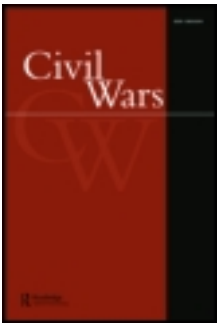

Civil Wars
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fciv20

Cut short for taking short cuts: The Lomé peace agreement on Sierra Leone

Abiodun Alao [a] & Comfort Ero [b]

[a] African Security Unit, Centre for Defence Studies , King's College , London

[b] Conflict, Security and Development Group at the Centre for Defence Studies , King's College , London

Published online: 20 Sep 2007.

To cite this article: Abiodun Alao & Comfort Ero (2001) Cut short for taking short cuts: The Lomé peace agreement on Sierra Leone, Civil Wars, 4:3, 117-134, DOI: 10.1080/13698240108402481

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13698240108402481

Cut Short for Taking Short Cuts: The Lomé Peace Agreement on Sierra Leone

ABIODUN ALAO and COMFORT ERO

The July 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement, the third in the series of peace agreements signed to end Sierra Leone's then eight-year war, collapsed in May 2000, with the arrest and detention of UN peacekeepers by the members of the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The collapse of the agreement raised fundamental questions about the future of peace in Sierra Leone, and forced many observers to wonder whether there are peculiarities inherent in the country that frustrate peace agreements, or that the agreements themselves are defective, and should not be expected to work. There is also the additional factor of an inability of parties and mediators to the conflict to implement peace agreements either because of a lack of political will or limited resources to start the process. This article takes a critical look at the Lomé Peace Agreement and argues that its failure was due more to the desire of negotiators and a fundamentally weak government to appease the rebel faction than address the key issues underlining the conflict. It argues that the peace agreement has once again uncovered the fragility of peace processes and the role of the international community in assisting that process. Finally, it considers the wider implications of Sierra Leone's failed peace process for international efforts in peacekeeping, conflict resolution and conflict management.

Between April and June 2000 Sierra Leone witnessed two months of renewed tension and hostility between government forces and the rebel movement, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) despite signing what many thought was a sustainable peace agreement at Lomé, Togo on 7 July 1999. British forces intervened initially to evacuate Commonwealth nationals, including their own before their mandate extended to bolstering the fortunes of a weak UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) that had consistently come under fire since its deployment in December 1999. In fact, the hostage taking of 500 UN peacekeepers by the RUF in late April 2000 triggered the tensions that finally led to the end of a fragile peace process and consequently the Lomé agreement.

Civil Wars, Vol.4, No.3 (Autumn 2001), pp.117–134
PUBLISHED BY FRANK CASS, LONDON

The benefit of hindsight allows analysts to dissect and deconstruct the many flaws contained within numerous agreements signed to end conflicts. Away from the intense atmosphere of compromise and negotiation, we are able to call into question various aspects, possible imbalances and contradictions that undermine peace settlements. Our position as onlookers or observers frees us from the burdens of trying to mediate in the harshest conditions. However, the history of two failed peace processes and ceasefire agreements in Sierra Leone provided significant warning light to negotiators that RUF rebels were not faithful keepers of the peace or that there was too much at stake to assume a peace settlement.

This article focuses on the Lomé peace agreement arguing that its failure lies in the inadequate role played by external 'moral guarantors' to the agreement. We argue that the willingness of mediators to compromise the position of Sierra Leone by taking short cuts to accommodate the RUF contributed significantly to the unravelling of the peace agreement.

This, we argue once again demonstrates the limits and dangers of outside attempts to mount, but not assist in sustaining peace processes. Moreover, it eloquently demonstrated that the Sierra Leone government under President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah was unable to mount a credible challenge against the RUF. The article begins by setting out the twists and turns that finally led to the collapse of the Lomé peace agreement, asking if conditions were ripe to assume RUF readiness for peaceful negotiations?

THE CONFLICT

The civil war in Sierra Leone has now become an issue about which there have been several articles and books.[1] This therefore alleviates the burden on this article to go into any long treatise on the causes and course of a conflict that has resulted in the death of up to 50,000 people and has brought a country with considerable potential to its knees. However, a capsule summary of the war is still required to guide the discussion on any of its aspects. The conflict began on 23 March 1991, when a rebel movement, the RUF, under Foday Sankoh, took up arms against the All People's Congress (APC) government of President Joseph Momoh.[2] It is difficult to understand the demands of the RUF as the movement has come up with a string of positions over the years, virtually all of which are at variance with the brutal methods it employed in their pursuance. It originally claimed its *raison d'état* as ending the system of one-party rule under the APC party.[3]

Almost immediately after its commencement, the war displayed features that were to be its characteristics and to imprint it on global attention. Four of these are worthy of mention.

First, is the blind terror and brutality inflicted on ordinary citizens, which is unprecedented in the country's history, and only comparable to the Liberian conflict on the barometer of sub-regional atrocities.[4]

Second, is the extent and nature of regional involvement, which saw some of the countries openly support peace while frustrating it behind the scene through their support for the rebel faction.

Third, is the massive and illegal exploitation of the country's abundant natural resources, especially diamonds, to prosecute the war

The final characteristic is the plethora of actors that have fought in the war. According to Comfort Ero, in its ten years of existence so far, at least ten 'armed forces and insidious groups' have taken part in the Sierra Leone conflict. These include unemployed youths, child soldiers, mercenaries, Lebanese traders, diamond miners, various Civil Defence Forces (CDF), the RUF, dissidents and loyal members of the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) Force and the Economic Community of West Africa States' (ECOWAS) Monitoring and ECOMOG.[5]

The overthrown of the APC administration, not by the RUF, but army officers disgruntled by the lack of support from the government over its year-long battle to end the RUF insurgency did not see an end to the civil war. Rather, the war continued under the administrations of a five-member military junta led by Captain Valentine Strasser – the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) (April 1992–January 1996), Maaida Bio who succeeded Strasser in an internal palace coup (January–March 1996) and the democratically elected government of President Tejan Kabbah.[6]

A controversial respite was reached on 25 May 1997, when a military coup led by another group of dissident soldiers overthrew the Kabbah administration and made Major Johnny Paul Koroma head of their military junta, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The AFRC invited the RUF into its administration by making Sankoh the Vice President. The war, however, resumed after a coalition of regional forces and CDFs fought to reinstate Kabbah on 10 March 1998.[7]

However, as discussed below, failure by the government to quickly work to reconcile the country and tackle grievances, particularly within the army led to further fighting between December 1998 and April 1999.

FAILED PEACE AGREEMENTS

Between 1992 and 1998, two agreements had been signed to end the civil war.

The first was the Abidjan Peace Agreement, signed between the government of President Kabbah and the RUF on 30 November 1996. The

agreement granted a general amnesty in return for the rebel force ending its insurgency. It also decided on an immediate disarmament and demobilisation exercise, and a promise to respect human rights and a programme of national reconciliation. The agreement was terminated following the May 1997 coup.

The Conakry Agreement soon followed on 23 October 1997 when ECOWAS and Major Johnny Paul Koroma agreed to the return of the democratically elected government of President Kabbah within six months. This agreement was terminated after the regional peacekeeping force, ECOMOG, forced the AFRC junta out before the due date stipulated by the agreement.[8]

On both occasions, neither peace agreements were implemented. It is hard to claim one reason for lack of implementation, rather what seemed apparent was the flawed assumption that the RUF was capable of negotiating peace and that the regime of President Kabbah was able to build peace, move to reconcile differences among the people of Sierra Leone or address critical grievances within the army. In fact, this latter point remains the one factor behind continued fighting after Kabbah was reinstated.

At least five factors accounted for the increase in rebel activities after the return of President Kabbah and finally the resumption of full-scale war in December 1998.

First was the continued weakness of the central government and crucially its limited control of territory outside the capital, Freetown, which made implementing peace agreements difficult. Although there was an ECOMOG show of force in the removal of the RUF/AFRC military junta, this strength did not continue after Kabbah's return to power, the assumption being that the RUF were no longer an effective fighting force.

Second, the politics of retribution, witnessed by Kabbah's decision to execute those condemned for the coup, though with considerable domestic support, was to backlash on his government, plus the Sierra Leone population. In an apparent reaction to the government's decision to execute the coup plotters, the AFRC/RUF coalition launched heavy attacks on ordinary citizens of the country; without an adequate backup from ECOMOG, the government became vulnerable in January 1999.

Third, and directly related was Kabbah's inability to address the grievances outlined by dissident soldiers of the AFRC. Many who had taken part in the May 1997 did so out of protest for the way the army had been mismanaged and under-resourced under the APC regime. Moreover, there was the increasing alliance between the Kamajor civil defence force and the Kabbah government. The Kamajors were led by their patron, Sam Hinga Norman, also Deputy Minster of Defence in Kabbah's administration. This

close association increased perception among dissident army officials that the Kamajors and other civil defence forces would replace the national army.

Fourth was the extent of support from neighbouring Liberia to the RUF/AFRC force. Despite the lack of concrete evidence, it is widely believed that President Charles Taylor of Liberia used his country as a conduit for military supply and logistical support for the RUF while exploiting the diamonds in the eastern districts of Sierra Leone.

Fifth, was the rebel access to diamonds which provided revenue to pursue the war; while the final reason was the determination of the RUF leadership to continue with its destruction of life and property, regardless of international opinion. In place to protect the government was a regional force, ECOMOG, which was heavily reliant on Nigerian forces.

THE ROAD TO LOMÉ

Domestic and external pressures soon began to mount on the Kabbah government to drop its strong stance against the rebels and to negotiate a new peace agreement. Internally, pressure was rooted to the practical reality that the rebel force controlled the main diamond mines, the source of main foreign exchange for the country. Thus, many people even within Sierra Leone believed that some form of agreement had to be reached, especially as the rebel force had become militarily strong enough to mount a sustained response even against regional firepower.

The external pressure on the Kabbah government to sign another agreement with the RUF came from three main sources.

First from Britain, who, after the controversial Sandline Affair which saw the British Labour government accused of contravening a UN arms embargo by allowing a private military company to supply arms to the Sierra Leone government and ECOMOG forces, embarked on a damage limitation exercise that would win it a form of respectability. It was the thinking in Whitehall that if a new agreement were signed with the backing of the countries in the region and the international community, it would be easier to get the rebel force committed to ending the conflict. Britain also thought that assistance to the country could be better handled if a sort of understanding existed between the rebel forces and the Kabbah government.

The second source of pressure came from Nigeria, the country that had borne the brunt of regional peacekeeping activities in Sierra Leone. With a new democratic government, pressure was mounting on the president, Olusegun Obasanjo, for accountability in the way the country's military force engaged in external activities.

Finally, there was the encouragement that came from the United States via Reverend Jesse Jackson, Special Envoy of the President (Bill Clinton) for Democracy and Human Rights in Africa, who assisted in pushing the agreement through. Indeed, it is widely believed that American officials drafted the agreement and pressurised a 'rather weak president' into signing the document.[9] These various factors merged together to drive the government to Lomé, Togo, for the 7 July 1999 agreement.

It is the sense that Lomé represented nothing short of a compromise that made the RUF/AFRC and not ordinary people the benefactors of the peace. The RUF/AFRC did not need to negotiate, they had made exceptional gains throughout their campaign and still held their prized possession – the diamonds district of Kono in the east. Rebel forces could have continued their fight, punishing ECOMOG and the CDFs even more. President Kabbah had lost the upper hand and government forces no longer had the capacity to sustain RUF offensives. Sensing that the international community was unprepared to protect the Kabbah government made negotiating the peace deal easy for the RUF. Its leader, Foday Sankoh, was able to demand key positions in government. Thus, conditions were not ripe for peace, rather, as with previous peace negotiations, the RUF seized opportunities that would buy it time to expand its reign of terror throughout Sierra Leone.

THE LOMÉ PEACE AGREEMENT: THE SHORT CUT

The Lomé Peace Agreement is a three-part agreement with 12 articles signed by President Kabbah and Foday Sankoh.

The first part deals with the cessation of hostilities and its monitoring.

The second concentrates on governance, looking at the transformation of the RUF into a political party; the allocation of public offices, including Cabinet positions to the RUF; the mechanisms for the consolidation of peace, the management of strategic mineral resources and the creation of a council of elders.

The third and final part discusses other political issues, including the issue of pardon and amnesty, revision of the constitution, post-conflict military and security issues, the date of the next election and the creation of the electoral commission.

Even a cursory look at the agreement shows an immediate and important omission. By making the agreement bilateral between the RUF and the government, it ignored other major stakeholders in the conflict, especially the local militias, Kamajors, and remnants of the SLA that had supported Major Koroma. Erroneously implicit in the decision to make the agreement

bilateral was that the government would be able to carry the Kamajors along in the peace deal and that the RUF would be able to convince the Koroma AFRC faction since they had fought as allies.

This was a wrong assumption and the consequences were to come out distinctly during the implementation stage, discussed below. The impression that the RUF and the AFRC would work together was dispelled few months after the agreement was signed, when both sides were engaged in a military skirmish around Makeni in Northern Province in October 1999. Although this was quickly contained, it eloquently illustrated the implications of leaving important stakeholders in the conflict outside of the negotiation and implementation process.

Although the same scenario did not emerge between the government and their Kamajor supporters, it was believed that some members of the movement would have preferred to be represented as a signatory in the agreement. It seems likely that the organisers of the agreement realised that getting an agreement between two sides would be easier to accomplish than getting all the numerous stakeholders to come to a united position on the future of the country.

Going into the contents, a detailed look at the agreement gives indications as to who had the upper hand among the signatories. Significant concessions were granted to the RUF, such that baffled all observers of developments in the country. Some of these articles are worth identifying here for a brief discussion. The first is Article IV of Part Two which allowed the members of the RUF to hold public offices. The movement was allocated four ministerial and four deputy ministerial positions. This concession was the first time any peace agreement in the conflict had granted the RUF such a large portfolio. Many saw this as a major prize and one that was not representative of domestic feelings.

RUF unwillingness to comply with previous peace agreements should have informed negotiators that they needed to seek RUF commitments to this latest peace process before granting concessions that could be exploited in a future recourse to violence. But while Sierra Leoneans were willing to grant this concession, assuming, of course that the RUF would not be given high profile public, they were disturbed with Article V, which specifically allocated Cabinet appointments to members of the rebel force. This was a reversal of tides unimaginable few years before and it demonstrated the growing weakness of the Kabbah administration to meet the challenges posed by the RUF.

However, more controversial was the decision to make Foday Sankoh the Chairman of Commission, alongside his position as Vice President. This proved to be an ill-fated judgement. Article VIII, which created the

Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development (CMRRD) tasked the chairman to protect the country's natural resources. This position, from which the president could not remove him, gave Sankoh the control of the country's diamond and gold reserves. Sankoh took effective management of the country's natural resources. One of the portfolios the RUF was able to secure in the deal was that of Energy and Power. This position effectively complemented Sankoh's control of the strategic mineral resources.

Sankoh took a major decision in January 2000 when he declared a moratorium on all diamond mining and cancelled all existing licenses. He then ordered anyone wishing to engage in mining to reapply to the CMRRD. While on the surface this may indicate a strong attempt to end the looting of gems, the close working relationship the RUF had developed with the Liberian authorities meant that the movement continued to receive direct benefit from diamonds. This apart, Sankoh never showed any sign of wanting to relinquish control after signing the Lomé agreement, and throughout the intervening period before the peace collapsed, illicit mining was reported to have been taking place.[10]

Many Sierra Leoneans perceived the decision to grant Sankoh the chairman of the CMRRD as carrying reconciliation too far, but it is also indicative of the desperation under which the central government negotiated and compromised the future of the country on the assumption that it would bring enduring peace. Evidence to prove people's misgivings about Sankoh was obtained when documents indicating various business deals and contracts were found in his house following his arrest on 17 May 2000.[11]

Equally controversial was the amnesty granted by Article XI of the third part of the agreement. After the kind of atrocities carried out by the rebel force, many found the whole idea of amnesty incomprehensible. Such an act denied a chance of justice to the victims of RUF atrocities.

THE LOMÉ PEACE AGREEMENT IN OPERATION

All the concessions and omissions discussed above become more visible when the Lomé Peace Agreement is discussed in practice. Once the Lomé Agreement was signed, the population expected to see some changes. This was based on the assumption that the RUF had been given all that it ever required (bar the Presidential office) and that there was no real bases for it to resort to the violence. Ironically, it was about this time that the weaknesses in the agreement began to reveal themselves.

The first crack that manifested itself was within the ranks of the RUF when some members of the organisation fell out with Foday Sankoh.

Despite the concessions granted to the RUF, there were still divisions within the movement over issues, including policy towards the peace initiative. The causes of the split is not known, but many observers believed that it was rooted partly to the peace process, and partly in what some RUF fighters perceived to be a small distribution of positions and offices allocated to the movement. Among those who left the fold was Sam 'General Mosquito' Bockarie, the Deputy Commander of the RUF. Bockarie was specifically against what he noted was Sankoh's 'hasty embrace of peace'.[12] Indeed, as early as November 1999, it had been alleged that Bockarie was preparing the ground for a military offensive in the east and north of the country.

Another key personality that spilt from Sankoh was the Legal spokesman, Omrie Golley, who was later to become RUF Political and Peace Council Chairman following Sankoh's arrest in May 2000. In fact, Sankoh sidelined Golley as a potential enemy and challenger to his leadership. Whatever the cause, the exit of two key personalities within the movement immediately after the peace agreement created doubts in the minds of many observers about the extent to which Sankoh exercised control over individuals within his movement.

The immediate concern over the split in the RUF was its possible sub-regional implications, especially in relation to Liberia. It was not known what side the Liberian President, Charles Taylor, would take in the RUF split. While he had a long-standing relationship with Foday Sankoh that predates the war, Sam Bockarie's close link with Liberia after he left the RUF and settled in the capital, Monrovia, raised suspicions about Taylor's potential role in sustaining a new leadership. This created concern as it showed that some form of Liberian support could still continue for one of the factions of the RUF, a development that would almost implicitly mark the end of any hope Sierra Leoneans put on the peace process.

Once the agreement became operational, the regional peacekeeping force that had overseen the security of the country, ECOMOG, began a phased exit, and a United Nation team arrived to supervise the ceasefire, disarmament and the demobilisation plans. Olu Adeniji, a retired Nigerian diplomat, was appointed UN Secretary General Special Representative (UNSGSR). It seemed obvious later that the UN was not prepared for the tasks it met on the ground. At the military level, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was grossly inadequate. The force appeared to have banked on the assumption that the peace agreement would work, and seemed prepared to only focus on the tasks of demobilisation and disarmament. There was no contingency plan should the unexpected happen.

Knowing the RUF and its ability to renege on promises, to pursue a one-way option was ill advised. UNAMSIL's process of deployment was also

uncoordinated. By January 2000, the RUF had started attacking the UN troops, seizing their weapons and uniforms. The disarmament exercise which was officially launched in October 1999 also continued slowly; by March 2000, the total number of disarmed combatants out of an estimated 40,000 combatants on all sides stood at 17,191, comprising 4,051 RUF, 8,851 loyal and ex-Sierra Leone Army, and 4,289 CDF ex-combatants. The RUF was estimated to have 15,000 troops in total. By the time conflict resumed in May 2000, this figure had barely risen – an estimated 4,949.[13]

In fact, UNAMSIL got off to a humiliating start. Ever since peacekeepers arrived in December 1999 the UN mandate had been crumbling in the face of numerous hostage crises. UN peacekeepers spent more time protecting one another than providing a secure atmosphere to pursue the disarmament programme. As Brian Urquhart notes, 'the UN operation in Sierra Leone was proceeding according to the old peacekeeping formula calling for nonforceful cooperation with consenting parties. The UN force had been arriving piecemeal' since its mandate was passed in October 1999.[14] Soldiers entered a dangerous terrain poorly equipped and unable to mount a challenge to the RUF, in fact this was not part of their mandate.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE LOMÉ PEACE AGREEMENT

By May 2000, the Lomé agreement was dead. The main trigger of this collapse was the arrest by the RUF of about 500 UNAMSIL troops. It is difficult to know exactly why Sankoh reneged on an agreement that was so blatantly in his favour, but interwoven reasons can be offered. The first possible reason was that Sankoh was getting worried of the division within the RUF, and he calculated that it was better to fight and win against a relatively weak government and UN force than confront a splinter rebel faction, especially one led by Sam Bockarie. Also in line with this, he could have calculated that it was better for him to take over the country before other factions become more prominent.

A second possible reason was the desire to exploit the departure of the Nigerian forces and the death of the Nigerian commander, General Maxwell Khobe, a veteran of the ECOMOG operation in Sierra Leone. Under the UN arrangement, Nigerian soldiers, who had a fairly detailed knowledge of the terrain of Sierra Leone and the RUF, having operated in the country for more than six years, had almost completed their exit from Sierra Leone. These two developments made the central government vulnerable, thus presenting Sankoh with his opportunity to exploit the security vacuum within Freetown and the rest of the country.

Third, the weakness of the fledging UN mission placed Sankoh in a position to derail the peace process. Apart from the fact that the UN soldiers did not know much about the terrain, and as such could not address the security situation, there were also problems with the civilian administration of the UN mission in Sierra Leone. On the administrative side, too, there were allegations that Olu Adeniji, the UNSGSR was not working closely enough with the UN Secretariat and was encountering problems with his staff on the ground. The lack of coordination among the UN officials was to reflect clearly when the mission had to negotiate the release of its captured staff from the rebel force.

Fourth, the lack of any credible sanctions to impose on the RUF should it fail to implement aspects of the peace agreement, gave Sankoh enough room to manoeuvre and eventually blow the accords to pieces. In fact, the international community did not have many options. As Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja who formed part of the technical assistance team to the Lomé agreement noted: 'unfortunately, the agreement's sponsors and guarantors could not come up with credible threats nor mechanisms for triggering effective sanctions for non-compliance with various deadlines for important steps'.[15]

This was made more apparent by the fact that the RUF were in possession of the key strategic resources and revenue of the country, the diamond districts, proving that one did not have to capture the presidential palace to claim victory in this war. Controlling the resources that fed the country was enough, and the RUF knew this would continually undermine the remit of any government in Freetown.

Fifth, the sheer fragility of government gave Sankoh enough room to undermine security in and around Freetown and ensure the non-implementation of the peace agreement. Although the government was able to maintain order in the capital and few major towns, its authority was weak and there existed only a crude semblance of order in most parts of the country. This raises a major problem confronting the implementation of peace agreement in Sierra Leone: that of implementing peace agreements in situations where the institutional structures of the state are weak and mutual distrust exists between warring parties and between the centre and the periphery.

Once the arrest of the UN troops was announced, opinion began to rise against the rebel leader. Initially, Sankoh denied that the RUF was responsible for the missing soldiers, and that they probably missed their way and would soon be found. When it became clear that RUF denial was untenable, Sierra Leoneans who were disappointed about the possibility that the peace would be derailed invaded Sankoh's house in Freetown. Members

of the Sierra Leone Army, the Kamajors and Koroma's AFRC, formerly allies of the RUF, supported them. The counter attack from the RUF was repelled, leaving four people dead from the rebel attack.

Foday Sankoh escaped from the mayhem, but was arrested few days later and was taken into custody. Pressure began to mount on the government about the fate of Sankoh, with the RUF and the Liberian government calling for his release, while the local population argued that he be tried for war crimes. The international community was, however, more concerned with trying to pick up the pieces of the collapsed peace agreement.

PICKING UP THE PIECES: INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The attempt to pick up the pieces of the Lomé agreement had five interwoven factors. The first was how to secure the release of the troops arrested by the RUF. The UN deduced that the only way this could be done was by securing the involvement of all those believed to have influence on the RUF. Assistance eventually came from Liberia's Charles Taylor, and by instalments, secured the release of most of the UN soldiers. The last batch was eventually rescued through a daring military raid in July 2000. Although this increased the international status of the Liberian leader, it also served as further confirmation of the much-alleged link between the RUF and Taylor.

The second was how best to repel further attack from the RUF and thus prevent the movement from entering Freetown. This was of particular concern, especially as the force was just at the outskirts of Freetown. This resulted in a two-dimensional response.

The first and most decisive came from Britain, who dispatched a parachute regiment to evacuate foreign citizens from Sierra Leone. This was followed by another detachment of British troops to defend the capital from falling into rebels' hands.

The second dimension came from countries in West Africa, who decided to dispatch a military force to Sierra Leone for the same purpose. This decision was taken after an emergency meeting in Abuja, Nigeria.

Getting the UN mandate back on course presented the third and most serious aspect of international response to the collapsed peace process. As discussed below, the reluctance of member states of the UN Security Council, in particular the permanent five, to effectively support its mandate to set up a peacekeeping mission once again tarnished the image of that organisation, especially on the African continent.

What to do with Foday Sankoh constituted the fourth aspect of international response. While some argued that he should be given some

form of conditional release, as his assistance would still be needed in any future attempt to bring the RUF to terms with any peace agreement, others maintained that he be tried for war crimes. An international tribunal was finally established under UN Security Council Resolution 1315 of 14 August 2000 where Sankoh and others who committed war crimes since the signing of the Lomé agreement will be prosecuted for war crimes.

The fifth aspect in the attempt to pick up the pieces of the failed peace accord was decision by the UN to impose sanctions against Liberia, or more specifically Taylor's predatory regime. Following a UN report on December 2000 which exposed the extent of Taylor's destabilising activities in Sierra Leone, UN resolution 1343 of 7 March 2001 imposing sanctions came into effect on 7 May, a year after the Lomé agreement collapsed.

WIDER IMPLICATIONS: ADDRESSING FLAWED PEACE AGREEMENTS

Since it began deploying in December 1999, UNAMSIL has fought battles on two fronts: the first has been against the RUF. Second, has been an internal battle to redress criticisms about its impotency and incompetence. A power struggle at the top of the mission between the Indian commander and head of the UNAMSIL, Major General Vijay Jetley, and the Nigerian contingent exposed severe strains in the command and control structure of UNAMSIL. A leaked memo by Jetley in September 2000 and the eventual withdrawal of the Indian contingent illustrated the deep division within the UN mission.[16] Jetley made several allegations about the collaboration of some Nigerian troops with RUF rebels in the diamond mining regions. Specifically, Jetley mentioned his immediate subordinate, Brigadier General Muhammed Garba, the UN Undersecretary General Oluyemi Adenji, and Major General Gabriel Kpamber, former head of the ECOMOG force that withdrew from Sierra Leone in April 2000 and the late Brigadier Maxwell Khobe. Though no concrete evidence exists to affirm such accusations, the memorandum highlighted the poor management at the top of the UN mission.

The memorandum also drew attention to the intense power struggle and desire by Nigeria officials to ensure complete control over military and political decisions in Sierra Leone. The withdrawal of the 3,161-strong Indian and 1,831-strong Jordanian contingent capped an embarrassing year for the UN. Their exit left a serious gap in the mission. UNAMSIL was established under resolution 1270 on 22 October 1999. The Security Council revised its mandate under Resolution 1289, giving the mission power within Chapter VII of the UN Charter 'to take the necessary action in the discharge of its mandate', in particular ensuring 'the security and

freedom of movement of its personnel and civilians under imminent threat of physical violence'.

The mission was expanded several times during 2000 and 2001. The current figure at the time of writing was 17,500, making it the largest multinational peacekeeping operation. But numbers were not the issues challenging UNAMSIL. Its problems were more critical; two factors explain UNAMSIL failure in Sierra Leone.

First, were the difficulties of operating in complex and open-ended conflicts. Sierra Leone has once again demonstrated that internal conflicts cannot be resolved through countless peace negotiations and peacekeeping operations. As Chantal de Jonge Oudraat argues, 'Sierra Leone showed that the political and operational lessons from failed UN missions in Rwanda, Bosnia and Somalia had not been learned.'[17] The same mistakes continue to be made – namely that lightly armed peacekeepers should not be sent into a violent or potentially violent situation. The last decade 'had shown the importance of matching mission mandates with sufficient resources. Yet, the Zambian peacekeepers in Sierra Leone were not equipped to carry out a mandate to enforce the peace. This mismatch was reminiscent of the agonising UN missions of the early 1990s, and it pointed to the domestic and international political constraints inherent in humanitarian interventions.'[18]

Moreover, it also illustrates the need for the international community to provide a realistic assessment of what it can deliver. The report by the International Crisis Group aptly sums up the problem confronting the international response in Sierra Leone: '[a] decade after the end of the Cold War, Sierra Leone provides a sobering reminder of how little progress has been made on forging appropriate international responses to conflict.'[19]

Externally driven projects to resolve civil wars have been tried and tested, yet they have either failed, proved inadequate or have been overrun by events on the ground. Having displayed a dismal failure, the UN added Sierra Leone to the catalogue of woeful performance in peacekeeping operations in Africa. Even before securing the release of its troops held hostage, the organisation had started negotiating with the British and regional countries on how best to jump-start the whole military operation back on course.

Second, was the lack of support from member states of the UN Security Council or other external negotiators that were party to the conflict. It did not help that the force that went into Sierra Leone lacked the significant backing from the UN Security Council despite a resolution signed by permanent members to mandate a peacekeeping force. The Lomé peace agreement should not have been allowed to falter and eventually collapse if

guarantors of the peace, namely Britain, the US, the UN (and also the OAU) had supported the peace agreement from its inception.

The history of international response in Sierra Leone even as events leading up to May 2000 unfolded represents a model of disengagement. Signs of disengagement continued after the collapse of the peace process in May 2000. Washington effectively disowned a peace agreement that its officials forced President Ahmed Kabbah to sign. After May, the US kept itself distant from negotiating a new peace deal and focused on training and equipping Nigerian, Ghanaian and Senegalese troops for future peacekeeping.

But Sierra Leone highlighted another important point about mandating international interventions. As Oudraat suggests, 'international interventions need strong leaders who can coordinate and give focus to the intervention. The UN Secretariat, because of its chronic lack of resources, is often unable to provide this type of leadership. The difficulties of the mission in Sierra Leone exemplify the type of problems the UN runs into when it does not have the support of any of the major powers.'[20]

This point is in fact important, especially when one bears in mind the relationship that unfolded between the UN and Britain following the May intervention. In fact, while the British intervention was widely welcomed with minimum criticism except from the British Conservative opposition party, British actions following its intervention served to further discredit the UN mission. At the outset, Tony Blair, the Prime Minister and Robin Cook, former Foreign Secretary justified the intervention as being, *inter alia*, helping to bolster and protect the UN mission, and many commentators saw the intervention as an attempt by Britain to save the UN.[21]

Yet the actions pursued on the ground proved contrary. British unwillingness to commit its troop under the auspices of the UN instead of creating a separate security umbrella to protect the government explicitly demonstrated minimal faith in the UN and in the end further contributed to the bad image Sierra Leoneans already had about the UN operation. Britain should have been part of the UN mission from the moment the UN Security Council mandated peacekeepers to be sent to Sierra Leone. In fact, Britain was instrumental to getting this mandate through the UN Security Council, but remained on the periphery of activities until the May intervention. This is why British intervention could aptly be described as too little, too late. Britain should have been working within the mission to improve not only security in Freetown, but also the UN's capacity to act decisively and competently.

More important, it would have been a serious sign of commitment to elaborate a division of labour between a Western country and countries from

the developing world who perceive the West as being disengaged from crises on the continent. It was not until October 2000 that Britain offered officers to fill key appointments in UNAMSIL Headquarters, including the Chief of Staff. Such visible display of lack of support for the UN by a permanent member state added to the UN's credibility crisis, but also challenged the mission's *raison d'être* and the very concept of peacekeeping. However, the damage to the UN had already been done. And since several UK personnel entered the UNAMSIL, a culture of 'them and us' has arisen, further ensuring the demoralisation of the UN mission.

Thus, what Sierra Leone eloquently demonstrated was the apprehension and open display of major powers in the international community to retreat from finding solutions to crises, especially when there is minimal interest. Instead, in what has become common occurrence in contemporary world politics, the Security Council mandated a patchwork force from the armies of developing nations while claiming that it was still the provider of international peace and security. The peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone ranks alongside too many other poorly managed peacekeeping missions.

This was well articulated in the publication in August 2000 UN of the Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations into the state of peacekeeping – famously called the Brahimi Report after the name of its author, the former Algerian foreign minister, Lakhdar Brahimi. In fact, UNAMSIL represents an example of the dangers of peacekeeping on a 'shoestring'. The solutions to peacekeeping seem all too obvious and are often repeated in all lessons learnt and evaluation papers. They include: greater cohesion and direction, better rules of engagement, resources, well-structured command and control, adequate equipment and ultimately the political will and support from UN member states in supporting peace missions.

In this respect, Brahimi told seasoned observers and critics of UN peacekeeping nothing new about the problems surrounding ill-conceived mandates and missions. What was significant and another lesson all too obvious in Sierra Leone is the recommendation that the Security Council leaves in draft form resolutions authorising peacekeeping missions until the Secretary General has received firm commitments of number of troops and other necessary support from member states, thus ensuring all missions receive the necessary support especially from the permanent members of the Security Council.[22]

CONCLUSION

The people of Sierra Leone are no clearer about the fate of their country. Only one thing seems certain: the RUF can no longer be trusted; it has

continually paid lip service to peace agreements. On the whole, it can be argued that the Lomé Peace Agreement failed because it placed the desire for peace before the practical realities of finding adequate mechanisms, especially incentives and disincentives to ensure it was sustained. Some of the concessions granted to the RUF were such that they significantly undermined the power of the government. This was not helped by the generally known assumption that the government negotiated from a predominantly weak position, and that the rebel faction got more than it bargained for in the agreement. The moral guarantors, having forced President Kabbah to sign a peace agreement, left him looking vulnerable. Sierra Leone's slide back to war was a tragic display of external failure to fully appreciate the capacity of the RUF and its allies, and to erect sufficient barriers to challenge that capacity.

NOTES

The authors contributed an equal amount to the research and writing of this article. We want to acknowledge our thanks to Dr Funmi Olonisakin for her comments on an earlier draft.

1. While books are only just emerging, articles have touched on virtually all aspects of the war. For an excellent review of the RUF – its background, values and strategies, read the excellent collection of essays in the Special Issue of *Africa Development* 22/3–4 (1997) especially I. Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL)' pp.45–76; on the resources aspect on the war, see, A. Alao, 'Diamonds are Forever ...but so also are Controversies', *Civil Wars* 2/3 (Autumn 1999) pp.43–64 and I. Smillie, L. Gberie and R. Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter: Sierra Leone, Diamonds and Human Security* (Partnership Africa Canada, Jan. 2000); on the role of youths, see P. Rich, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone* (Oxford: James Currey 1996).
2. Although it started under Momoh, the socio-economic underpinnings of the war took place under his predecessor, the late President Siaka Stevens. Indeed, Sankoh himself had served a jail term for attempting to overthrow President Stevens.
3. In what can be considered its manifesto *Footpath to Democracy*, the movement stated that it wanted to ensure genuine democracy in the country and end what it considered the years of undemocratic rule of the successive governments in the country. The manifesto also raised questions about the mismanagement of the country's abundant natural resources by successive governments.
4. The Sierra Leone civil war has shown some of the greatest atrocities such that has received global condemnation. Limbs and hands have been amputated, and women and children have been victims. Most of these atrocities have been associated with the rebel forces.
5. C. Ero, *Sierra Leone Security Complex*, Working Paper Series, Number 3, The Conflict, Security and Development Group (London: Centre for Defence Studies, King's College, June 2000) p.16.
6. Presidential and legislative elections were held on 26–27 Feb. 1996. The Sierra Leone's People's Party (SLPP) under the candidacy of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah won in the runoffs on 15 March with 59.5 per cent of the votes.
7. CDFs are traditional hunters known by various names, among which the Kamajors is the most prominent. For an excellent analysis of the role of civil defence forces in the civil war, see P. Muana, 'The Kamajoi Militia: Violence, Internal Displacement and the Politics of

Counter-Insurgency', *Africa Development* 22/3–4 (1997) pp.77–100.

8. The decision to remove the government by force was taken after ECOMOG claimed that the government had shown sufficient sign of not wanting to respect the terms of the agreement.
9. See R. Lizza, 'Jesse Jackson the spoiler', *West Africa*, 31 July–7 Aug. 2000, pp.13–15 and *African Research Bulletin*, 1–31 May 2000, p.13980.
10. On 29 March 2000, for example, the BBC television programme, *Newsnight*, reported that illicit mining was still taking place in the rebel heartland.
11. Some of the documents found can be found at www.sierra-leone.org\documents.html
12. Ero (note 5) p.29.
13. See *Fourth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone*, UN Doc. S/2000/455, 19 May 2000, para. 26, p.5.
14. B. Urquhart, 'Some thoughts on Sierra Leone', *New York Book Reviews*, 15 June 2000.
15. G. Nzongola-Ntalaja, 'Unpacking the Lomé Peace Accord' in *Sierra Leone One Year After Lomé*. CDD Planning Strategy Series 5 (London: Centre for Democracy and Development, Sept. 2000) p.54.
16. The memorandum can be obtained via www.sierra-leone.org.
17. C. de Jonge Oudraat, 'Humanitarian Intervention: The Lessons Learned', *Current History* (Dec. 2000) p.420.
18. Ibid.
19. *Sierra Leone: Time for a New Political and Military Strategy*, Report No.28 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 11 April 2001) p.3.
20. De Jonge Oudraat (note 17).
21. C. Ero, 'British Foreign Policy and the conflict in Sierra Leone', in *Sierra Leone One Year After Lomé* (note 15) pp.110–11.
22. Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, UN General Assembly Document A/55/305, 17 Aug. 2000, para. 64(b), pp.11–12.