and the return of President Kabbah on 10 March 1998.⁵⁹ After that, ECOMOG deployed fully and engaged in the conflict, attempting to defeat the RUF all over Sierra Leone in cooperation with the CDF. ECOMOG, which consisted mainly of Nigerian soldiers but also included troops contributed by Ghana, Mali and Guinea, was actually compensating for the absence of a governmental army following the disbandment of the SLA. It consequently played a critical role in Sierra Leone, helping to restore a legitimate government and then attempting to defend the government against renewed rebel attacks. In particular, ECOMOG managed to expel the AFRC/RUF a second time from Freetown, which had been attacked and retaken in January 1999.⁶⁰ As a consequence, many Sierra Leoneans, especially in Freetown, praise ECOMOG for its actions against the rebels. Nonetheless, the 'third Freetown battle' served as an indicator of ECOMOG's growing difficulties because of insufficient financial, material and human resources. Overstretched from the beginning, ECOMOG barely managed to defend Freetown and its surroundings and never succeeded in defeating the RUF.⁶¹

In addition to these logistical and tactical problems, ECOMOG is apparently not exempt either from criticism with regard to both human rights and natural resource exploitation. In most of his reports, the UN Secretary-General expresses concern at ECOMOG soldiers' appalling human rights' record, referring in particular to harassment, extortion, unlawful detention and even, in the context of the January 1999 events, summary executions (including of children). As for diamonds, accusations are less direct and documented, but there are also strong suspicions that ECOMOG soldiers have been involved in diamond mining or trading whenever possible.⁶² Those problems were, however, not the main reason for ECOMOG's departure from Sierra Leone, which was indeed related to Nigerian internal political developments. After Sani Abacha's death in June 1998, elections held in 1999 in Nigeria brought to power President Obasanjo, who quickly announced that he intended to withdraw from Sierra Leone, where Nigeria was spending too much. The other troop contributors could only follow and ECOMOG negotiated with the United Nations a phased withdrawal in order to allow UNAMSIL (the UN mission that was going to replace ECOMOG) to be reinforced and deployed

⁵⁸ See *ECOWAS Summit Final Communiqué*, § 25, Abuja, 28-29 August 1997.

⁵⁹ On the February 1998 events, see S/1998/249. For details on the peace plan, ECOMOG deployment and the decision to resort to force, see below, the following paragraph and section II.

⁶⁰ ECOMOG, however, proved unable to avoid the city being recaptured, which lasted for four terrible days during which between 3,000 and 5,000 persons were killed, thousands of others mutilated, raped or abducted and hundreds of thousands displaced. Public and private buildings, as well as homes, were looted and burnt; see S/1999/237, § 20-30.

⁶¹ On ECOMOG difficulties, see all UNSG reports in 1998.

⁶² These suspicions derive from three facts: first, ECOMOG's behaviour in Liberia, where soldiers (most of them Nigerian, as in Sierra Leone) engaged in trade and cooperation with warring parties in order to exploit timber and minerals, raises questions on possible similar practices in Sierra Leone. Second, and more directly, there are strong presumptions that ECOMOG's soldiers did cooperate with the Sierra Leonean rebels on many occasions (for instance in 'losing' weapons to them or letting them escape), most probably in exchange for money - or diamonds. See Berman, *Rearmament in Sierra Leone*, p. 18; see also S/2000/1195, § 19 and 248; and Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, p. 75. Third, and finally, the Indian and Jordanian contingents withdrew from UNAMSIL (the United Nations Missions that took on ECOMOG's tasks after the latter's withdrawal) in late 2000 because of accusations emanating from the (Indian) UN commander that Nigerian soldiers were collaborating with the RUF in mining and trading diamonds. See ICG, *Time for a New Military and Political Strategy*, p. 18; and Hirsch, 'War in Sierra Leone', p. 158. Since the Nigerian troops deployed under UNAMSIL were the same as those previously making the bulk of ECOMOG, it is likely that such practices occurred before 2000.

without creating a security vacuum. ECOMOG troops finally achieved their withdrawal in May 2000, but Nigeria nevertheless remained among UNAMSIL's biggest troop contributors.⁶³

The growing number of actors involved in the Sierra Leonean conflict, the shifting alliances and the duplicity of many of the players contributed to the apparent complexity of the Sierra Leonean war and conversely conveyed the feeling that the conflict was intractable. To add to this impression, the war - that finally lasted more than ten years - was all but linear. The following chronology is intended to give some sense to this erratic course of events.

3. When? A Brief Chronological Overview

1991-1995: The Early Years of an Unnoticed War

On 23 March 1991, a rebel attack was launched by the RUF (from Liberian territory) in the Kailahun district, a region traditionally opposed to the APC regime led at the time by General Momoh, Stevens' successor. The movement officially targeted Momoh's government, and claimed that it meant to free Sierra Leone's people from APC rule. The (by then already weak) government proved unable to offer an appropriate answer to the rebellion (which according to some authors was indeed not taken seriously by the regime) and the RUF initially gained some ground against the government.⁶⁴ This failure, combined with a general and growing dissatisfaction with Momoh's government, prompted junior army officers to stage a *coup* one year later, on 29 April 1992. A new regime was thereafter established, the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) led by Valentine Strasser, which initially enjoyed some form of popular support. Paradoxically, the fact that these officers had removed General Momoh from power and declared that they wanted to fight corruption and mismanagement did not change anything for the RUF, which continued fighting the NPRC as it had fought the previous regime. After a few months of advance by the NPRC (in particular because at the same time, the RUF was cut from its Liberian support because Taylor's opponents had taken control of the border), the new regime quickly met its limits.⁶⁵ After 1994, a revived RUF started to make important military gains and took control of an important part of the territory, including the diamond regions. When, in 1995, the rebels threatened to seize Freetown, the NPRC's leader Valentine Strasser contracted a South African private security firm, Executive Outcomes, in order to defeat the RUF.

1995-1996: The Story Becomes More Complicated

The years 1995-1996 represent a first turning point in the war. First, Executive Outcomes, working in association with local Civil Defence Forces (CDF), managed to push the RUF away from Freetown and to retake some of the diamond fields. Second, under regional and international pressure, the NPRC engaged in a democratization process, which ultimately led to national elections in 1996. In the meantime, on 16 January 1996 Valentine Strasser had been removed from power through an internal *coup* and replaced by one of his former colleague, Julius Maada Bio. The latter, while going ahead

⁶³ On Nigeria's decision to withdraw, see S/2000/13, § 2; and on the final withdrawal, S/2000/455, § 24. In March 2003, Nigeria was contributing 3,178 of the 14,721 troops deployed under UNAMSIL. The two other main contributors were Bangladesh (2,301) and Pakistan (3,849); see S/2003/321, Annexe.

⁶⁴ On the inadequacy of the government's response, see Abraham, 'Dancing with the Chameleon', p. 209; and Richards, 'Rebellion in Liberia and Sierra Leone', pp. 147-149.

⁶⁵ On the difficulties marring the army at the time, see the main text above, pp. 12-13.

with the democratization process, also engaged in negotiations with the RUF, which for the first time agreed to enter into such a process.⁶⁶

1996-May 1997: Democracy Before the Storm

The elections took place in February and March 1996 and brought to power the SLPP and Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. While Executive Outcomes and the CDF led renewed offensives against the RUF during summer and autumn 1996 (and actually nearly succeeded in defeating the movement), the peace talks continued and led to the conclusion of a first agreement in Abidjan on 30 November 1996. The text provided in particular for the departure of Executive Outcomes, which actually left Sierra Leone in January 1997. Ironically, it could be said that this is the only clause that was ever respected. The implementation of the agreement indeed proved extremely chaotic and partial, especially as the RUF quickly assumed a spoiler's role. At the same time, the rebel leadership went through a period of crisis, which culminated after Foday Sankoh's arrest in Nigeria in February 1997. Ultimately, the Abidjan peace process irreversibly collapsed on 25 May 1997, when a military *coup* carried out on by disgruntled elements of the Sierra Leonean army removed Kabbah and his government from power. A new regime was established, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma, who invited the RUF to join him in exercising power.⁶⁷ The 'cooperation' that was then established proved extremely violent and damaging for the population.

May 1997-March 1998: The Bloody Months

While violence against civilians reached a peak in the months between May 1997 and March 1998, ECOWAS (the Economic Community of African States) and ECOMOG (its 'peacekeeping force') entered the Sierra Leonean scene. The strategy adopted by ECOWAS to restore the legitimate government was three-dimensional, built around diplomacy, sanctions and use of force, and led to the signing of the Conakry six-month peace plan in October 1997. The plan, however, proved a farce, and ECOMOG ultimately launched an offensive against the junta in February 1998, officially in response to AFRC/RUF attacks on its soldiers stationed at Lungi airport near Freetown. This offensive compelled the AFRC/RUF to relinquish power and allowed for the return of President Kabbah and his government in March 1998. Although some members of the junta were arrested, the bulk of AFRC and RUF combatants managed to escape and retreated to the bush, from which they resumed fighting against ECOMOG and the government (on behalf of which the CDF acted as a form of army).

March 1998-May 2000: The Deadlock

As from July 1998, the United Nations deployed a small mission - UNOMSIL - in order to monitor the security situation and the (planned) demobilization of former combatants, which was to be undertaken by ECOMOG.⁶⁸ However, this task could barely be fulfilled, since military confrontation between former AFRC/RUF and ECOMOG/CDF combatants prevailed in the years 1998-1999. January 1999 in particular proved a bloody month, with the AFRC/RUF re-entering Freetown and committing

⁶⁶ On the motivations of the RUF leadership, see the main text below, pp. 21-22.

⁶⁷ On the reasons for the RUF (then in the midst of its 'leadership crisis') accepting to collaborate (or, depending on the authors, having actively participated in the *coup*'s organization), see Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction', pp. 230-231; or Abraham, 'Dancing with the Chameleon', pp. 215-216.

⁶⁸ S/1998/486, § 66.

atrocities (in particular against civilians) during four days, before being laboriously pushed away by ECOMOG. This show of force by the rebels compelled the government to initiate a new negotiating process in 1999, which culminated with the signing in Lomé of a new agreement on 7 July 1999. The Lomé accord, combined with the planned withdrawal of ECOMOG following Nigeria's defection, opened the way for a reinforcement of the UN presence, which ultimately transformed into a real peacekeeping force called UNAMSIL. UNAMSIL - understaffed, suffering from deployment delays and an ill-suited mandate - proved unable, however, to compel implementation of the agreement. Seriously undermined by spoilers' actions (led by the RUF, the former AFRC, but also the CDF), the painstaking peace process came to a sudden halt in May 2000, when the RUF took 500 UN peacekeepers hostage.

May 2000-May 2002: Peace in the End?

The UN's humiliation marked the entry into a new period, which ran until the official 'end' of the conflict in January 2002. First, following the hostage crisis, the United Kingdom became involved militarily. Second, the UN strengthened its mission and increased the number of 'peacekeepers' deployed. Third, international action targeting diamonds and Liberia was undertaken. At the same time, renewed conflict in Liberia and attacks originating from Guinea also contributed to weakening the RUF. Finally, Foday Sankoh, who had been arrested shortly after the May 2000 crisis, was no longer considered a negotiating partner. On the contrary, a Special Court was established jointly by the United Nations and the Sierra Leonean government in order to try those bearing the greatest responsibility for crimes committed in the country - including most probably the RUF leader. These developments put an unusual pressure on the rebels, and as a result a ceasefire was signed in November 2000 between the RUF and the Sierra Leonean government. In the following months, Liberian support for the RUF was openly denounced and sanctioned for the first time by the United Nations, while the situation within Liberia further deteriorated as it faced renewed conflict. In Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL reinforcements and the United Kingdom's presence continued to put pressure on the RUF. The combination of these developments led the rebel movement finally to agree to enter a disarmament process in May 2001, during the first review meeting of the ceasefire agreement. It was not the first time that such a promise had been made but, as it appeared, it was the first time that it held. The disarmament process lasted for another eight months and was declared completed in January 2002. The conflict was then officially considered terminated and elections were held in May 2002, which provided for the re-election of Kabbah while the SLPP won a comfortable majority. Sierra Leone then entered a new phase of its history, that of peace consolidation and post-conflict recovery.

4. How? Violence as a Trademark of the Conflict

The description of the conflict would not be complete without a word about violence as one main characteristic of the war that devastated Sierra Leone. Much has been written about the conflicts of the end of the twentieth century, in particular with regard to the grave breaches of humanitarian law, gross human rights' violations and the deliberate targeting of civilians that characterized most of those wars. However, Sierra Leone stands sadly apart in that respect, as violence became a trademark of the conflict and reached extremely high levels, qualifying the country for the unenvied category of 'worst

types of conflict'.⁶⁹ In addition to a high number of casualties, refugees and internally displaced persons, the war generated hundreds of mutilation victims, more than 10,000 children were transformed into combatants, thousands of people were sexually assaulted, and others were abducted and used for forced labour or sexual slavery. Villages were looted and villagers terrorized, houses and public buildings were burnt down, and summary executions were conducted. In short, terror was considered a normal way of fighting.⁷⁰ The RUF is the first and most responsible actor for such waves of violence. Many reasons have been invoked to shed light on this behaviour: first, RUF atrocities are often seen as a legacy of (or an importation from) the Liberian conflict.⁷¹ As seen above, there are indeed many links between the conflict in Sierra Leone and the Liberian war, and a further parallel can be drawn between the brutal methods used in both cases. Second, atrocities can be considered as having been an end in themselves, in so far as they allowed the RUF to control local populations as well as some of their own combatants. Indeed, the fact that the RUF failed to attract popular support probably contributed to the rebels resorting to violence on an ever-growing scale. Seemingly, it is sometimes argued that terror was also used as a means to compensate for the lack of an important military capacity.⁷² Finally, the role of the disillusioned, idle and disaffected youth (a product from state failure), whose culture would be based on violence, is also presented as having had a decisive effect on the spreading of such brutal methods.⁷³ In any case, most observers underline that violence was also linked to the widespread use of alcohol and drugs of all sorts, especially in the case of child soldiers.

Violence and atrocities were nonetheless not limited to the RUF and, as seen above, have also been perpetrated by the Sierra Leonean army (and of course the AFRC), the CDF and (although to a lesser extent) by ECOMOG. Such a fact must be related to the general climate of violence that accompanied state collapse and the existence of the above-mentioned security vacuum.⁷⁴ In that context, and given the propensity of the RUF and of the army to resort to brutal methods, it hardly comes as a surprise that other actors finally became involved in such a cycle of violence.

Conclusion

The Sierra Leonean conflict, which was initially deemed 'low-intensity', rather easy to read (one rebel movement opposing a weak government) and of little interest in the eyes of Western powers finally developed into an intractable conflict, lasting more than ten years and characterized by an extremely high level of violence. A number of factors contributed to that situation, which combined to make the Sierra Leonean conflict all the more difficult to resolve. First, the conflict took place in a failed state, with a government unable to provide a credible answer to the rebels. It is often stated that if Momoh

⁶⁹ The expression is from Abraham, 'Dancing with the Chameleon', p. 205.

⁷⁰ See all UNSG reports and in particular S/1998/1776, § 36-41; and S/1999/237, § 20-30. See also Riley, *Liberia and Sierra Leone*; Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction'; and Richards, 'Rebellion in Liberia and Sierra Leone'.

⁷¹ Abdullah and Muana, 'The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone', p. 190; Riley, *Liberia and Sierra Leone*, p. 13; Abraham, 'Dancing with the Chameleon', pp. 207-108; and Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction', p. 225.

⁷² Abdullah and Muana, 'The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone', p. 190.

⁷³ See Richards, 'Rebellion in Liberia and Sierra Leone', p. 158; or Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction', p. 223.

⁷⁴ With regard to the specific case of the army, most of the reasons invoked for the RUF are also valid, in particular since both of them actually recruited from the same population group - those disillusioned youth mentioned above.

had taken the first RUF attacks seriously and if he had had the military means to respond efficiently to the rather weak rebel movement appearing in 1991, the conflict might never have developed in the way that it did. In this regard, the state of the army played an important part in the difficulties encountered, first to react to the rebel attacks and then to bring the war to an end. Likewise, state failure had made the country ripe for conflict by allowing lawlessness and a violent climate to develop and by producing a whole generation of disillusioned youth who proved easy recruits for the warring parties. Finally, state failure and the related political and security vacuum also contributed to bringing other actors on the scene (such as the two different military regimes, the *Kamajors* or ECOMOG). This increase in the number of warring parties precisely makes up the second aspect of the conflict's intractability. In this regard, the shifting alliances, the confusing role that is played by the army and the succession of *coups* and counter-*coups* blurred the picture even more. Thirdly, the motives of the parties also proved an aggravating factor. The lack of a real political agenda on the one hand and the interest shared by many of the actors in the pursuit of the conflict on the other undoubtedly contributed to the seemingly never-ending cycle of violence. This is to be linked to the importance of natural resources (and their connection with arms smuggling) in fuelling the conflict. War-perpetuating mechanisms played their part efficiently in Sierra Leone, providing convincing incentives for the continuation of war. Intrinsicly linked to these two points, the last and fourth factor relates to the negative role assumed by a badly intentioned neighbour, whose direct interest has been to foster the conflict throughout the period. The role of Liberia is indeed so important that it could be argued that without Taylor's and his associates' involvement, Sierra Leone would still be a country at peace. Strangely enough, the first attempts to bring peace to Sierra Leone through a negotiated settlement failed to take that dimension into account.

II. The Failed Attempts to Bring Peace (1996-1999)

Most conflicts that deserve the qualification of ‘intractable’ are characterized by the absence of a military solution. Consequently, the quest for peace most of the time takes the form of a conflict resolution process based on negotiations, whose ultimate objective is to broker a sustainable peace agreement endorsed by all of the warring parties. Although one of the difficulties definitely derives from the necessity to find a solution that is suitable for all of the parties, the negotiations for (and conclusion of) an agreement are not the only stumbling blocks of such a process - far from it. Indeed, the case of Sierra Leone, where no less than three peace accords were signed between 1996 and 1999 but where all collapsed after a few months, illustrates the fact that reaching an agreement does not imply making peace. On the contrary, peace results from a complex alchemy in which the actual accord is only one factor among others - although perhaps the most important. In this study three stages, all of them equally significant, have been identified. The first (‘creating the momentum for peace’) focuses on the period preceding the beginning of negotiations and deals with the context leading to the talks as well as with the reasons for (and motivations of) the parties agreeing to enter the negotiations. The second (‘providing for peace’) is centred on the agreement itself and focuses on the peace prospects that its provisions might raise (or not). As for the last stage (‘making peace work’), this relates to the actual implementation of the agreement and to the strategies followed by the various actors during this crucial period, which can lead to peace as well as to renewed hostilities. For the three agreements analysed in that section, weaknesses and shortcomings will be identified at each stage in order to shed light on the reasons for the failure of these first attempts. The ultimate goal is to pinpoint recurrent factors that impede conflict resolution and thus, by analogy, to highlight possible strategies that would enable these factors to be overcome.

1. Creating the Momentum for Peace

The period preceding the initiation of a negotiation process provides a variety of indicators that give hints regarding the potential sustainability of the forthcoming agreement. Two sets of factors can be explored at this point: the first relates to the context (in particular the military situation) and to the ‘immediate’ reasons for the parties agreeing to negotiate; the second is more related to ‘peace diplomacy’, encompassing the strategies, goals and incentives to which third parties can resort in order to bring belligerents to the negotiating table. Actually, in conflicts where no decisive military answer can be brought, such an outside intervention is often fundamental in order to help the parties to find a way out from the stalemate in which they are caught.

The goal is thus to identify why the agreement was signed and if one of the above-mentioned factors was prominent in the process. In doing so, particular attention should be granted to the existence of a genuine desire for peace (from the parties) and of a genuine interest in settling the conflict (for the facilitators). Shedding light on these aspects is important for the sustainability of peace: indeed, an agreement can be signed ‘opportunistically’ for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with a real aspiration for peace. For the parties, it can be in order to buy time and to

avoid an imminent setback (or forthcoming sanctions); for external actors, the goal may be to win short-term international respect or to avoid criticism for doing nothing. Whatever the motives, the chances that peace will really follow are not many.

In Sierra Leone, the context surrounding the signature of each agreement was very different, despite the rather short time span within which the accords were concluded. In one case (the Conakry agreement) the signatories were not even the same as for the two others - and were not actually the main protagonists of the decade-long conflict.⁷⁵

Abidjan: A Real Chance for Peace?

The 1996 context leading to the Abidjan agreement was rather specific, as the reasons for the parties agreeing to negotiate resulted mainly from internal developments. Accordingly, there was not much need for external pressures in order to drive the actors to the negotiating table, a situation that seems at first sight more favourable to an agreement eventually being signed. The first actual sign that change was in the air came from the rebels agreeing to negotiate with the NPRC in January 1996, after Julius Maada Bio had replaced Valentine Strasser. The reasons for the RUF entering into negotiations are not fully documented, but it is sometimes pointed out that the presence of Bio's sister among the RUF's leaders could at least have facilitated the establishment of contacts. Another explanation hints that Bio and Sankoh were in fact plotting together to postpone the elections scheduled for February 1996, planning to assume power jointly should the poll be cancelled.⁷⁶ This objective was never reached, but the negotiation process that had been started on that occasion was nevertheless pursued thereafter, in a context of greater difficulties for the RUF.⁷⁷ In fact, the elections, which had brought the SLPP and Ahmed Tejan Kabbah to power, were followed by a serious offensive led by the *Kamajors* and Executive Outcomes against the RUF. By autumn 1996, the rebels' military situation had deteriorated to such a point that they were, according to some observers, 'on the threshold of being decisively defeated'.⁷⁸ This situation on the ground undoubtedly placed the RUF in the position where it had little choice but to agree to negotiate and ultimately to sign an agreement. In that regard, it can also be added that Charles Taylor, who was at that time in a difficult situation (the 'Monrovia battle' was raging in Liberia), probably contributed to the weakening of the rebel movement. On the other hand, the newly elected government, which enjoyed a military advantage that ensured a priori that the settlement would fit its views, was most probably eager to bring the conflict to an end peacefully through a negotiated process that would not tarnish its democratic image.

This leads to thinking that the main reasons for reaching an agreement in 1996 were more contextual than political, and that the external actors did not play a fundamental role in convincing the

⁷⁵ For a comparison of the context prevailing within the country before the initiation of each negotiation process, the various 'peacemakers' involved (including their motives for pressing for negotiations), and the leverage that these actors enjoyed, see Table 1 provided in Annex 2.

⁷⁶ See Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, p. 43. It appears in fact that Bio was not happy at all with the elections (which had always been contested by Sankoh) and tried to postpone or cancel them as soon as he assumed office. Actually, the RUF and the NPRC's regimes, which in many respects were resorting to similar practices with regard to security and wealth accumulation (the 'sobel' phenomenon developed during the NPRC rule), could well have more than one interest in common.

⁷⁷ Actually, the RUF violently disturbed the election process and never recognized the results; see Commonwealth, *Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group to the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Sierra Leone*, April 1996.

⁷⁸ UK adviser Colonel Andrew Gayle, quoted in Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, p. 53; see also Abraham, 'Dancing with the Chameleon', p. 213; and ICG, *Time for a New Military and Political Strategy*, p. 11.

parties to make peace. Bearing these facts in mind, one word must be said here about the involvement of the non-governmental organization International Alert. This NGO stated that it aimed to help the peace process through acting on the RUF, in particular to facilitate dialogue between the RUF and the other parties. But in doing so, it appears that it played a more intrusive (and for some observers, supportive) role *vis-à-vis* the RUF, which served to strengthen the movement at a time when its weakness might have helped to end the conflict. In particular, International Alert contributed to changing the public's perception of the rebel movement (the RUF was presented as a 'legitimate representative of the oppressed' in William Hirsch's words). It also allegedly encouraged the RUF to put high demands on the government, some of which were accepted in the end (such as Executive Outcomes' withdrawal). International Alert is thus sometimes perceived as having been more a source of problems than a real facilitator.⁷⁹

Despite this dubious role played by International Alert, the timing of the Abidjan negotiations might be considered as propitious, as the two main parties were (of their own will) taking part in the process at a time when one was enjoying a credible advantage over the other. Since the 'leading' party (the government) was the one a priori less inclined towards resorting to violence to spoil the peace process, it can be argued that there were real prospects for peace at that time.

Conakry: A Fools' Deal?

If an opportunity for peace may have existed in 1996, it was far from the case a few months later when talks were engaged in Conakry. In the meantime, not only had the Abidjan agreement collapsed, but Kabbah and his government had been overthrown by part of the army (the AFRC), which was soon joined by the RUF to exercise power. Sierra Leone was then caught in a devastating cycle of terror, which triggered international reactions, although mostly only from the African continent.⁸⁰ For the first time in its history, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) condemned the *coup* and requested ECOWAS to find a solution allowing for the return of the government. The growing involvement of the sub-regional organization thus marks the first difference with the 1996 setting. ECOWAS was, however, initially rather divided on the strategy to use, with some of its members favouring a military solution (Nigeria), while others were keener on traditional diplomatic action (Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire). As a compromise, the organization opted on 26 June 1997 for a 'combination of three measures, i.e.: the use of dialogue; the application of sanctions, including an embargo; and the use of force'.⁸¹ Despite ongoing efforts by the Committee of Four on Sierra Leone (comprising Nigeria, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana) established in June 1997, dialogue proved most difficult to establish.⁸² Sanctions were therefore adopted in August 1997, which included embargoes on weapons, petrol and other products, as well as measures targeting the members of the Junta, military officers and their relatives (travel restrictions and freezing of financial assets).⁸³ ECOMOG was officially

⁷⁹ Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, p. 52; and Abraham, 'Dancing with the Chameleon', p. 210.

⁸⁰ The rest of the world kept a deafening silence, which can be partly explained by the will of the great powers to remain away from the African scene, not least because of painful experiences such as Somalia and Rwanda. It can also be noted that most international attention was focused at that time on the Balkans and more specifically on Bosnia, which was undergoing serious political crisis.

⁸¹ ECOWAS Foreign Ministers' *Final Communiqué*, 26 June 1997, § 9.

⁸² On the establishment of the Committee of Four, see ECOWAS Foreign Ministers' *Final Communiqué*, § 12. The Committee became the Committee of Five in autumn 1997, with the inclusion of Liberia.

⁸³ ECOWAS Twentieth Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, Abuja, 28-29 August 1997, Decision on Sanctions against the Junta in Sierra Leone.

mandated to enforce these sanctions, which were endorsed by the UN Security Council in October 1997.⁸⁴

The military build-up that followed, combined with the effect of sanctions (in particular those on petrol, the most harmful for the AFRC/RUF coalition), led the junta to accept an ECOWAS peace plan proposal.⁸⁵ A meeting took place in October 1997 in Conakry, which officially brought together ‘a delegation representing Major Johnny Paul Koromah and the Committee of Five of ECOWAS on Sierra Leone’. Oddly enough, neither the ousted government nor the RUF were thus officially represented. If the RUF was in fact acting through the AFRC delegation (as illustrated by the fact that Foday Sankoh’s release was included in the final agreement), it seems that the government’s views were not taken into account during the negotiations.⁸⁶ The position of Liberia adds further to the peculiarity of that process. Recently elected as Liberia’s President, Charles Taylor insisted on being included in the Committee of Four and succeeded in doing so, yet despite his persistent denial, he still maintained very tight links with the RUF, which somewhat put him in the position of an *agent double*. Obviously, Taylor’s participation in the Committee was not disinterested, but on the contrary provided him with the means to influence the process from within, while pretending to be a peacemaker. Indeed, the sincerity of all the negotiating partners can be questioned. For the junta, which was increasingly ostracized, it was certainly more an opportunity to buy time and to seek legitimization and international recognition; for ECOWAS, the negotiations may have been used by those within the organization favouring force (in particular Nigeria) to convince the other members that all efforts were being made to find a solution peacefully, while in fact preparations for military action were under way. In such a context, it seems that far from creating a ‘momentum for peace’, the Conakry negotiations were in fact much closer to a fools’ deal.

Lomé: A Real Chance for the RUF?

In a way, the context leading to the Lomé agreement can be deemed as exactly the reverse of the one prevailing in 1996: Kabbah’s government, which was restored in March 1998 after ECOMOG’s military intervention, was again in an extremely weak position following the AFRC/RUF attack against Freetown in January 1999. Adding to that weakness, ECOMOG’s presence seemed to be no longer guaranteed, given Nigeria’s stated will to withdraw its troops. Finally, and this is a new aspect, the government was also subject to strong pressure from the United Kingdom and the United States, which had finally resolved to tackle the Sierra Leonean issue but whose interests seemed to be much more to broker an agreement (at any cost) than to bring real peace. In fact, both the UK and US had become eager to appear to be doing something for Sierra Leone, in part because the atrocities committed in January 1999 had been well reported by Western media, and in part as a kind of ‘African compensation’ following their massive engagement in Kosovo also in 1999. Neither was willing, however, to engage directly, let alone military. They thus opted for brokering an agreement that would

⁸⁴ ECOWAS Twentieth Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, *Final Communiqué*, § 25; and UN Security Council Resolution 1132, 8 October 1997. Nigerian forces were present before the *coup* under an agreement with the government, and ECOMOG was subsequently deployed around positions already held near Freetown.

⁸⁵ See Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, p. 64. The effect of sanctions was particularly felt in the Freetown area, where, according to the UN Secretary-General, ‘commercial food stocks dwindled considerably and prices started to raise as the sanctions took effect’. In the same report, the Secretary-General mentioned ‘an increasingly acute shortage of petrol’ in the whole country; see S/1997/958, § 21.

⁸⁶ See Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, p. 65.

allow the RUF to share power with the government, without taking into consideration that the government had been democratically elected, or that the RUF had never lived up to any of the commitments made in previous agreements. Furthermore, such a strategy was a deliberate disregard of the RUF being responsible for some of the worst exactions committed during the 1990s, and easily stood comparison with the atrocities that had rhetorically triggered intervention in Kosovo.⁸⁷ The UN for its part was also eager to see an agreement brokered, since it was becoming clearer that should ECOMOG withdraw, the small United Nations Observer Mission, deployed since 1998, would remain alone in Sierra Leone: in that context, keeping peace would prove a better deal than watching war. As for ECOWAS, its members, which were the most involved in trying to reach an agreement (Nigeria and Togo), also followed internal agendas: Nigeria was eager to disengage from Sierra Leone while Togo's leader, at that time assuming the ECOWAS Chairmanship, longed to appear as a peacemaker in order to cover up his own poor human rights' record. President Kabbah and his government were thus caught under an enormous pressure, which left them with very little room to manoeuvre.

On the other hand, the RUF had a lot to win from entering negotiations at that stage. The movement's first objective was to obtain the release of Foday Sankoh, who had been judged and sentenced to death in October 1998 and was still detained pending his appeal of the sentence. Second, the RUF was also probably well aware of the opportunity that it held to regain power - through 'legitimate' means. Finally, it seems that Liberia was in this period more interested in peace than in war in Sierra Leone, and could thus have pushed the RUF in that direction.⁸⁸

Before the signing of the Lomé agreement, the RUF was therefore in a comparatively better situation than the government. This fact, added to the pressure exercised by third parties on the government, augured well for the negotiations' outcome. However, the agreement would probably include some advantageous provisions for the RUF. Given the RUF's demonstrated lack of reliability, the prospects of reaching a sustainable peace thus remained low.

As a conclusion of the situations that were prevailing at the eve of each agreement's conclusion, three key issues can be identified that all have a potential to impact significantly on the provisions entrusted in the agreements as well as on the implementation periods. First, the treatment granted to the parties bears an influence on the whole process. Actually, there is a dilemma about how to deal with an actor responsible for massive human rights' violations, especially if that party does not enjoy any popular support. In the three agreements studied above, the RUF (and the AFRC in the case of Conakry) was treated as a reliable partner. Yet the risk inherent to any negotiation process is to legitimate such an actor, and even to grant it a governing status should power-sharing arrangements be included in the agreement. This highlights the necessity for a clear assessment of the nature and goals of the local actors, especially on the part of third-party mediators, in order to delineate clearly what can be tolerated in the negotiation and peace implementation processes and what will trigger sanctions. The role of third parties is precisely the second aspect deserving mention, as these may be instrumental in convincing the belligerents to start a dialogue and to come to an agreement. However,

⁸⁷ On the role of the UK and US, see Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction', pp. 219-221; David J. Francis, 'Tortuous Path to Peace: The Lomé Accord and Post-War Peace-Building in Sierra Leone', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 31, No. 3, p. 364; and ICG, 'Time for a New Military and Political Strategy', p. 12.

⁸⁸ Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter*, p. 49: 'Taylor may have noticed that with the escalation of the conflict, much of his potential income was being spent to keep the fractious RUF together, to pay Liberia-based South African trainers, and to buy more arms and ammunition. This may be why he pressured the RUF to sign the July 1999 peace accord in Lomé'. One could add that this strategy was facilitated because the RUF had good chances to keep control over the diamonds fields.

their interests in resolution of the conflict are sometimes driven by political considerations that have nothing to do with the actual situation in the country at stake. In such circumstances, an agreement may be called for at any price, even if peace is almost certainly not going to follow. This was the case for the Lomé agreement negotiations, and this proved in the end to be as damaging as indifference. Finally, the timing of the negotiations should carefully take into account the military balance, which keeps changing even in intractable situations. Some periods may in fact appear as potentially more promising with regard to the outcome of the process, for instance when one (or more) of the most brutal and/or demanding actors is weakened. According to that logic, one can say that the Abidjan context was a priori more favourable than the Lomé.

2. Providing for Peace

The elements identified above are not only important in helping to create a momentum for peace; they also weigh on the provisions included in the final agreement. In particular, the respective position of the parties (and the importance granted to each of them by the potential mediators) may have a strong impact on the agreement concluded, especially with regard to the political outcome and, possibly, the judicial aspects (inclusion or omission of an amnesty, for instance). The analysis of the agreement itself is a further element in helping to assess the future sustainability of peace. In doing so, a series of criteria may be used.⁸⁹ In particular, attention may first be granted to whether the agreement provides for an effective cessation of the hostilities, including through the establishment of a monitoring and enforcement mechanism to supervise respect for a given ceasefire. Second, assessing whether the text addresses the ‘root causes’ of the conflict and in particular allows for the establishment of a political framework within which issues and differences could be settled may also be telling about the future for peace. Third, the existence of a number of specific provisions related to justice, DDR processes (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration) and economic rehabilitation, for instance, can moreover be good indicators of the agreement’s sustainability. Fourth, and finally, measures that target potential spoilers and war-perpetuating mechanisms can also be important provisions, whose inclusion might bear a strong influence on the conflict resolution process.

Abidjan: A Missed Opportunity

Given the context in which the Abidjan agreement was negotiated, the first provision that deserves mention is the one stipulating that Executive Outcomes must leave the country in a specific time-frame.⁹⁰ Knowing that the military advantage enjoyed by the government at that time was in great part ascribable to the private security firm (the *Kamajors* also played an important role, but they had been trained and were backed by EO), that provision appears as a quasi-suicidal concession on the part of the government. Actually, the main reason for President Kabbah agreeing to terminate Executive Outcomes’ contract was not to make a concession to the RUF (which, according to some observers, was then so close to military defeat that it would have been ready to withdraw its demands for such a

⁸⁹ See Table 2 provided in Annexe 2 for a global presentation of these criteria in relation to the agreements studied. The texts of the agreements can be obtained from <http://www.sierra-leone.org>, the section on documents related to the peace process.

⁹⁰ Article 12 of the agreement specified that EO was to leave within five weeks after the deployment of a ‘neutral monitoring group’ to be established by the international community.

provision), but derived from financial constraints.⁹¹ The government was in fact accumulating huge payments' arrears and had little choice other than to put an end to Executive Outcomes' contract. However, enshrinement of the security firm's departure in the peace agreement conveys the impression that the RUF's main demand had been met. Furthermore, the agreement provided nothing to compensate for the security vacuum that was to be created by EO's withdrawal and that could well benefit the RUF in the end. In fact, the only provision relating to the security sector stipulated the downsizing of the army, whose weakness was one of the causes of the conflict.

Yet the Abidjan agreement also included some provisions that were potentially conducive to a lasting peace, in particular measures that were designed to address the failure of the state: a number of articles identified actions to be taken in various but precise sectors (judiciary, police, health, education, access to water, economic opportunities, rural development, provision of food, environment and natural resources, and infrastructures) in order to reconstruct the Sierra Leonean state. However, other key areas (notwithstanding the security sector) were left aside, such as the diamond issue ('the exploitation of natural resources' was only supposed to be 'regulated', article 26.h) and the regional dimension of the conflict. With regard to justice, a blanket amnesty was guaranteed for 'any member of the RUF/SL in respect of anything done by them in pursuit of their objectives as members of that organization' (article 14). This provision raises concern on three different levels: the atrocities committed during the conflict would remain unpunished; violence as a means to conquer power would not be condemned; and hardliners (also potential spoilers) would remain free to disrupt the process should they decide to do so.

The main weakness of the agreement came precisely from the absence of any mechanism meant to prevent potential spoilers from blocking implementation. The RUF's goodwill seems to have been considered as a given fact by the negotiators. Furthermore, certain actors were simply left outside the process - and could thus feel exempt from any of the obligations contained in the agreement. The *Kamajors*, for instance, were not mentioned and thus not concerned by the demobilization and disarmament process, nor were foreign combatants (apart from Executive Outcomes) - or more precisely mercenaries fighting alongside the RUF. These omissions, coupled with the lack of any measure to compel compliance, most certainly jeopardized the agreement's future implementation.

Because of these shortcomings, the Abidjan agreement already appears at that stage as a missed opportunity for peace. An explanation for this disappointing outcome could be that the Sierra Leonean government had been overassertive about its capacity to handle the situation once an agreement was signed, while underestimating the RUF as a negotiating partner. For its part, the RUF succeeded in 'reversing the trend' and managed to take advantage of a negotiation process in which it was initially not in a good position. The question remains as to whether this comes from a clever negotiating strategy on its part (and here International Alert's advisory role might have been instrumental) or from the government's own weakness. Whatever the answer, the lesson that should have been drawn from this first series of talks was that the RUF was a hard-hitting negotiating partner.

Conakry: The Odd One Out

If the Abidjan agreement was at least an attempt to find a solution to a well-defined conflict involving two warring parties as negotiating partners, the Conakry agreement appears from the outset as a kind of oddity. Signed by two actors that were officially not at war (ECOWAS and AFRC), the text

⁹¹ See Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, p. 53.

includes a call for the cessation of hostilities, without however mentioning which hostilities are at stake. And that question would not be pointless, since the agreement was concluded at a time when the RUF was exercising power jointly with the AFRC, which in fact mostly consisted of ex-SLA members, who were the RUF's former enemies... Therefore, the hostilities referred to could have only been those opposing the junta to the CDF, but the CDF is not mentioned at all in the text, adding further to the oddity of the agreement. Moreover, the inclusion of a ceasefire provision (especially in the first article) in the agreement is even stranger when recalling that the aim of the negotiations (and, in fact, the mandate of ECOWAS) was not to make peace but to restore the government thrown out by the junta. And in that regard the plan is somewhat startling, since it stipulates that the government should be restored by 22 May 1998, that is six months later... In the meantime, all combatants were supposed to enter a DDR process, refugees and displaced persons should have returned and humanitarian assistance been resumed under the supervision of ECOMOG and UN observers. This sounds like mere wishful thinking, especially given the RUF's and AFRC's propensity to renege on their earlier commitments.⁹² In fact, Kabbah and his government are known to have been kept outside the negotiations, although they were regularly informed.⁹³ It thus remains uncertain whether they would have agreed to such a deal, which, in addition to postponing their return, provided for Sankoh's release and repatriation to Sierra Leone and called for power-sharing arrangements (article 5). Actually, it allows little doubt that the peculiarity of the Conakry agreement derives from the fact that none of the signing parties really believed in it, both were wishing only to buy time: the junta hoping to strengthen its hold on the country; while ECOWAS was preparing for military action under Nigerian guidance. In such a situation, the agreement's provisions do not weigh much with regard to the prospects for peace.

Lomé: Power and Diamonds are the RUF's Best Friends

The Lomé agreement appears at first sight as much more comprehensive than the other two. Including no less than 37 articles spelt on 23 pages and completed with five annexes, it looks and sounds serious, especially when compared to the previous ones.⁹⁴ Some interesting points were included for the first time in the agreement, such as the establishment of a Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development (thereafter CMRRD), the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and of a Trust Fund for war victims, the release of all prisoners and abductees, and the constitution of a government of national unity. Moreover, for the first time, the agreement mentions the CDF, which was to be included in the DDR process. Last but not least, the text provides for monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, including the establishment of a joint monitoring commission (chaired by UNOMSIL and comprising ECOMOG), mandated *inter alia* to 'take appropriate action on reports of violations of the ceasefire' (article II). If such a provision does not clearly allow for peace enforcement actions, it nevertheless represents an opportunity for a robust implementation process, should the concerned actors wish to seize it.

⁹² By October 1997, the RUF had given many indications of that propensity, the latest being the collapse of the Abidjan peace process. As for the AFRC, in addition to being most probably dominated by the RUF (on that point, see Abraham, 'Dancing with the Chameleon', pp. 217-128), it had been at the origin of the failure in July of a first attempt to negotiate (Abidjan negotiations, July 1997).

⁹³ Hirsch, *Sierra Leone* p. 65.

⁹⁴ Although the Abidjan agreement comprised 27 articles, these only covered eight pages, whereas the Conakry peace plan was made of only six points recapitulated on a mere three pages.

Despite those provisions, three specific concessions made to the RUF actually undermine the whole agreement. First, the very precise power-sharing arrangements described in article V gave the RUF and its leader Foday Sankoh (who was still at the time condemned to death by a Sierra Leonean court) a very important position in the country's future political and economic landscape. No less than four ministerial positions (including one out of three 'senior appointments', i.e. justice, foreign affairs or finance), four posts of Deputy Minister and the status of Vice-President for Sankoh (in his capacity as Chairman of the CMRRD) were granted to the rebel movement, whose lack of legitimacy and popular support was even more blatant since it had exercised power in 1997-1998. Although power-sharing arrangements at the governmental level might be necessary in order to find a way out from certain conflict situations, the danger of such a choice in the case of Sierra Leone was obvious for most observers.⁹⁵ In the previous years, the RUF had given ample evidence of its real war aims (money and power) and of its inability to govern the country. In such circumstances, allowing it to participate in the government of Sierra Leone was a risky bet, if not insane. In addition to legitimizing the RUF and thus to creating a precedent for other potential violent rebel movements in the region, such a policy bore the risk of perpetuating the mismanagement of the country and the plunder of natural resources.

The second problematic provision of the Lomé agreement relates to the establishment of the CMRRD. Although it is difficult to contest the validity of the idea to create a body designed to 'exercise full control over the exploitation of gold, diamonds and other resources for the benefit of the people of Sierra Leone' and to ensure that the proceeds for such exploitation should 'be spent exclusively on the development of the people of Sierra Leone', the main concern in this regard comes from the nomination of Sankoh as Chairman of such a commission. Given the RUF's predatory records, one could only express reservations as to whether Sankoh was the appropriate person to ensure 'the legitimate exploitation of Sierra Leone gold and diamonds' as well as 'the security of the [diamond] areas'.⁹⁶

Finally, the last troubling provision is the one that grants 'absolute and free pardon' to Foday Sankoh and 'all combatants' (articles IX.1 and 2) and calls for the government to 'ensure that no official or judicial action is taken against any member of the RUF/SL, ex-AFRC, ex-SLA or CDF' (article IX.3). Such an unconditional amnesty was not only a judicial setback in a period when two special tribunals for war crimes existed and the International Criminal Court was being established, it can also be considered as a concrete threat for the sustainability of peace and as an offence to the people of Sierra Leone. It is thus no surprise that the UN Secretary-General instructed his Special Representative to sign the agreement with the reservation that the UN was considering that article IX 'shall not apply to international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law'.⁹⁷ As for the people of Sierra Leone, that provision, as well as the two previous provisions, is in total contradiction with the conclusions of the National Consultative Conference on the Peace Process, which gathered in April 1999 to reach a popular consensus on the objectives for peace. Interestingly enough, the Conference, which comprised civil society organizations, government representatives, local district representatives and international organizations, recommended *inter alia* that no power-sharing arrangements should be foreseen and

⁹⁵ See, *inter alia*, Abraham, 'Dancing with the Chameleon'; and Francis, 'Tortuous Path to Peace'.

⁹⁶ All of the quotations are taken from the Lomé agreement, article VII on the establishment of the CMRRD.

⁹⁷ S/1999/836, 30 July 1999, § 7.

that any blanket amnesty should be conditional. In particular, Foday Sankoh was supposed to go through the due process of law.⁹⁸

These three provisions, which derive from the RUF's dominant position during the negotiations and the pressures exercised on the government by third parties that were eager to broker an agreement at any price, undermine the whole agreement and cast a shadow on the implementation of other provisions that could really help enhance Sierra Leone's situation. Actually, the final outcome of the Lomé accord would thus depend on the ability (and will) of the implementing actors to ensure that the problematic provisions do not allow for the collapse of the whole structure. In short, it is up to ECOMOG and even more to UNOMSIL (which was soon going to be transformed into UNAMSIL) to make use of the enforcement power that they were granted to bring peace to Sierra Leone. Here, the prospects for peace ultimately depend on the initiatives taken during the post-signature/implementation period.

As a conclusion to this section, it can be said that the three agreements studied illustrate three different situations. The first includes one provision (EO's departure) that casts a shadow over the sustainability of the agreement in its entirety; the second is a mere anecdote, in which nobody really believes; and the third comprises some very problematic provisions, but peace is not completely out of reach, and transforming the essay ultimately depends on the way that the agreement is implemented.

3. Making Peace Work

It is not breaking news that the implementation phase of peace agreements needs to be considered as an important stage of conflict resolution processes, offering as much room for success or failure as the other two - if not more. At this stage, peace might in particular be threatened by the potential emergence of spoilers (be they parties to the agreement or other actors excluded from the settlement) as well as the existence of war-perpetuating mechanisms (such as the arms' trade and natural resource exploitation). In this regard, the will to make use of enforcement mechanisms (if they were foreseen in the text) in order to neutralize these two 'failing elements' can bear a strong influence on the final outcome, highlighting the continuity that obviously exists with the two previous steps. Similarly, third parties have a key role to play in dealing with spoilers and war-perpetuating mechanisms. Table 3 in Annexe 2 identifies a series of factors that may weigh in at that stage, helping to shed light on the international, regional and local actors' undertakings and their role in succeeding or failing to create conditions for peace implementation.

*Abidjan: Triumph of the Lack of Will*⁹⁹

What is striking regarding implementation of the Abidjan agreement is the vacuum of measures and/or actions that were taken to sustain the stalling process. As early as December 1996, signs that the agreement was endangered were visible, especially as Foday Sankoh started to criticize the government for ceasefire violations, while delaying appointments to the Demobilization and

⁹⁸ National Consultative Conference on the Peace Process, 12 April 1999, *Summary of Consensus*: 5.0 (amnesty); 7.0 (power-sharing); and 10.0 (Sankoh). Text available on <http://www.sierra-leone.org>, the section on documents related to the peace process.

⁹⁹ The expression is borrowed from James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War*, Hurst and Co, London, 1997.

Resettlement Committee, thus preventing the DDR process from starting.¹⁰⁰ The crisis became open in January 1997, when Sankoh persistently refused to agree to the deployment of a UN monitoring force, mostly consisting of military observers.¹⁰¹ In the end, no ‘Neutral Monitoring Group from the International Community’ as stipulated in the Abidjan agreement was ever set up, constituting the first breach in the agreement’s implementation. Nevertheless, and despite the clear obstructionist role played by Sankoh, the government finally put an end to Executive Outcomes’ contract in the same period (a measure that was supposed to be taken only *after* the Neutral Monitoring Group was established). Indeed, it seems that the government was unable to react to the RUF’s provocations and more generally to assume a leading role in the peace process.¹⁰² Consequently, no concrete action was taken, either to implement the agreement or to ameliorate Sierra Leone’s socio-economic situation, or even to protect the institutions. For instance, it is often reported that Kabbah was aware of the probability of a *coup* occurring in this period (before the final blow on 25 May 1997, at least two other attempts had taken place without success), but he nevertheless proved unable to prevent the bloody May 1997 AFRC takeover.¹⁰³ In fact, the government’s actions towards the army (cutting the rice rations, maintaining low salaries and nominating the Kamajors’ leader Hinga Norman as Deputy Defence Minister) can be perceived as having directly fuelled frustration within the SLA. Similarly, not much was done to improve governance, to reverse state failure or to redress the economy (in part because of a lack of financial resources).¹⁰⁴ In addition, it can be argued that the external world did not attempt much to boost the peace process. With the exception of the United Nations’ proposals for a peacekeeping deployment, nothing was done in order to support (or to pressure) the government, or to warn the RUF that it could face reprisals for creating obstacles to peace implementation. And apparently, the Security Council itself did not show much nerve in trying to impose on Sankoh the deployment of UN troops.

Together with the spoiling role endorsed by the RUF, these cumulative weaknesses account for the collapse of the Abidjan peace process and the following *coup* that overthrew the government. Yet, it could be argued that it would have been possible for the government and for other external actors to exert more pressure on the RUF, which was at that time undergoing a major crisis. Actually, the RUF officials who had participated in the negotiations and were among the RUF’s representatives in the CCP were ready to implement the agreement and were rebuffed at Sankoh’s attitude of spoiling the peace process. They thus decided to organize an ‘internal *coup*’ in order to remove Sankoh from the

¹⁰⁰ See Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, p. 54; and Abdullah, ‘Bush Path to Destruction’, p. 229; and S/1997/80, § 22 and 23.

¹⁰¹ See S/1997/80, § 15, 16 and 39 for Sankoh’s position towards UN peacekeeping; and Annexe II for the concept of operations of the foreseen force.

¹⁰² As far as the government is concerned, some authors also consider that one of the reasons for the RUF’s obstruction to the agreement is also related to EO and CDF attacks of RUF bush camps in September-October 1996, that is during the Abidjan negotiations. The RUF would then have felt ‘betrayed’ by the government side and thus would have lost any interest that it may have had in implementing the agreement. See Richards, *The Political Economy of Internal Conflict in Sierra Leone*, pp. 16-17).

¹⁰³ On the awareness of Kabbah, see Abraham, ‘Dancing with the Chameleons’, p. 215; and Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, p. 56 (the two authors do not agree on the number of *coup* attempts, with Abraham mentioning three while Hirsch only cites two).

¹⁰⁴ For a general description of the situation in Sierra Leone in 1996-1997, see S/1997/80, and in particular § 28-35.

leadership in March 1997.¹⁰⁵ But this attempt failed (despite Sankoh's arrest in Lagos in the same period) and hardliners' positions within the RUF were consolidated. Far from being anecdotal, this crisis offers an illustration of how an opportunity to isolate some troublemakers was missed and thus how the chances for peace were lost.

Conakry: Triumph of the Use of Force ... but No Follow-Up

If lack of will was the main characteristic of the post-Abidjan period, things changed radically one year later. As seen above, the Conakry agreement ultimately proved to be more an artifice than a real attempt to bring a peaceful solution to the conflict. It is therefore not really surprising that ECOMOG (in fact, Nigerian troops deployed in Sierra Leone) finally resorted to force to implement the 'agreement' - three months before the deadline mentioned in the text... True, the junta had by then given ample indications of its bad faith, in particular in raising three issues that had to be solved before it would accept implementation of the agreement.¹⁰⁶ True also, the junta forces attacked ECOMOG on 5 February 1998, prompting ECOMOG to respond and to pursue military action until the junta's final defeat one week later.¹⁰⁷ But the rapidity of the response and the efficiency of ECOMOG forces hint that this robust action had been planned and was not merely a self-defence operation. In addition, it also seems that the choice to resort to force had enjoyed the (unofficial but tangible) support of the United Kingdom, which had become entangled in a scandal for having provided arms and training, in violation of the embargo, to the exiled Kabbah government, the CDF (which actively supported ECOMOG's offensive) and even ECOMOG.¹⁰⁸ In spite of a dubious legal basis, ECOMOG's intervention actually prompted the implementation of key provisions of the agreement: President Kabbah and his government returned to Freetown on 10 March 1998; ECOMOG started to deploy throughout the country as from March 1998; and the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) was established in July 1998.¹⁰⁹ Here it is possible to speak of the triumph of the use of force.

Robust actions are, however, not an end in themselves but must be followed by appropriate political and military strategies in order to keep the process going. And such strategies were not adequately devised in the 'peace plan for Sierra Leone'. In particular, not much was indicated with regard to the management of peace once the government was restored. And the only political provisions calling for power-sharing arrangements had in effect been nullified by the military defeat imposed on the junta. Moreover, ECOMOG's 'robust action' had not relieved Sierra Leone of potential peace spoilers. In fact, most AFRC and RUF members had managed to escape after the fall of Freetown and continued to harass ECOMOG, the CDF (which was acting as a national army in the absence of such an institution) and UNOMSIL from the hinterland.¹¹⁰ Despite a marked increase in the number of ECOMOG troops (in June 1998, they were estimated at 12,000 according to the UN

¹⁰⁵ For details on this episode, see Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction', p. 229; Abraham, 'Dancing with the Chameleons', pp. 214-215; Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, pp. 22-26; and ICG, *Time for a New Military and Political Strategy*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁶ S/1998/103, § 13. The issues were: the release of Sankoh; the exemption of the army from the disarmament process; and the modification of ECOMOG's composition.

¹⁰⁷ S/1998/249, § 2-10.

¹⁰⁸ On the 'Sandline affair', see Hirsch, *Sierra Leone*, pp. 65-67; Comfort Ero, 'A Critical Assessment of Britain's Africa policy', *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 1, No. 2.

¹⁰⁹ S/1998/249, § 9; S/1998/486, § 13-18; and UNSC Resolution 1181, 13 July 1998.

¹¹⁰ On the security situation, see S/1998/486, § 13-18 and 25-33; S/1998/750, § 12-13; and S/1998/960, § 9-10.

Secretary-General) and the (less impressive) deployment of UN observers (56 persons in December 1998), the peacekeeping forces proved underequipped, understaffed, and thus unable to stabilize the security situation outside Freetown.¹¹¹ They also lacked the means to enforce the arms' embargo, which was still relevant for actors other than the government, especially since the rebels' stronghold bordered Liberia, from where arms were being shipped.¹¹² Proposals (made by Taylor and Kabbah) to deploy a joint ECOWAS/UN observer unit at the border between Liberia and Sierra Leone were never implemented, for obvious security reasons.¹¹³

This last point brings us to the spoiler's role endorsed by Taylor in this period and to the persistent duplicity that he has shown with regard to Sierra Leone: while his responsibility in the conflict was gradually recognized (after 1998, the 'diplomatic silence' surrounding him was progressively broken, in particular on the initiative of President Kabbah), Taylor not only denied all of the allegations of his involvement but kept a high profile, making ostentatious declarations about his commitment to the maintenance of peace in the region and ostentatiously offering for the UN and ECOMOG to monitor the border (while knowing that this would in fact be impossible with the means that ECOMOG had at its disposal). Later on, he proposed reviving the Mano River Union, a sub-regional organization - grouping Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia - to bring stability to the region, a purposefully deceitful offer since he was well aware of the lack of credibility and above all lack of power of this phantom organization, which was furthermore weakened by the tense relationship existing among the three neighbours.¹¹⁴ However, despite the obvious bad faith shown by the Liberian President, neither the Sierra Leonean government, ECOMOG, UNOMSIL, nor the 'international community' as a whole attempted anything to counter Charles Taylor, in part probably because of the fear that Liberia would once again be destabilized if the newly elected President was weakened. This strategy was, however, short-sighted, since the price to pay in the end was renewed hostilities in Sierra Leone and, later on, regional destabilization.

But Charles Taylor does not bear the sole responsibility for Sierra Leone's problems. First, as far as spoilers are concerned, the governmental side was not completely irreproachable, as it can be argued that the CDF, which was still combating alongside ECOMOG and was far from willing to join any DDR process, contributed to the violent climate and can thus be considered as a spoiler, against whom no action was taken. To add to these difficulties, the government did not do much to address the causes of the conflict in this period. Most of its energy was in fact directed at organizing 'treason trials' for those arrested following the fall of the junta, while attempting at the same time to defeat the rebels militarily. That strategy did not, however, bring impressive results. Apart from raising concerns among the international community, the treason trials, which were held in an atmosphere of revenge, did not impact much on the process, especially with regard to the sustainability of peace and the rebuilding of national unity.¹¹⁵ And the military option did not prevent the AFRC/RUF attacks on Freetown in December 1998-January 1999, which shed light on the real weakness of the government

¹¹¹ Data available in S/1998/486, §18 (for ECOMOG); and S/1998/1176, Annexe (for UNOMSIL). On the forces' difficulties, see all UNSG reports for 1998 and 1999.

¹¹² As from 1998, Liberia's role in the Sierra Leonean conflict became more and more publicized. On Liberia breaking the embargo, see S/2000/1195, part II, section II.

¹¹³ See S/1998/750, § 6; S/1999/237, § 50; and S/1999/645, §14-15.

¹¹⁴ See S/1998/1176, §12-13, for the first reference made to the Mano River Union. The myth of the organization's revival was to last until 2002, when it became obvious that the conflict in Liberia was posing a threat to the whole region (see S/2002/267, § 5, for the last reference to the Mano River Union).

¹¹⁵ On the treason trials, see S/1998/960, § 4 and 25-26; and S/1998/1176, § 4 and 40-41.

and on the difficulties of its defenders (ECOMOG and CDF). This event also prompted the government and its external supporters to change strategies and to start the Lomé negotiation process.

Lomé: Spoilers Versus Peacekeepers: An Uneven Combat

Again, the presence of spoilers and the inability of those tasked to implement the agreement to react to their actions constituted major stumbling blocks of the Lomé process. But these acquired a much more dramatic dimension than in the previous contexts, for two series of reasons related, on the one hand, to the strong position enjoyed by the spoilers and, on the other, to the special weakness of the peacekeepers. The RUF, which was basically the Lomé agreement's main winner, was granted a new political status from which it could easily block the implementation. For its part, the AFRC, which was initially not mentioned in the settlement, launched a series of violent actions in the weeks following the signing ceremony and managed to obtain the appointment of its leader Johnny Paul Koroma as Chairman of the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace.¹¹⁶ These positions allowed both groups to pursue violent actions after the signing of the agreement, even occasionally taking ECOMOG or UNAMSIL peacekeepers as hostages or robbing them of their weapons, without facing any serious political consequences.¹¹⁷

The second series of reasons relates to the increased weakness of the peacekeepers. Whereas it was fundamental that the bodies set up to foster implementation should enjoy some credibility and thus show that they had the means and the will to compel implementation, the reality on the ground reflected exactly the opposite. First, ECOMOG faced extreme difficulties in 1999-2000. Its mandate was reviewed in August 1999, as foreseen by the Lomé agreement, and was far-reaching, including *inter alia* 'the maintenance of the peace and security of the Sierra Leone state', the disarming of 'all fighters', the protection of 'UNOMSIL personnel, human rights' monitors, humanitarian aid workers, the staff of the DDR programme, government officials, UN officials and NGO officials' and the 'establishment of safe corridors for refugees'.¹¹⁸ Despite these huge responsibilities, the force remained overstretched and lacked essential materials, including military equipment, to fulfil its tasks. In addition, the announced and planned departure of ECOMOG and its foreseen replacement by UNAMSIL added to the peacekeepers' difficulties. Yet efforts were made to smooth the transition: Nigeria agreed to delay repatriation of its troops while UNOMSIL was transformed into a real peacekeeping force (UNAMSIL), initially comprising up to 6,000 personnel and authorized to use force 'to ensure the security and freedom of movement of its personnel and, within its capabilities and areas of deployment, to afford protection to civilians under imminent threat of violence'.¹¹⁹ But despite this genuine attempt to compensate for the departure of ECOMOG, there remains the fact that UNAMSIL's mandate was not a peace-enforcement mandate, far from it, and thus that the force was potentially less efficient than ECOMOG to address and respond to ceasefire violations or to any other

¹¹⁶ See S/1999/1003, §7-8; and S/1999/1223, § 5.

¹¹⁷ S/2000/186, § 11. See also Berman, *Rearmament in Sierra Leone*, pp. 18-19.

¹¹⁸ S/1999/1003, § 37.

¹¹⁹ UNSC Resolution 1270 (1999), § 14. The force, whose mandate is included in Resolution 1270, was basically tasked to assist in the DDR process (and to this end to deploy throughout the territory), to monitor the ceasefire, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and to encourage the parties to create confidence-building mechanisms. In February 2000, UNAMSIL was reinforced (up to 11,100 military personnel) and its mandate revised to include tasks previously assumed by ECOMOG (the provision of security at key locations including the DDR sites, facilitation of the free flow of people and guarding of the weapons collected); see Resolution 1289 of 7 February 2000, § 9 and 10.

attempt to block the peace process. These ECOMOG difficulties and UNAMSIL's inability to appear as a credible alternative therefore led to the creation of a sort of 'enforcement vacuum' at the end of 1999 and the beginning of 2000.

Yet in a development that is not so different from what happened at the time of the Abidjan implementation, divisions occurring both within the RUF and between the RUF and the AFRC could have offered an opportunity to weaken further the two main spoilers. In particular, the RUF's internal divisions, which derived from a diamond-related conflict opposing Sankoh and Bockarie, could have been the occasion to tackle the diamond issue while taking advantage of the movement's temporary weakness.¹²⁰ But in 1999-2000, as in previous periods, it was apparently still too early to take any action on diamonds, despite the suggestion by the UN Secretary-General 'to consider measures to curb the sale of illegally mined diamonds from Sierra Leone' in March 2000.¹²¹ Similarly, it was apparently also too early to take any action against Liberia, despite more and more evidence that Liberia was involved in Sierra Leone.¹²²

As for the rest of the agreement, the fact that not even the ceasefire was respected could only impede implementation of the other provisions, in particular those related to the disarmament and demobilization process. By May 2000, when the process effectively collapsed following the RUF's attacks on peacekeepers, a total of 24,042 combatants had been disarmed, among whom 10,055 belonged to the AFRC and ex-SLA, 9,038 to the CDF and only 4,949 to the RUF.¹²³ This relatively significant number should not, however, conceal less positive facts: first, the number of combatants was estimated in September 1999 to be about 45,000, which means that nine months after signature of the agreement, only 53 per cent of the fighting population had been disarmed (the draft schedule of implementation attached to the Lomé agreement foresaw that the DDR process should be completed within two months). Second, and perhaps most important, the number of arms collected at the same time was 10,840, which means that the ratio of arms to combatants was less than 1:2.¹²⁴ In addition, the fact that these arms were of poor quality indicated that the warring parties were not ready to surrender their best weapons.¹²⁵ Finally, the data refer to the disarmament of combatants, but not to their demobilization or their reintegration. And the UN Secretary-General indicated in his May 2000 report that many of the ex-SLA and CDF combatants had retaken arms following the RUF attacks, thus 'seriously complicating the DDR programme'.¹²⁶ Consequently, it does not seem an exaggeration to state that the process was a failure, at least partially, even before the RUF destroyed the DDR facilities in May 2000. The same applies to many other aspects of the agreement, such as the restoration of the government's authority throughout the territory, the functioning of the various commissions established (including the CMRRD), the protection of human rights (the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was not established) and the rebuilding of Sierra Leonean forces (despite

¹²⁰ On the RUF crisis and its relationship with diamonds, see S/2000/1195, §71-77.

¹²¹ S/2000/186, § 49.

¹²² In March 1999, the UN Security Council expressed in Resolution 1231 'its grave concerns' at 'continued reports that support is being afforded to the rebels in Sierra Leone, including through the supply of arms and mercenaries, in particular from the territory of Liberia' (§5), but after the signature of the Lomé agreement, a sudden silence surrounded Liberia's role in Sierra Leone, which was to last until the May 2000 crisis. The last UNSG report mentioning Liberia is dated 4 June 1999 (S/1999/645, § 13-17) and it was not before 19 May 2000 that mention was made again of Liberia in a UNSG report (S/2000/455, § 11-13, 67 and 106).

¹²³ S/2000/455, § 26.

¹²⁴ S/2000/455, § 26.

¹²⁵ Berman, *Rearmament in Sierra Leone*, pp. 25-26.

¹²⁶ S/2000/455, § 27.

the United Kingdom's assistance in this respect).¹²⁷ In conclusion, it can thus be argued that the implementation of Lomé ultimately collapsed because the spoilers enjoyed a concrete capacity to derail the process, while the implementing parties proved unable to prevent them from doing so. The difference with previous periods lies in the fact that much more than a lack of will, the peace process failed this time in part because of a lack of means, to be seen in particular in relation to the United Nations' recurrent difficulties when confronted with the necessity to deploy an efficient and credible peacekeeping force quickly.¹²⁸

Conclusion

This section has identified a number of issues that have differently but significantly impacted on Sierra Leone's conflict resolution process and that ultimately led to the three agreements' failure. These issues relate to the role of the belligerent parties, the involvement of third-party actors and the contents of the agreements.

The Parties. The case of Sierra Leone highlights in particular four points with regard to the role of the parties. The first is related to the importance of the parties' respective (military or political) positions at the time of the launch of the negotiations. Even if no military solution is brought to the conflict, one of the parties is always in a better position than the other(s) at a given time (as was the case for the Sierra Leonean government in 1996 and for the RUF in 1999), which means that this particular player enjoys a greater capacity to influence the negotiations and the final outcome. If this party is in fact a potential spoiler, there is little chance that the agreement should ever be implemented (as was the case for the Lomé agreement). Second, the way that the different actors are treated (including by third parties, if any) also bears some fundamental influence, since a rebel movement that had until then been ostracized can be legitimated by the negotiations (this was in effect what happened in Abidjan for the RUF and in Conakry for the junta). Third, any political settlement foreseen in the agreement must take into consideration the parties' real motivations as well as their true nature, especially if power-sharing arrangements are to be included. Former enemies when the conflict was raging cannot be expected suddenly to become cooperative and friendly partners. Similarly, the different players cannot be expected to be equally committed to peace - some of them may actually be prone to return to war, not least because of the economic profits that they can make in a conflict situation. The negotiators should thus anticipate the actors' potential to become spoilers when the time comes for them to exercise power, and they should consequently foresee mechanisms enabling action against one of the parties - without the latter's consent, should this prove necessary. Fourth, and last, the experience of Sierra Leone also points to the importance of players that are absent from the settlement. Ignoring or deliberately excluding some very real actors (such as the CDF or the AFRC in Sierra Leone) may prove critical, especially since the 'forgotten' combatants often have no obligation to disarm under the agreement. The same remark applies to other states that are actively involved in the conflict: ignoring the regional dimension of a conflict can only lead to the perpetuation of

¹²⁷ For a general description of the slowness of the Lomé agreement's implementation, see S/2000/186 and S/2000/455.

¹²⁸ More will be said on UNAMSIL's weaknesses in the following section. With regard to recurrent problems of UN peace operations, see A/55/305-S/2000/809, 21 August 2000, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*. In this regard, it is worth noting that UNAMSIL was used as a reference by that report's authors to support their demonstration of the problems faced by UN peacekeeping operations.

problems. In the case of Sierra Leone, while Liberia could have been considered as a direct party to the conflict, if only for the massive support that it was offering to the RUF (in terms of arms' supply and sanctuaries), none of the three processes studied involved action against Liberia. This actually amounted to offering the RUF the means to play its spoiler role without restriction.

Third Parties. Closely linked to the importance of the direct parties is the role of external actors. Although it is a favoured attitude within most international organizations and foreign affairs' services to claim that the main responsibility for a peace process lies in the hands of the local actors, experience has shown on many occasions (from Bosnia to Kosovo, from Cambodia to East Timor, and from Rwanda to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that the involvement (or the lack of involvement) of third parties actually weighs on a peace process at least as much as the local parties' will. The case of Sierra Leone highlights the critical role of third parties with regard to the pressure exercised on local players to enter a negotiating process, the legitimization (or the exclusion) of a designated actor, the political outcome of the settlement, as well as the ultimate decision to enforce peace and to confront peace process spoilers.

The Contents of the Agreement. If the parties (local and external actors) constitute the first factor (both in time and in scope) influencing a conflict resolution process, the provisions included in an agreement are obviously also of importance. In particular, those aiming at solving the conflict (political provisions, removal of the causes of the conflict, and state-building clauses) and those aiming at making peace sustainable (monitoring and enforcement mechanisms) must be granted special attention. The examples of the Abidjan and Conakry agreements show that if one of these two types of provisions is missing, peace has few chances of prevailing. Another point that specifically deserves mention in that category is the issue of justice. The fact that an agreement includes a call for justice would probably be a good indicator of the negotiators' willingness to bring peace to the country and, concretely, to prevent spoilers from blocking implementation. Such a scenario nevertheless remains exceptional, since the signing parties are too often involved in war crimes and human rights' violations to accept justice-related provisions. In the absence of such clauses, the least that can be done is to avoid including a blanket amnesty in an agreement, in order to leave open the possibility of trying the perpetrators in the future. In Sierra Leone, the amnesties granted to the RUF (and the AFRC) proved to be serious mistakes, inasmuch as they sent a wrong signal to the actors at stake and paved the way for the reiteration of such acts.

Failed attempts such as the ones studied here may, however, help the main actors to draw lessons from failure, as shown by the aftermath of the collapse of the Lomé agreement. Far from putting an end to the Sierra Leonean conflict resolution process, the May 2000 hostage crisis propitiously generated a kind of 'electric shock' that brought major changes in the main actors' strategy, including those great powers that had until then cautiously remained at the margins of the process.

The next section thus proposes an overview of the actions taken between 2000 and 2002, with the ultimate objective of identifying what made a difference between the 1990s' failed attempts to bring peace and the ultimate 'success' of the Abuja process in 2001-2002.

III. Peace at Last? The Abuja Process and the Chances for Peace in Sierra Leone

On 17 January 2002, less than two years after the dramatic collapse of the Lomé agreement, the Sierra Leonean conflict was officially declared over following completion of the disarmament process.¹²⁹ After a decade marred with war and atrocities, Sierra Leone suddenly appeared as an unexpected instance of (relative) stability in a region becoming more and more tense.¹³⁰ The sharp contrast existing between this ultimate development and the previous laborious attempts to restore peace cannot but prompt questions about the factors that helped to change the situation. Actually, the resolution of the Sierra Leonean conflict resulted from a combination of factors, among which the above-mentioned spiral of violence that was affecting neighbouring states was not the least important. The role that was played by third parties and the ‘international community’ also proved highly instrumental in accelerating the ripening process, thereby illustrating the fact that restoring peace is a challenge that can (and thus should) be taken up, even in situations that are deemed desperate. The following is therefore a presentation of these factors and of the way that they combined to produce (astonishing) results. Yet the peace process undergone by Sierra Leone during these two years cannot be qualified without reservations as a ‘complete success’, and the fragility of peace in Sierra Leone should be kept in mind, as exemplified by the assessment of the challenges facing Sierra Leone that is offered in the very last section.

1. From the May 2000 Crisis to the Abuja Ceasefire: The Beginning of the End

Somewhat paradoxically, the RUF attacks on UNAMSIL peacekeepers marked the beginning of the rebels’ difficulties.¹³¹ No longer considered as a credible partner for the implementation of the Lomé agreement, the RUF was in fact further weakened by a combination of factors. First, the attack triggered strong international reactions, in particular from the United Kingdom. The former colonial power had been following the situation in Sierra Leone for a long time but, as seen above, managed to avoid direct intervention until 1999, when it started to support the Sierra Leonean government in training and equipping the new Sierra Leonean army while, following the death of the Nigerian President Abacha, it also began to contribute financially to ECOMOG.¹³² This growing involvement derived in great part from Tony Blair’s ‘ethical foreign policy’ and his party’s ‘new

¹²⁹ S/2002/267, § 12.

¹³⁰ In the same period, Liberia and Guinea were marred with violence, which was also going to reach Côte d’Ivoire in 2002.

¹³¹ Most of the peacekeepers were released in the course of May 2000, ironically enough thanks to Charles Taylor’s intercession; see S/2000/751, §24.

¹³² S/1999/645, § 22. Because of Abacha’s poor human rights’ record, the United Kingdom had until then refrained from supporting ECOMOG, which was dominated by Nigerian troops.

internationalism'.¹³³ Still in accordance with that strategy, the British government went a step further in May 2000, when British troops were deployed in the Freetown area and a substantial naval presence was established off the Sierra Leonean coast as a reaction to the hostage crisis. Although the deployment was initially meant to allow the evacuation of British nationals, the intervention had a much broader effect, 'boosting the confidence of Sierra Leoneans and enabling UNAMSIL to redeploy much-needed troops to areas east of Freetown'.¹³⁴ Moreover, although most British troops had already left Sierra Leone in mid-June 2000, the United Kingdom subsequently remained militarily active in Sierra Leone. Two warships were maintained offshore and a rapid reaction force was established in order to allow for swift intervention should this become necessary.¹³⁵ In addition, military personnel were also seconded to assist the Sierra Leonean government in establishing a credible army.¹³⁶ Such a military involvement from a Western power undoubtedly played an important role in signifying to the RUF that attacks against peacekeepers would no longer be tolerated and furthermore that the outside world was no longer indifferent to what was happening in Sierra Leone. If the impact on the security situation in Sierra Leone is unquestionable, British involvement should not however be overestimated. Contrary to what is sometimes stated, the United Kingdom never intervened to 'put an end to killings and amputations of civilians', the massive military deployment remained short-lived (one-and-a-half months) and most of the further contributions to stabilize the country were (cautiously) centred on SLA training.¹³⁷ Moreover, although occasional (but decisive) military support was offered to UNAMSIL, the British avoided participating directly in the United Nations' operation.¹³⁸

As a matter of fact, the second important consequence of the May 2000 crisis relates to the United Nations' reaction and strengthening of UNAMSIL. An assessment team sent to Sierra Leone in June 2000 by the UN Secretary-General to review UNAMSIL's operations uncovered serious efficiency problems. The team highlighted in particular the lack of cohesion, the absence of a commonly shared understanding of the mandate, problems in command and control, the insufficient preparedness of some of the contingents, problems related to internal communication and coordination, the lack of integrated planning and logistical support, as well as training and equipment shortfalls.¹³⁹ As a result, the UN Security Council decided in August 2000 to adapt the force's mandate, and authorized UNAMSIL to 'deter and, where necessary, decisively counter the threat of RUF attack by responding robustly to any hostile actions or threat of imminent and direct use of force'.¹⁴⁰ The authorized ceiling of 13,000 troops was not increased (it is true that this ceiling was not reached at that time), but new troops were committed to UNAMSIL, allowing for a substantial augmentation from 7,391 personnel

¹³³ On the importance of Sierra Leone for Blair's international policy, see Ero, 'A Critical Assessment of Britain's Africa Policy', pp. 55-58.

¹³⁴ According to the UN Secretary-General in S/2000/455, § 69.

¹³⁵ See S/2000/751, § 20; and S/2000/1055, § 47.

¹³⁶ The United Kingdom had been involved in such training since 1999, but its presence and role were going to be substantially increased after May 2000. In June 2000, 200 personnel were sent, and at their peak British forces totalled 550 (see S/2000/751, § 20; and ICG, *Sierra Leone: Managing Uncertainty*, 24 October 2001, p. 6).

¹³⁷ The quotation is translated from Stephen Smith in *Le Monde*, 30 June 2003.

¹³⁸ Throughout 2000 and 2001, the United Kingdom's contributions to UNAMSIL were limited to two dozen personnel, mostly military observers. There were also, however, four senior British staff in the UNAMSIL command (see UN Secretary-General reports, annexes; ICG, *Time for a New Military and Political Strategy*, p. 24; and IGC, *Sierra Leone*, p. 6).

¹³⁹ S/2000/751, § 54.

¹⁴⁰ Resolution 1313 of 4 August 2000, § 3.b.

in March 2000 to 12,440 in July 2000.¹⁴¹ These reinforcements were followed by concrete actions in the field, with two military operations launched in July 2000, the first against the RUF's stronghold in Kailahun in order to extract UN staff trapped there and the second against a former AFRC group (the 'West Side Boys'), who were threatening to attack UNAMSIL.¹⁴² On those occasions, the UN (backed by the United Kingdom) militarily and successfully opposed the rebels for the first time, contributing to increasing UN credibility and thus changing the general climate.

In addition to these international military actions, the RUF was also affected by political or diplomatic events. First, on 17 May 2000, Foday Sankoh was arrested by former AFRC elements, which turned him over to the government.¹⁴³ Breaking with the previous appeasement and amnesty strategy, President Kabbah wrote on 12 June 2000 to the UN Secretary-General, asking him to establish a special court 'to try Foday Sankoh and other senior members of RUF "for crimes against the people of Sierra Leone and for the taking of United Nations' peacekeepers as hostages"'.¹⁴⁴ The UN Security Council endorsed the idea in its Resolution 1315 of 14 August 2000 and mandated the Secretary-General to make preparations for the formal establishment of such a court. From then on, Foday Sankoh and other rebel leaders faced the concrete threat of being prosecuted by an internationally backed tribunal.¹⁴⁵ In addition, Sankoh's arrest also meant that the RUF was - once again - bereft of a leader. In that regard, extensive diplomatic pressure was exerted by the Presidents of Mali and Nigeria in order to facilitate the nomination of Issa Sesay as the RUF's interim leader, as he was considered to be potentially more open to dialogue. Although this strategy did not immediately bear fruit, that nomination shed light on growing divisions within the RUF, as some battlefield commanders apparently disapproved of Sesay's nomination.¹⁴⁶

In addition to the difficulties related to Sankoh's arrest, the RUF faced (renewed) diplomatic and (new) economic pressures. On 5 July 2000, the UN Security Council prohibited 'the direct or indirect import of all rough diamonds from Sierra Leone' and called for the establishment of a certificate-of-origin regime, which would enable the Sierra Leonean government to be exempt from the above-mentioned sanctions while retaining control over diamond exports.¹⁴⁷ For the first time in UN history, sanctions were thus adopted in relation to the issue of conflict diamonds. If the RUF was not mentioned in the Resolution, it was nevertheless the main target, as illustrated by the reference to the UN Secretary-General's earlier call on the Security Council to 'consider a strengthening of the

¹⁴¹ S/2000/186, Annexe; and S/2000/751, Annexe. In the same period, the mission also received additional contingent equipment (S/2000/751, § 57).

¹⁴² S/2000/751, § 26-27 and 23. The 'West Side Boys' were, however, defeated only two months later, following an operation carried out by UK forces in order to rescue some of their members who had been taken hostage (see S/2000/1055, § 17).

¹⁴³ In fact, a crowd of 30,000 persons had already attempted to arrest Sankoh on 8 May 2000 in Freetown, but failed. On those events and Sankoh's arrest, see S/2000/455, § 74.

¹⁴⁴ S/2000/751, § 9.

¹⁴⁵ The Court was finally established on 16 January 2002 by an agreement between the United Nations and the government of Sierra Leone. In the meantime, its mandate had been enlarged to include the prosecution of all 'persons who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law'. See *Agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone on the Establishment of a Special Court for Sierra Leone*, available on <http://www.sierra-leone.org/specialcourtagreement.html>.

¹⁴⁶ S/2000/1055, § 2; S/2000/992, § 22; and ICG, *Time for a New Military and Political Strategy*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 1306. The 'certificate-of-origin scheme' is a system by which only rough diamonds with a tamper-proof certificate delivered by the government can be exported and thus imported.

sanctions' regime, including measures which would prevent RUF commanders from reaping the benefits of their illegal exploitation of mineral resources'.¹⁴⁸

The combination of these various developments bore some first fruits in November 2000, when a ceasefire agreement was signed between the Sierra Leonean government and the RUF in Abuja. Far from being a comprehensive peace plan, the text, which comprised ten points briefly exposed in a short two-page document, did not give birth to exaggerated enthusiasm among the main observers. The UN Secretary-General cautiously called it 'a first step towards creating an environment conducive to the reactivation of the peace process', but recalled that the situation remained 'precarious' despite 'positive developments' occurring in the period between 31 October and 15 December 2000.¹⁴⁹ Yet the agreement signed on 10 November 2000 included some innovative features. First, beyond the 'traditional' engagement to 'halt hostilities' and to 'recommence immediately the DDR programme', a concrete control body was foreseen, with UNAMSIL mandated to monitor the ceasefire and to report on potential violations. This provision, combined with the new responsibilities granted to UNAMSIL by Security Council Resolution 1313, opened the way for the UN force to implement 'robustly' the ceasefire agreement. Furthermore, the agreement called on UNAMSIL to deploy throughout Sierra Leone, including in the diamond zones, an invitation that had until then never been made to any other actor. Finally, the last article of the agreement foresaw the holding of a meeting to review the state of implementation after 30 days. Although often unnoticed, that point is indeed particularly important. Actually, any fragile ceasefire or peace agreement signed under special circumstances should include such a provision, which is the best way to prevent 'obsolescence' of the text and to keep the parties involved.¹⁵⁰ Many issues that could not be resolved at the time of signing might be overcome on such occasions, once the climate has cooled off. And if, on the contrary, the situation has deteriorated, such a meeting can be the occasion to address a last warning to the parties and to remind them of their obligations. In any case, it provides an opportunity for the parties and the agreement's guarantors to keep communicating - an essential factor of any peace process.

The developments that led to the signing of the Abuja ceasefire in October 2000 were pursued and confirmed in the following months preceding the review implementation meeting, which was finally held in May 2001. But a striking feature of the period between the two dates is definitely the regional evolutions that were taking place at the time and more specifically the developments occurring within Liberia.

¹⁴⁸ S/2000/455, § 94.

¹⁴⁹ S/2000/1199, § 66 and 68. Indeed, the first weeks following the agreement's signing did not seem to offer many reasons to hope for a radical change from the previous practice of declaring a ceasefire without respecting it. Issa Sesay, who had agreed to meet with UNAMSIL's leadership, postponed the proposed meeting on many occasions, while reports from the media indicated that some RUF members were contesting the ceasefire (S/2000/1199, § 3-4). And if the general military situation could be deemed rather calm, the RUF alleged on various occasions that the SLA and the United Kingdom had attacked some of its positions (allegations that were denied), while fighting involving the RUF and Guinean forces definitely took place at the border with Guinea (S/2000/1199, § 4 and 10).

¹⁵⁰ On the 'obsolescence' concept, which is related to the actors developing a growing dissatisfaction with the agreement that can bring them progressively to resist implementation, see Michael W. Doyle, *UN Peacekeeping in Cambodia: UNTAC's Civil Mandate*, Occasional Paper Series, International Peace Academy, London, 1995, p. 82; or Chester A. Crocker and Fen Osler Hampson, 'Making Peace Settlements Work', *Foreign Policy*, No. 104, autumn 1996, pp. 54-71.

2. The Path to Abuja II: Towards the Official End of the Conflict

If the situation in Sierra Leone during the winter months of 2001 seemed to indicate that the rebels had once again taken up with their old strategy of not keeping their word, important regional developments occurred in this period that undoubtedly weighed on the conflict resolution process.¹⁵¹ First, Liberia at last became the target of international action for its role in Sierra Leone. In December 2000, a Panel of Experts mandated by the United Nations Security Council to enquire on possible violations of the arms' embargo imposed on Sierra Leone in 1998 and on the 'link between trade in diamonds and trade in arms' issued its report, which was extremely critical of Liberia.¹⁵² In this straightforward document, the Panel uncovered the part played by Liberia, both with regard to the illegal exploitation of diamonds and the breaking of the arms' embargo.¹⁵³ In unequivocal terms, the report's authors deplored 'the widespread breaking of Security Council sanctions on both weapons and diamonds' and noted that 'the bulk of the RUF diamonds leave Sierra Leone through Liberia', a trade that 'cannot be conducted without the permission and the involvement of Liberian government officials at the highest level'.¹⁵⁴ As far as weapons were concerned, the conclusions were no different, with the Panel finding 'unequivocal and overwhelming evidence that Liberia has been actively supporting the RUF at all levels, in providing training, weapons and related material, logistical support, a staging ground for attacks and a safe heavens for retreat and recuperation and for public relations activities'.¹⁵⁵ This report, coupled with the United Kingdom's pressure to trigger sanctions against Liberia, led to adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1343 on 7 March 2001, in which the support provided by Liberia for armed rebel groups in neighbouring countries and in particular for the RUF in Sierra Leone was recognized as constituting 'a threat to international peace and security in the region'. The Resolution then imposed three sets of sanctions on Liberia: 1) an arms embargo; 2) a ban on the sale of rough diamonds, whether these diamonds originated in Liberia or not; and 3) a travel ban for senior members of the government and their families and for 'any other individuals providing financial and military support to armed rebel groups'. The Resolution, which came after years of passivity about Liberia, fell short, however, of any action targeting the logging industry, despite recommendations from the Panel of Experts to give consideration to the issue.¹⁵⁶ In fact, it seems that the slowness to decide on sanctions against Liberia, as well as the decision to exclude timber, came in great part from France's reluctance to target one of its commercial partners.¹⁵⁷ This incidentally illustrates the detrimental effect of Western powers' conflicting agendas when it comes to conflict resolution and in

¹⁵¹ On the situation within Sierra Leone, see S/2001/228. Among the problems related to the RUF's behaviour, one can mention ceasefire violations at the border with Guinea, additional conditions set up before the RUF would agree to disarm (release of the imprisoned leaders, establishment of an inclusive government and prior disarmament of the SLA and the CDF), and the restitution to the United Nations of only a few weapons and stolen material, including vehicles that had been stripped of their equipment and were not in a useable condition.

¹⁵² The report was issued as UN document S/2000/1195 on 20 December 2000.

¹⁵³ S/2000/1195, in particular § 81-89, 122-130, 141-143, 157, 180-193, 202-234, 252-253, and 271-272.

¹⁵⁴ S/2000/1195, § 2.

¹⁵⁵ S/2000/1195, § 20.

¹⁵⁶ S/2000/1195, § 272. Such recommendations to impose sanctions on the timber and logging industry were reiterated by the Panel of Experts mandated to report on eventual violations of the sanctions that was decided upon in Resolution 1343 (see S/2001/1015, § 40), but were not followed before May 2003 (Resolution 1478, 6 May 2003).

¹⁵⁷ France is among the main importers of Liberian timber. On this subject see 'France's Stance on Sanctions Viewed as Affront to Liberians', *Perspective*, 5 February 2001; and ICG, *Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability*, 24 April 2002, p. 23.

particular the lack of cohesion marring the European Union. Far from being anecdotal, the old France/United Kingdom rivalry becomes a serious concern when it touches the resolution of African conflicts, where economic interests and post-colonial considerations are often closely intermingled. Despite those shortcomings, Resolution 1343 marked a turning point in the political management of the Sierra Leonean conflict. Within eight months, the links between diamonds and conflict on the one hand and Sierra Leone and Liberia on the other had been recognized and sanctions had been accordingly taken in order to address both the causes of the conflict and the detrimental role of war-perpetuating mechanisms.

Things were indeed turning sour for Liberia, which was not only facing diplomatic action but also came under increased internal military pressure. In July 2000, a group calling itself LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy) launched a series of attacks against the Liberian government in Lofa county, on the border with Guinea.¹⁵⁸ The situation remained extremely tense during the following months, which saw the LURD insurgency, backed by Guinea, progressively gain ground against Liberian governmental forces. That period noticeably coincided with the first skirmishes in Sierra Leone that opposed the RUF to Guinea - obviously, this was not mere coincidence, confirming once more the close ties between the RUF and Charles Taylor. During winter 2001, the rebellion in Liberia became closer to a full-scale conflict and governmental troops were deployed in high numbers at the border with Guinea. In parallel, the regional situation quickly deteriorated, with Liberia accusing its neighbours of supporting the rebels and closing its borders with Sierra Leone and Guinea in March 2001.¹⁵⁹

These events impacted on the situation in Sierra Leone and more specifically on the relationship between Taylor and the RUF in many regards. First, the support that the Liberian President had until then granted to the RUF was becoming too costly for him, both from a material point of view (he was now himself facing a rebellion and thus needing all his military and financial resources to fight his own war) and a political (international pressure was rising following the issuance of the Panel of Experts' report). On 12 January 2001, Taylor publicly renounced his support for the RUF and called on the Sierra Leonean rebel movement to lay down its arms.¹⁶⁰ Even if the sincerity of this commitment can be questioned, such a declaration can be considered as having had some consequences on the morale of the RUF's rank and file, especially since it was formulated at a time when RUF fighters were encountering difficulties with the second battle front that they had opened against Guinea. Second, in addition to being less prone to support the RUF, Taylor in fact proved himself in need of the Sierra Leonean rebels' military support, requesting them to send fighters into

¹⁵⁸ For a detailed description of the LURD, among whose members there were allegedly a number of former ULIMO-K (of Mandingo origin) fighters, see S/2001/1015, § 124-131.

¹⁵⁹ The conflict was also generating thousands of refugees in neighbouring countries, in particular in Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire (S/2001/1015, § 106; and S/2001/228, § 88). With the regional dimension of the crisis becoming more and more alarming, ECOWAS tried to defuse the tension and proposed the deployment of a buffer-force at the border of Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. This proposal was, however, never implemented, one reason being the impossibility of concluding status-of-force agreements with two of the three states - namely, Liberia and Guinea (S/2001/1015, § 102).

¹⁶⁰ S/2001/228, § 27. This declaration was, however, more a show for the 'international community' than a real commitment (probably in order to avoid the sanctions that were being foreseen by the UN Security Council members), since at the same time Taylor was offering financial assistance to the RUF in exchange for RUF services to fight the LURD (S/2001/1015, § 113 and 116).

Lofa county to wage war against the LURD.¹⁶¹ This had a serious impact on the RUF's internal situation, both in diverting the rebels from the Sierra Leonean scene and in triggering reluctance among some of the RUF's members, who were wary at the idea of becoming involved in another foreign war. These developments actually led to growing tensions within the RUF, opposing those who were willing to continue fighting in what had become a regional war with those who were seriously considering entering the peace process.

Those events clearly bore an important weight on the ripening process that was then at work in Sierra Leone. But as important as these regional aspects may have been, they must be read in conjunction with the developments occurring within Sierra Leone at the same time, which were mostly deriving from the pursuit of the international strategy that had been initiated after the hostage crisis. First, UNAMSIL gained credibility, with an increased military component of up to 17,500 troops and a revised concept of operation foreseeing its progressive deployment across the whole territory, including in RUF-controlled areas and diamond-producing provinces.¹⁶² Moreover, a new disarmament, demobilization and reintegration plan had been elaborated in December 2000 by the government in cooperation with UNAMSIL, which was also tasked with a number of important responsibilities with regard to the first two aspects of the process - actually, the United Nations can be considered the main body in charge of the operation.¹⁶³ This may well have convinced the targeted combatants that the process was this time serious, managed by an impartial actor, and that it could thus potentially offer a credible alternative to life in the bush - and to war in Liberia. Second, the involvement of the United Kingdom (which had indicated in early 2001 that its assistance would be extended until September) continued to add some pressure on the RUF.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, more than UNAMSIL, the British troops appeared as one of the rebels' main concerns, and they complained on several occasions about attacks launched against RUF-controlled villages, while Charles Taylor himself called for the withdrawal of the British Task Force if it was not brought under UNAMSIL.¹⁶⁵ Finally, the training offered to the Sierra Leonean army started to produce its first results, with 3,000 soldiers completing their training in December 2000 and being progressively deployed across the territory, including in the countryside.¹⁶⁶ For the first time since 1998, Sierra Leone could claim that it had an army, and, for the first time in years, that this was becoming a professional one...

Keeping all these internal, regional and international developments in mind helps us to understand how a real perspective for peace progressively materialized in Sierra Leone. In April 2001, the Joint Committee established by the Abuja agreement finally decided on a date for the

¹⁶¹ S/2001/1015, §112-123. A first hint of this reversal of situations was provided by the RUF's attacks against Guinea in September 2000, whose aim was to weaken Conakry's regime - that is, Taylor's opponent. Later on, Taylor asked the RUF to provide him with direct military assistance in Liberia.

¹⁶² UN Security Council Resolution 1346, 30 March 2001, § 2 (for the increase in troops); and S/2001/228, § 57-68 (for the concept of operations). The first reinforcements arrived in April 2001 and, although the number of troops still remained largely inferior to the authorized ceiling, this allowed the Mission to deploy in areas that had been deserted since the previous year and to launch patrols in most of the remaining parts of the territory; see S/2001/627, § 19-20.

¹⁶³ S/2000/1199, § 33-36; and S/2001/228, § 76-79.

¹⁶⁴ In November and December 2000, the British staged a series of military exercises in the country, officially as part of the SLA training programme, but which incidentally also served to display British military capabilities (S/2000/1199, § 32).

¹⁶⁵ S/2000/1199, § 4 and 14.

¹⁶⁶ S/2000/1199, § 30; and S/2001/228, § 18. As a whole, by September 2001, the UK had completed a first programme of basic military training for around 8,500 soldiers, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website.

implementation review, which was subsequently held in Abuja on 2 May 2001, and completed by a further meeting in Freetown on 15 May 2001. Three important decisions were taken on these occasions: first, the continued fighting between the CDF and the RUF in the eastern province should come to a halt; second, the DDR process should resume according to an pre-established timetable, starting in Kambia district on 18 May 2001; and third, the CDF and RUF should disarm simultaneously.¹⁶⁷ These firm commitments and in particular the fact that a precise timetable was drawn for each region, as well as the linking of the CDF and RUF disarmament, allowed for slow but steady progress to be registered in the DDR process in the following months.¹⁶⁸ In total, between 18 May 2001 and 17 January 2002, 47,076 combatants disarmed (19,183 RUF, 27,695 CDF and 198 AFRC).¹⁶⁹ In parallel, UNAMSIL, which had also finally been reinforced up to the authorized ceiling, deployed throughout the territory, including in the diamond zones from August 2001 (Tongo fields) and - ultimately - in Kailahun (the RUF's stronghold) and Kono (the richest diamond region) in the beginning of 2002.¹⁷⁰ These developments were accompanied by the first attempts to restore state authority in the various provinces, starting with the deployment of the new Sierra Leonean army and police force and the return of paramount chiefs - however, not much more could be done with regard to the restoration of civil administration, in particular because of a lack of financial means. The path to peace was indeed a long one, but with the disarmament process over and preparations under way for holding new elections, a genuine feeling of peace gradually started to spread throughout the country. In many respects, it was still too early to claim a complete victory, as will be seen in the final section below. It can, however, be stated that Sierra Leone was then entering the phase of post-conflict reconstruction and state-building.

In conclusion, and as a reminder, it is possible to highlight the decisive factors that ultimately played a part in the resolution of the conflict, which primarily resulted from an evolution of the international strategy. It is worth noting that contrary to the previous attempts, the Abuja process did not involve the signing of any negotiated peace accord. Although the ceasefire agreement made reference to Lomé commitments, there was actually no further attempt to implement the 1999 accord in the following months. The strategy was indeed much more straightforward: the government was considered as the sole legitimate actor to exercise power, while the RUF was recognized as having the right to transform into a political movement and, provided that its military structures had been dismantled, to participate in the forthcoming elections. A series of actions were thus undertaken both to weaken the RUF and to support the government, in order to change the military balance and compel the rebels to disarm.

International Military Intervention. First, the deployment of UK troops and their commitment with regard to the training of the Sierra Leonean army clearly contributed to changing the climate

¹⁶⁷ S/2001/627, § 2-6; and Meeting of the Joint Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, 15 May 2001, §5-6. In addition, all of the roadblocks were to be removed, the government was to extend its authority throughout the country as UNAMSIL deployed, the weapons and equipment stolen in the course of the conflict from UNAMSIL and ECOMOG were to be returned by 30 May 2001, and all abductees were to be released.

¹⁶⁸ In his report dated 25 June 2001, the UN Secretary-General notes that 'nearly all of the decisions taken at the meeting held on 2 May in Abuja and on 15 May in Freetown have been implemented' (S/2001/627, § 11). The 'nearly' included in the sentence refers to the more than partial return of stolen weapons. Although this definitely constituted a matter of concern, it can, however, be considered of relatively minor importance in comparison to the completion of the other requests.

¹⁶⁹ S/2002/267, § 13.

¹⁷⁰ S/2001/857, § 18; and S/2002/267, § 8.

prevailing in Sierra Leone, boosting confidence on the government's side and creating anxiety as far as the rebels were concerned. In addition, the British military support offered to UNAMSIL helped considerably to restore the United Nations' credibility. Second, the strengthening and enhancing of the United Nations' mission also proved important, in particular in the perspective of maintaining the peace once it was achieved. As seen previously, one of Sierra Leone's problems was a security vacuum, which also meant that there was no credible force (either military or civil) that was able to protect the country once peace was restored. The 'new' UNASMIL that emerged in the course of 2001 thus appeared as a credible actor to assume that role. As a matter of fact, it could be argued that the British helped to stop the hostilities, while the reinforced UNAMSIL (backed by the British) facilitated the transformation of the ceasefire into a real and potentially durable peace. This division of labour could prove an interesting response to the recurrent problems faced by regional or international organizations entrusted with peacekeeping mandates that they do not have the means to implement. Although the strategy favoured by the United Kingdom to remain outside UNOMSIL may be a source of concern, it can also be argued that in the current situation and in particular given the problems marring UN peace operations, it is far from certain that a British deployment under the banner of the United Nations would have had an equivalent impact. As long as the great powers remain reluctant to entrust the United Nations (let alone regional organizations) with the necessary means (political, military and financial) to face unstable situations such as the one prevailing in Sierra Leone, unilateral interventions can indeed be considered as a way to accelerate the search for a solution, provided of course that they are authorized by the United Nations and that the intervening external power acts in coordination with and in support of any peacekeeping mission eventually deployed in the field.

Diplomatic Pressure and Sanctions. Direct intervention proved fundamental in the case of Sierra Leone, but international pressure exercised through sanctions also played a part in bringing the conflict to an end. However, assessing the impact of sanctions on a conflict resolution process is often a thorny exercise, and this is particularly the case with regard to Sierra Leone where sanctions were adopted in a period of active external involvement in the conflict, making it extremely difficult to differentiate among the various actions taken to encourage the cessation of hostilities. The Panel of Experts that was mandated in December 2000 to enquire about Sierra Leone depicted both the embargo on rough diamonds (which was decided in July 2000) and that on weapons (decided in 1998) as widely broken.¹⁷¹ No further Panel of Experts was mandated thereafter, but the Security Council's Resolutions that were adopted in 2001 and 2002 (which prolonged the embargo on rough diamonds) both mentioned the persistence of a 'large volume of illicit trade in diamonds', thus confirming that the sanctions were not as efficient as they should have been.¹⁷² Still, this does not mean that such

¹⁷¹ S/2000/1195, § 17.

¹⁷² Resolutions 1385 (2001) of 19 December 2001 and 1446 (2002) of 4 December 2002. Although not clearly mentioned in these Resolutions, the embargo on weapons decided in 1998 was never lifted. The end of the conflict and the official completion of a disarmament campaign make it all the more difficult to assess the effect of that embargo since 2001-2002 (earlier, it was clearly established that the embargo was not respected; see S/2000/1195, § 17). Nevertheless, some reservations expressed by the UN Secretary-General about the disarmament process could hint that the weapons' issue was not completely clarified at the end of the programme in January 2002 (see S/2002/267, § 14). Furthermore, the general situation in West Africa, about which the Security Council in March 2003 deplored the 'proliferation of small arms and light weapons' (Resolution 1467 of 18 March 2003), leaves in fact little hope with regard to the efficiency of the control in Sierra Leone, especially since small arms and light weapons were not included in the initial disarmament programme. Finally, unofficial but well-informed sources are formal about weapons still illegally entering Sierra

measures were totally useless in the conflict resolution process, but their impact has probably been more psychological than material. In particular, the adoption of sanctions served as a clear signal that the great powers were no longer indifferent to the situation in Sierra Leone, thus raising the pressure on the local actors. It can also be argued that despite their very partial effect, sanctions nevertheless rendered it more difficult for the RUF to develop illicit mining and trading activities, thus contributing to accelerating the rebels' difficulties and by the same token ripening the conflict.

The Regional Dimension. A similar argument could be developed with regard to Liberia, even if the situation there is even more difficult to assess because of the resumption of hostilities. Indeed, it has become very complicated to gauge the effect of sanctions that were decided in relation to a conflict that came to a halt a few months after the adoption of these measures, while the development of another conflict provided both some ground for a prolongation of the sanctions and an opportunity for the Liberian government to contest the validity of these measures, in particular given the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country.¹⁷³ Nevertheless, a few comments can be made on the issue. The first derives from the chronology: the sanctions against Liberia were adopted in March 2001, while the second Abuja meeting took place in May 2001. The time span between the two thus seems too short for a direct relationship to be established between the imposition of sanctions against Liberia and the end of the conflict in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, as underlined by the UN Secretary-General in his reports about Liberia and by the Panels of Experts mandated to enquire on the situation in Sierra Leone, these sanctions were neither much more efficient nor more respected than the ones on Sierra Leone.¹⁷⁴ But, as in Sierra Leone, and perhaps even more clearly in this case, the decision to target Liberia has nevertheless been an element that has contributed to accelerating the conflict resolution process. First, because officially designating Taylor as bearing some responsibility for the conflict in Sierra Leone was in itself a critical step and the beginning of a delegitimization process, which ultimately culminated in the President's departure in August 2003. Second, because even if the sanctions were in the end not respected, violating the embargoes and the other measures is a time- and energy-consuming activity, which (at least) distracted Taylor's attention from Sierra Leone (especially given the fact that he needed to concentrate on Liberia's situation at the same time). Furthermore, Liberia was from then on placed under international scrutiny, making it more difficult for Taylor to spoil the peace process. For these reasons, and although the regional dimension of the Sierra Leonean conflict was taken into account much too late, the impact of the Security Council's measures cannot be considered as null – far from it, even though sanctions must be considered as only one instrument among others to facilitate the resolution of conflicts.

The radical change in the international strategy proved instrumental in finding a solution to the conflict but the specificity of the Sierra Leonean case should be emphasized inasmuch as there was a legitimate, democratically elected government to back, while the rebel movement lacked both

Leone (see Global Witness, *The Usual Suspects*, p. 33). It thus seems quite difficult to state that the weapons' embargo has been of any efficacy in Sierra Leone, even after the conflict ended.

¹⁷³ The Liberian government has conducted a propaganda campaign to convince the population that most of the current suffering was a result of the United Nations' sanctions (see S/2002/1115, § 19-22). Such manipulation is indeed an interesting side effect of the sanctions, which deserves mention here and which highlights the need to accompany the imposition of sanctions with a clear public information campaign.

¹⁷⁴ S/2002/1115, § 43: 'The government of Liberia continues to violate the sanctions imposed under paragraphs 5 and 7 [of Resolution 1343]. These violations have been brought out clearly in two previous reports (S/2001/1015 and S/2002/470) and also in the present report'. For the (more diplomatic) view of the Secretary-General, see S/2002/1193.

legitimacy and credibility. The choice between the two was thus not so difficult to make. In contrast, neutralizing the spoiler and addressing the causes of the conflict constituted a much more difficult task, which is still far from having been successively achieved, as will be seen in the next and final section.

3. Sierra Leone's Unfinished Peace: Problems and Prospects

Although peace has now been holding in Sierra Leone for two years, the country remains fragile and security is still conditioned by a massive UN presence (close to 15,000 troops in March 2003) and the United Kingdom's assistance with regard to restructuring the army.¹⁷⁵ Sierra Leone's stability has been particularly endangered by a degrading regional situation, with Liberia again experiencing full-scale war within the last two years and Côte d'Ivoire also falling into conflict after September 2002. In addition to these serious security threats, the rebuilding of the Sierra Leonean state is a slow process, hampered by financial and logistical constraints, but also by the old Sierra Leonean problems of poor governance and corruption. For the sake of this study, a distinction can be made between the difficulties related to shortcomings of the early peace process and the challenges lying ahead for the recovering country.

The Many Shortcomings of a 'Potholed' Peace Process

The completion of the DDR process has been considered the key step marking the end of the conflict. This operation is, however, far from an overwhelming success and indeed in many respects appears an imperfect exercise. First, disarmament in itself proved partial: although a number of fighters (higher than initially foreseen) ultimately registered for the process, the ratio of arms to combatants remained noticeably low.¹⁷⁶ Most of the weapons stolen from ECOMOG and UNAMSIL were never recovered. In addition, it is now established that the RUF moved combatants and weapons to Liberia in order to avoid entering the DDR process, while disarmed former RUF members were later recruited to fight in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁷⁷ These aspects undoubtedly cast a shadow on the disarmament process, even if the RUF's military structures in Sierra Leone were finally dismantled. A second limit of the DDR process comes from the fact that the demobilization and reintegration phases have been seriously hampered by a lack of funds and economic opportunities for the former soldiers. Consequently, in March 2003 14,700 registered ex-combatants still remained to be included in the reintegration programme, while the restructuring of the new Sierra Leonean army (renamed the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces - RSLAF) was expected to generate another 3,500 discharged soldiers.¹⁷⁸ The widely acknowledged risk deriving from such a situation is that disillusioned former combatants attempt to destabilize the country, either from inside (demonstrations already took place in September 2002) or from outside (in joining other guerrillas or forces in the region).

These limits encountered in the DDR process are furthermore aggravated by a security situation that has remained fragile. Generally speaking, the ceasefire has been holding, but a few skirmishes

¹⁷⁵ S/2003/321, § 23 and Annexe.

¹⁷⁶ For data about the disarmament process, see S/2001/228, § 69; and S/2002/267, § 13 (47,076 combatants were disarmed between May 2001 and January 2002, in addition to the 20,000 who had previously been disarmed, while 27,664 weapons were collected - less than one for two).

¹⁷⁷ S/2001/1015, § 118; S/2002/267, §4; S/2002/1115, § 51; and S/2003/321, § 79.

¹⁷⁸ S/2003/321, § 23 and 30.

have been noted, which most of the time involved the CDF. The propensity of these militias to maintain local command structures and to resort to violence actually constitutes a first serious source of concern.¹⁷⁹ Another security problem derives from the weakness of the police and the army. With regard to the army's weakness, the British involvement, further completed by the establishment of a (United Kingdom-led) International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT) enabled the restructuring, training and equipping of the army. But the task was initially huge, and shortcomings remain, in particular regarding the army's lack of infrastructure, its inadequate logistics, its poor equipment and the rudimentary state of garrison locations.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, the army's ability to defend the Sierra Leonean territory remains doubtful, as illustrated by incidents taking place in January 2003, in which Liberian combatants attacked one Sierra Leonean village and forced the Sierra Leonean army to retreat and leave behind some of its equipment.¹⁸¹ In addition to rendering UNAMSIL's presence still necessary, such events do not help to restore the population's confidence in the RSLAF. As a matter of fact, the ultimate security concern relates precisely to the population's and government's lack of confidence in the army. The army's loyalty is indeed still questioned by many, especially after the 2002 elections showed that many among the armed forces had given their voice to Johnny Paul Koroma and his party.¹⁸² This of course could only trigger anxiety, especially when remembering the AFRC's *coup* and Koroma's propensity for resorting to violence. Actually, in January 2003, Koroma proved implicated in a plot involving ex-combatants and serving soldiers that was aimed at destabilizing state authority and disturbing the work of the Special Court. The plot was eventually uncovered and Koroma fled to Liberia, where he was reportedly killed in June 2003.¹⁸³ Koroma's death notwithstanding, this episode highlights the existence of very concrete internal threats to Sierra Leone's security. In that regard, the fact that the rebuilding of the police has also been a process marred with enormous difficulties further adds to the perceived fragility of the security sector.¹⁸⁴ In such circumstances, it is no exaggeration to state that Sierra Leone's stability has since the 'end of the conflict' been guaranteed by UNAMSIL's deployment (and UK elements still present), a fact that speaks for itself about the unfinished character of the conflict resolution process.

In addition to these shortcomings, the Sierra Leonean peace process faces serious challenges, including security threats from outside the country.

¹⁷⁹ On the violence (against disarmed RUF cadres in the Kono diamond region in September and December 2001, in Freetown in July 2002, or after the arrest of Hinga Norman in March 2003), see S/2003/663, §3; S/2003/321, § 4; S/2002/987, §5; S/2002/679, §11; S/2002/267, §7; and S/2001/1195, §9. On the local structures' problem, see S/2003/321, §8; and S/2003/663, §4.

¹⁸⁰ S/2003/663, § 15-17.

¹⁸¹ S/2003/321, § 6-7.

¹⁸² ICG, *Sierra Leone after Elections: Politics as Usual?*, 12 July 2002, p. 9.

¹⁸³ S/2003/321, § 2-3; and S/2003/663, §2. See also IRIN-Sierra Leone, 'Court investigates reports that Koroma may be dead', 16 June 2003.

¹⁸⁴ The police force was close to inexistent in 2000, absent from most part of the territory, ill-equipped and understaffed. Efforts were undertaken by the Commonwealth and UNAMSIL to rebuild an efficient police force and to assist in its deployment throughout the territory, but progress has been very slow, especially given the necessity to recruit and train new police officers. In July 2003, the police force was still understaffed (6,800 personnel compared to a pre-war level of 9,500) and lacking infrastructure, as well as transport and communication equipment (see S/2003/663, § 10-14).

The Challenges Ahead

The regional instability deriving from Liberia's renewed conflict undoubtedly poses a serious threat to Sierra Leone, in two respects. The first derives from the risk of a classical 'spill over' of the conflict to neighbouring states, including Sierra Leone, through an escalation process fed by fighters' incursions across the border, raids against villages and troop concentration at the border. The second is more specific of the Liberian-Sierra Leonean relationship and relates to the peculiar links existing between fighters of the two countries. In particular, the fact that some RUF members have joined Charles Taylor's loyalist forces feeds the risk that these former rebels will bring war back to Sierra Leone.¹⁸⁵ Specifically, the Liberian government's growing difficulties could compel its Sierra Leonean allies to flee back to their country of origin, from where they could continue to wage war against the LURD and the MODEL (the most recent rebel movement to have appeared in Liberia). They could also attempt to destabilize Sierra Leone for fear of being indicted and arrested by the Special Court. In any case, the summer 2003 developments in Liberia and the incapacity of the great powers (and in particular of the United States) to react despite urgent and repeated calls for the deployment of a multinational force are definitely bad news for Sierra Leone. In this context, UNAMSIL's reduction could also constitute another challenge for the peace process,¹⁸⁶ although it seems that the United Nations is extremely cautious about leaving Sierra Leone too quickly, and the final withdrawal is not foreseen before December 2004.¹⁸⁷ In addition, benchmarks have been set up, according to which the decision to reduce the UNAMSIL force is taken and which include the evolution of the security situation in Sierra Leone, as well as in Liberia.¹⁸⁸ It can thus be hoped that UNAMSIL will continue to provide security for Sierra Leone as long as the situation remains tense.

Although remaining the main concern, the security issue is not the only challenge facing Sierra Leone. The necessity to rebuild the collapsed state and to restore government authority is also an overriding task, whose failure could trigger renewed instability. Much remains to be done in this field in addition to the necessity to rebuild the army and the police. In particular, administrative structures must be restored at the local level in order to deliver basic state services to the population. Although pre-eminent chiefs have now returned and government officials have been deployed, very few concrete results have yet been obtained in the fields of law and order, justice, education and health.¹⁸⁹ Corruption also remains a problem that needs to be efficiently tackled in order to avoid growing frustration. Moreover, there is an urgent need for economic revival, in particular in order to create opportunities both to allow former combatants to reintegrate softly into civil society and to answer the needs of a whole generation of young people currently facing a grim future.

Answering these needs relates to, and will depend in great part on, the government's capacity to exert control over diamond mining. Here lies another challenge facing the authorities, important both in order to defuse the tensions currently rising in the diamond regions and to collect much needed fiscal revenue to be used for development policies. In July 2003 attempts to deliver licences to regulate diamond exploitation and to reduce illegal activities significantly had still not been allowed,

¹⁸⁵ On the presence of former RUF members in Liberia, see S/2002/1115, § 51-54.

¹⁸⁶ In July 2003, the mission's personnel, which reached 17,398 at its peak in September 2002, had already been reduced to 13,074; see S/2003/663, Annexe.

¹⁸⁷ S/2003/663, § 37-40 and 68; and UN Security Council Resolution 1492, 18 July 2003, § 1.

¹⁸⁸ S/2002/987, § 13: these two aspects are even deemed 'paramount concerns' by the UN Secretary-General.

¹⁸⁹ S/2003/663, § 21-23, 42 and 59.

nor had the government proved able to police the diamond-mining areas effectively.¹⁹⁰ The challenge thus remains enormous, and its importance with regard to the causes and continuation of the conflict has been amply documented. But the diamond issue is complex, with ramifications reaching far beyond Sierra Leone. As extensively underlined by the different Panels of Experts on Sierra Leone and Liberia, diamonds are indeed at the heart of large-scale trafficking, and it is difficult to separate ‘conflict diamonds’ from other illegally mined stones sold on parallel markets (to avoid taxation for instance).¹⁹¹ Accordingly, and although the sanctions imposed on Sierra Leone and Liberia have probably made it more difficult for illegal miners and traders to sell their stones, they have also contributed to increasing the number of diamonds sold on the illegal market or trafficked into other countries.¹⁹² Similarly, the introduction of the ‘certificate-of-origin’ scheme in Sierra Leone has helped the government to increase its control on diamond sales and thus its fiscal revenue, but it did not completely succeed in eradicating the continuous smuggling of diamonds.¹⁹³ In fact, the diamond business is such that only implementation of a worldwide ‘certificate-of-origin’ system that is respected by importers as well as countries of origin can have a chance at seriously reducing trafficking in diamonds - including ‘conflict diamonds’. Such a system was launched in November 2002 under the name of the ‘Kimberley process’, but it remains to be seen whether all of the actors will sincerely respect their commitments.¹⁹⁴

Finally, justice makes up the last challenge for the sustainability of the peace process. Sierra Leone now belongs to the restricted club of countries for which a war crimes’ court has been established. The Special Court for Sierra Leone, which is a joint international/national institution, was established in January 2002 and began its operations in July 2002.¹⁹⁵ In March 2003 the first indictments were issued, targeting RUF leaders but also AFRC and CDF members, including Hinga Norman. Moreover, in June 2003, the indictment of Charles Taylor was also revealed. These first indictments did not occur without generating tension and restlessness in Sierra Leone, and many reports were issued warning that supporters of the indicted could attempt to destabilize Sierra Leone in order to disrupt the work of the Court.¹⁹⁶ Allowing the court to fulfil its mission of judging those bearing the ‘greatest responsibility’ for the crimes committed during the war, while ensuring that this does not offer more room for regional destabilization, will thus be one of the challenges facing the Sierra Leonean government, but also the international actors that have been involved in the establishment and functioning of the court.

This brief overview of the challenges currently facing Sierra Leone highlights that the country, although at peace for the time being, is still not completely out of the conflict. Indeed, it is striking to note that the factors identified in the first part of the study as the causes of the conflict (state failure,

¹⁹⁰ S/2003/663, § 5 and 24-27.

¹⁹¹ S/2000/1195, § 110; and S/2001/1015, § 384.

¹⁹² S/2000/1195, § 99-109; and S/2001/1015, § 359-373.

¹⁹³ According to the Panel of Experts dispatched to Liberia, although the system was considered to work reasonably well, smuggling still accounted for 50 per cent of the trade in Sierra Leone in late 2002 (S/2002/1115, § 146).

¹⁹⁴ The Kimberley process involves 35 governments, the European Union, the diamond industry and representatives of civil society. The system is basically an export and import control regime, according to which certificates are issued in order to guarantee the origin of the diamonds - of course, only the certified stones can be sold and thus imported.

¹⁹⁵ *Agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone on the Establishment of a Special Court for Sierra Leone*, 16 January 2002.

¹⁹⁶ S/2003/663, §3; see also Global Witness, *The Usual Suspects*, pp. 31-32.

diamonds and the regional dimension) have not yet been fully removed. One should therefore be careful when claiming the end of the conflict. Nonetheless, the Sierra Leonean case offers some room for a few final general comments on the resolution of intractable conflicts in Africa.

Conclusion

Having been characterized both by failure and success, the resolution of the Sierra Leonean conflict is an instructive case to study. Since the role of international actors has furthermore proved instrumental in both ways, Sierra Leone definitely offers room for general comments on the negative and positive impacts of international involvement in peace processes. Although it could appear to be stating the obvious, it first seems necessary to highlight that the resolution of a conflict requires a thorough analysis of the nature of the war. Recent examples have indeed shown how detrimental a misinterpretation of the real causes of the conflict and of the war aims of the parties can be: in Bosnia, for instance, it is widely acknowledged that misconceptions of the conflict, which was initially seen as the product of ‘ancient hatred’, could only contribute to letting the war continue. In Sierra Leone, the main mistake has been to grant credit to the RUF, which was considered as defending a cause and thus was accepted as a suitable negotiating partner and, even more detrimental, as a credible governmental party. Moreover, the real causes of the conflict (state failure, the regional dimension and diamond issues) were initially not addressed. In that regard, it is worth stressing that a final solution to the conflict could only be found when actions were taken after 2000 in order to strengthen the government, exert pressure on Charles Taylor and to try to prevent illegal diamond exploitation from fuelling the conflict, while at the same time ostracizing the RUF.

A further observation relates to the strategy followed in order to settle a conflict. Third-party actors have the choice of two options: helping peace agreement negotiations; or facilitating one side’s victory. A somewhat disturbing conclusion that can be drawn from the Sierra Leonean case is that prompting a negotiated settlement that equally rewards the warring parties is not necessarily the best way to restore peace. Indeed, the resolution of the Sierra Leonean conflict did not derive from the conclusion of a peace agreement between two equally legitimate actors (as experienced in vain between 1996 and 2000), but from a totally different approach, based on the deliberate weakening of one of the actors that was no longer considered credible or legitimate. While legitimacy is a highly subjective notion, three criteria could be used to assess whether a belligerent party can be deemed a legitimate partner: the fact that it actually represents a significant part of the population (and correlatively, the extent of its popular support); the existence of a substantive political agenda (bearing in mind that power for power does not make for a political agenda); and the fact that it refrains from resorting to extreme violence, in particular against civilian populations. A party that does not fulfil the first two conditions and proves particularly brutal should be considered as illegitimate and dealt with accordingly. The involvement of this type of actor indeed adds to the intractability of conflict since such a belligerent is prone to be more interested in war (or disorder) than in peace, if only because of the economic benefits that it draws from the conflict. The priority in such a setting is to neutralize these spoilers, either by defeating them or by ensuring that they do not have the means to jeopardize the process. The conflict in Sierra Leone ultimately ceased when the RUF was compelled to disarm, not when the rebels were offered power and control over diamond resources. International intervention is essential, since one characteristic of intractable conflicts is that the local parties have proved unable to find a military or political solution by themselves. In this respect, the Sierra Leonean case shows

that international actors cannot always avoid taking sides in order to weaken the party that could spoil the peace process.

In cases where spoilers can be easily identified, there should thus be no negotiated settlement ending in reward for the troublemaker, but it is all too clear that in many other cases it will prove difficult to find a 'legitimate' party to support. In such a setting, there might be no other way than seeking the conclusion of an all-inclusive peace agreement. In order to neutralize the spoiling propensity of all of the actors involved as much as possible, the peace accord could then include firm commitments to peace and, most importantly, strong enforcement mechanisms that allow a quick response to breaches. Furthermore, efforts should be made to ensure that no blanket amnesty is enshrined in the text, if only to leave the question of justice open. This still requires a strong involvement - including of a military nature - on the part of international actors, as they are the only ones potentially able to monitor and enforce a threatened peace.

The last remark relates precisely to third parties' modus operandi and to the tools to which they may resort in order to boost the conflict resolution process. Third-party actors have first to decide between intervening directly (often through military means) or indirectly through sanctions and other actions (such as economic conditionality or resorting to international justice) in order to modify the military and political balance between the warring parties and to accelerate the 'ripening process'. As was eventually the case in Sierra Leone, both options can be successfully combined. However, specific conditions have to be fulfilled before any Western power decides to engage militarily, which is why the 'indirect option' is opted for most often. Current practices in this regard can, however, be improved, as illustrated by the failures encountered in Sierra Leone. First comes the need for better coordination of foreign policies, especially from actors that are potentially the most powerful, namely Western countries. Although the main obstacle in Sierra Leone actually resulted from a general lack of involvement, divergences among European countries delayed the adoption of necessary measures in at least one instance: called for by the United Kingdom, the decision to trigger sanctions against Liberia was postponed (and sanctions were then purposely restricted) because of France's reluctance. It is in fact no secret that French and British foreign policies are more often at odds than in harmony, especially with regard to Africa, but this is precisely an area where change could take place. The issue of sanctions is precisely the second area that offers room for improvement. First, while sanctions seem to be more efficient when they target individuals (such as political leaders or members of the armed forces), they could prove particularly useful in exerting pressure on external supporters of the warring parties, for whom the cost of impeding peace could be painfully increased, while having no vital interest in prolonging the war (contrary to some of the local actors, which may have everything to lose from peace). Conditioning development aid is also a potentially powerful tool that international donors are often reluctant to use, but that may enable aid recipients who sponsor armed groups in neighbouring countries to be pressurized. Second, arms' embargoes might be less easy to violate if actions were taken against well-known exporting or transit countries. The Panel of Experts mandated to enquire about Sierra Leone identified the United Arab Emirates and Eastern European states (Ukraine, Moldova, and Kazakhstan) as seriously involved in weapon trafficking. Accordingly, the experts recommended targeting exporting countries' authorities in order to increase their capacity - but also their will - to enforce international embargoes seriously.¹⁹⁷ Finally, the issue of criminal justice also deserves consideration, especially as the establishment of the International Criminal Court might

¹⁹⁷ S/2000/1195, § 236-237 and 262.

have repercussions on future peace processes. It remains to be seen whether the 'indictment threat' will further complicate conflict resolution or whether it will actually speed up the process by excluding the main perpetrators of atrocities from any peace settlement.

Whatever the case, an important conclusion to be drawn from this study is that third parties and international actors have the potential to impact positively on the resolution of a seemingly intractable conflict, provided that they are genuinely committed and their involvement is based on a thorough analysis of the situation. Unfortunately, the developments of summer 2003 in Liberia illustrate that these conditions are seldom met.

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Annexe I. A Note about the Sierra Leonean Diamond History

The first diamond in Sierra Leone was discovered in 1930 in the Kono district in eastern Sierra Leone, and diamond production began in 1935. Other stones were later discovered in the Tongo fields, south of the Kono district but also in the eastern part of the country. These two regions are still today the main centres of diamond production in Sierra Leone, and have remained under RUF control for most of the conflict. Diamond production was initially dominated by one company, SLST (Sierra Leone Selection Trust), a subsidiary of De Beers-controlled Consolidated African Selection Trust (CAST) (De Beers is the world's biggest actor in diamond mining and trading).

Things changed radically in the 1950s with the 'great diamond rush', which saw tens of thousands of (most often illicit) diggers engage in mining. This was accompanied by a noticeable development of violence and lawlessness, which ultimately compelled SLST to hire a private security firm to protect its interests. Private security is thus an old phenomenon in Sierra Leone, entering the scene well before the collapse of the state and the eruption of the conflict. In 1955, in an attempt to stabilize that chaotic situation, SLST's monopoly was brought to an end, with the company being granted concessions in the Yengema and Tongo fields while mining and dealing licences were granted to other actors in the rest of the mining regions (Alluvial Mining Scheme). Although the mining licences could only be awarded to Sierra Leoneans, dealing licences could be awarded to foreigners and were actually granted to a number of Lebanese dealers.

With the situation thus stabilized, independence did not bring much change, but the system collapsed upon Siaka Stevens' arrival. After 1968, illicit mining resumed and the security situation deteriorated again. Already discouraged by such an unfavourable environment, and further weakened by the theft of a stock of diamonds in November 1969, SLST was finally nationalized by Stevens in 1971 (the Prime Minister then announced the formation of a new state-owned company, which would take over 51 per cent of SLST's shares). Stevens and one of his associates, Jamil Said Mohamed, took effective control of the new company's management and continued to encourage illicit mining and robbery. In 1984, SLST sold its share to Jamil and withdrew from Sierra Leone. By then, official diamond exports had dropped from over two million carats in 1970 to 595,000 in 1980 and to only 48,000 carats in 1988.¹⁹⁸ In the meantime, Sierra Leonean diamond fields had become a favoured scene for trafficking and the development of international criminal networks (including Lebanese and Israeli connections). The state had disappeared from these regions, which were thus out of reach for the army and the police well before the RUF's arrival.

¹⁹⁸ Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter*, p. 44.

Annexe II. Tables

Table 1. Creating the Momentum for Peace

	Abidjan	Conakry	Lomé
Contextual evolutions leading to negotiations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Outcome and Kamajors military successes over the RUF • Liberia confronted to a major crisis • New government elected in 1996 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Junta diplomatic isolation and condemnation • Junta weakened by ECOWAS and UN sanctions (especially those on petroleum products) • Nigerian military built-up in Sierra Leone • Kabbah and his government excluded from the negotiations • Taylor elected as Liberian president 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nigeria planning to withdraw from ECOMOG • RUF/AFRC offensive on Freetown in January 1999.
Peace-makers: who? and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Côte d'Ivoire: wants to play a political role in the region • International Alert: an international non-governmental organisation eager to play a role - and to gather credit from it - in a conflict resolution process. • Other actors, assuming a secondary role: OAU, UN and Commonwealth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECOWAS Committee of 4 on Sierra Leone: Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Nigeria)(then 5 with Liberia after August summit) - as a regional organisation, takes the lead in the search for a solution. Mandated by OAU. • Nigeria already present and involved in Sierra Leone • OAU : condemnation of the Junta coup (first time in African history); weak role for the negotiations (in fact, has 'mandated' ECOWAS), represented at the signature of the agreement • UN: very slow to react. Endorses ECOWAS sanctions in October 1997, represented at the signature of the agreement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECOWAS Committee of 6 (C5 plus Togo): Nigeria eager to find a solution in order to withdraw ; Togolese president, chairman of ECOWAS, eager to garner credit for peace • United States and United Kingdom : both of them eager to reach an agreement in order to appear as doing something for SL, which had by then reached the Western medias. Especially true in the context of their massive engagement in Kosovo. • US to dispatch a Special envoy, Jesse Jackson • UN: weak role, but present (UNOMSIL deployed and would remain alone after

			<p>ECOMOG withdrawal)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taylor: for the first time, appears as a key player in the negotiations, obtaining some concessions from the RUF.
<p>Peace-makers' incentives (including pressures and sanctions) and strategies to encourage/compel the parties to negotiate and to sign</p>	<p>Against the RUF:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Alert plays a role in convincing the RUF to participate but at the same time legitimises the movement. • Kabbah's government's attempt to trigger UN sanctions against the RUF: failure. 	<p>Against the RUF:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECOWAS three-track approach (diplomacy, sanctions, force). • ECOWAS sanctions adopted as early as August 1997 • ECOWAS/Nigeria military built-up • UN sanctions adopted in October 	<p>Against the RUF:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some sanctions still in force (including travel ban, which was temporarily lifted for the sake of negotiations, see S/1999/237, § 17) • Sankoh condemned to death and in detention (his release is thus a potential incentive). • Taylor potentially more interested in peace (at that time) <p>Against the government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nigeria's planned withdrawal from ECOMOG • US and UK pressures

	Abidjan	Conakry	Lomé
Cease-fire provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total cessation of hostilities • Departure of E.O. • DDR process for the RUF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cessation of hostilities with immediate effect (NB: which hostilities?) • DDR for all combatants in a one month time-frame 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of the armed conflict between Government and RUF (no mention of AFRC). • Withdrawal of mercenaries • DDR for all combatants (CDF, SLA and paramilitary groups included)
Monitoring mechanism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission for the Consolidation of Peace (made of RUF and Government members) • Deployment of a 'Neutral Monitoring Group from the International Community' • Mention of a 'Joint monitoring group' (RUF + Government) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECOMOG and UN to supervise the cessation of hostilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cease-Fire monitoring committees at local level (chaired by UNOMSIL and including Government, RUF, CDF and ECOMOG - no mention of AFRC) • Joint Monitoring Commission at national level (same members) • Joint implementation committee (CCP + ECOWAS Committee of seven + moral guarantors)
Enforcement mechanism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not clear whether the term 'supervise' means that ECOMOG and UN monitors are actually in charge of guaranteeing the cease-fire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint monitoring commission tasked with taking appropriate action on reports of violations of cease-fire. • CMRRD (Commission on natural resources) allowed to take all necessary measures against unauthorized exploitation (does not say how)
Peace-keeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None. Mention is made of a 'Neutral monitoring group' from the international community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECOMOG • UN observers foreseen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of a 'neutral peace-keeping force' (UNOMSIL and ECOMOG) • Review of ECOMOG mandate
Measures targeting war-perpetuating mechanisms - sanctions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nothing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECOWAS and UN embargos; • enforcement mentioned in the agreement (article 3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of the CMRRD (Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development). Chaired by F. Sankoh.

Political provisions, power-sharing arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RUF participation into CCP • RUF transformation into a political party • Reform of the electoral system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restoration of Kabbah's government • Modification of the government towards an all-inclusive cabinet (power-sharing) • Sankoh's release and return to Freetown (art. 5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformation of the RUF into a political party. • Ministerial positions for the RUF in a government of national unity (including senior positions) • RUF participation into CCP • CMRRD to be chaired by Sankoh.
Measures addressing the actual causes of conflict (state failure ; diamonds issue; regional dimension)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A whole set of measures addressing State failure (independence of judiciary, improvement of police and rule of law, indications on a new socio-economic policy of Sierra Leone). • Reduction of the army 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CMRRD supposed to control the production of natural resources and to establish a special treasury account in order to spend the revenues of such activities on the country's development • Restructuring and training of the army foreseen (with possible recruitment of former RUF, CDF and SLA combatants) • Special attention devoted to education and health
Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amnesty for RUF members • Establishment of a National Commission on Human Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sankoh's release • Amnesty for all those involved in the events of 25 May 1997 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blanket amnesty (with UN reservations) to all combatants • Creation of a Human Rights Commission • Creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

	Post-Abidjan	Post-Conakry	Post-Lomé
Peace-keeping: deployment, mandate, efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UN peace-keeping operation foreseen but never agreed upon (refusal of Sankoh to meet with UN officials, deterioration of security situation, UN security never gave approval). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECOMOG official deployment in February 1998 UNOMSIL deployed in July 1998 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECOMOG (new mandate adopted on 25 August 1999). Phased withdrawal starting in December 1999. UNOMSIL: until 22 October 1999, then replaced by UNAMSIL UNAMSIL : mandate approved on 22 October 1999 (UNSC resolution 1270), deploys as of 29 November; replaces ECOMOG in April - May 2000
Peace process spoilers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kamajors (not included in the agreement, thus not targeted by DDR process) SLA (growing dissatisfaction towards the government and resentment towards the importance granted to CDF) RUF: December 1996 : Sankoh not ready to respect the agreement (crisis within the RUF opposing the leader to the RUF representatives to CCP; the former wins). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RUF/AFRC (3 conditions set to accept the peace plan) Kamajors/CDF Liberia appears more and more as a spoiler (Taylor now president of Liberia, member of ECOWAS Committee of five but also ‘official’ sponsor of junta). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liberia : already in May 1999, identified as a spoiler by UN SG RUF: Sankoh does not return to Freetown before 3 October 1999; other elements of the RUF openly contest the agreement (Sam Bockarie). AFRC: Did not sign the agreement; are not mentioned in the text (except for amnesty). Koroma remains a problem until October 1999, then (apparently) changes sides
Sanctions and/or measures targeting spoilers and war-perpetuating mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECOWAS and UN sanctions still in force (in particular those targeting Junta members) until March 1998. UNSC resolution 1156, 16 March 1998 and UNSC 1171, 5 June 1998: After Kabbah’s return, only travel ban on members of the former Junta and ban on arms sales to actors other than 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNSC resolution 1171 (travel ban + arms embargo) still in force. No measures related to economic resources, but in March 2000 the issue is raised by UN SG, who suggests that the ‘international community’ could consider measures in relation to illegal diamond sales. ECOWAS moratorium still

		<p>the government are maintained</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31 October 1998: ECOWAS Moratorium on importation, exportations and manufacture of light weapons in West Africa • Proposal of deployment of ECOMOG troops + UNOMSIL at the border with Liberia in order to monitor the absence of arms influx and assistance from Liberia (never implemented). 	in force
Use of Enforcement mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No enforcement mechanism foreseen in the agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECOMOG military action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability of the Joint monitoring commission to react to cease-fire violations. • UNAMSIL unable to react • ECOMOG is the only strong actor, but its phased withdrawal undermines its action
Intervention of external actor, not foreseen by the agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great Britain indirectly involved (Sandline affair : arms sales and military support to the Government and Kamajors in 1997-1998 despite the embargo) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great Britain: training and equipment of new SL army