

The Sierra Leonean state in 2005: Revisiting the root causes of the conflict

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INTRODUCTION

The UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), a multifunctional peacekeeping operation established by Security Council Resolution 1270 in 1999 to assist implementation of the Lomé Agreement,² will be phased out during 2005.³ Nonetheless, on 28 July 2005 the UN Secretary-General (UNSG), Kofi Annan, recommended that “a modestly sized United Nations integrated office be established for an initial period of 12 months” from 1 January 2006.⁴ The Security Council approved the recommendation on 1 September.⁵ The so-called United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) is to be headed by an Executive Representative of the UNSG, who will also serve as the UNDP Resident Representative and the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator.⁶ Key areas of its mandate will include sections on good governance and peace consolidation, human rights and rule of law as well as other vital sectors that are in need of fundamental reforms if the underlying causes of the conflict in Sierra Leone are to be robustly addressed.⁷ The initiative

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² The title of the agreement between the official protagonists of the conflict is *Peace Agreement Between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone*. It was signed in Lomé, Togo on 7 July 1999.

³ UN Security Council, *Resolution 1270*, S/RES/1270, 22 October 1999; see UN Security Council, *Resolution 1610*, S/RES/1610, 30 June 2005.

⁴ UN Security Council, *Addendum to the twenty-fifth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone*, S/2005/273/Add.2, 28 July 2005.

⁵ UN Security Council, *Resolution 1620*, S/RES/1620, 31 August 2005.

⁶ Under the UNAMSIL mandate, the Deputy Special Representative for the Secretary General (DSRSG) for Governance and Stabilization had a similarly integrating role, functioning as UNDP Resident Representative and Humanitarian Coordinator. This set-up proved valuable in bridging the gap between UNAMSIL and other UN agencies. See Lotta Hagman, *Security and Development in Sierra Leone*, International Peace Academy (IPA) Workshop Report, June 2002, p. 9.

⁷ UN Security Council, *Resolution 1620*, S/RES/1620, 31 August 2005.

constitutes one way of addressing in practice the criticism that once peacekeepers are withdrawn, coordinated efforts by the UN are limited.⁸ In sum, whatever ‘post-UNAMSIL’ Sierra Leone may look like, one of the biggest peacekeeping operations ever deployed is in effect in the process of withdrawal.

Neither Sierra Leone’s President Ahmed T. Kabbah, nor Vice-President Solomon E. Berewa have called for the continuation of UNAMSIL in its current form into 2006. However, as the UN Secretary-General has indicated in his twenty-fifth report on UNAMSIL (March 2005),⁹ major shortfalls and challenges remain if peace is to be consolidated. The process of state dissolution was a long-term process, transcending the years of conflict. In other words, it may not so much be a question of rebuilding the state, but rather of enabling the imposition of ‘good governance’ that is necessary, if public benefits of some quality are to be delivered to the general public. Indeed, international intervention is the single most significant contribution to Sierra Leone’s emergence as a sustainable state.

In a complex mix of liberal democratic and traditional forms of authority, international donors have supported elections for paramount chieftaincies, local councils and the government, the staging of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) processes for ex-combatants, and the development of new political structures. Yet, while such restoration has been critical to ameliorate the consequences of war, they have not addressed the societal inequalities that arguably transcend the years of conflict. This point is pertinent as peacebuilding aims to prevent and resolve violent conflicts as well as to consolidate peace by addressing the *root causes* of the Sierra Leonean conflict, including structural, political, socio-cultural and economic factors. The current status is that the Sierra Leone government is virtually destitute of a domestic revenue mobilization capacity, and almost entirely sustained from outside through aid.

As Christopher Clapham argued in 2003,¹⁰ very little has been done by external actors to identify and rectify the underlying sources of the conflict – i.e. the root causes. While this may still hold true in 2005, it should be added that there are obviously limits to what international agencies can meaningfully do if a robust national leadership is neither in place, nor genuinely responsive to international initiatives or, more importantly, outright popular grievances.

However, on the part of the international community, there is an obvious set of problems involved in implementing projects that are not based on a sound and comprehensive understanding of the context of the conflict. An evident danger is that projects developed in good faith, yet ill-considered, end up being counter-productive to the peace process as a whole. As several UN reports have stated – from *An Agenda for Peace* in 1992 to *A more secure world: Our shared responsibility* in 2004 – underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian concerns must be tackled in order to lay the foundation of a liberal democratic state.

⁸ UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, *Addendum to the twenty-fifth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone*, S/2005/273/Add.1, 21 June 2005. See Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project, *Making Peacebuilding Work: Reforming UN Peacekeeping Operations*, conference report, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, 6 June 2005, p. 4.

⁹ UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, *Twenty-fifth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone*, S/2005/273, 26 April 2005.

¹⁰ Christopher Clapham, *Sierra Leone: The Political Economy of Internal Conflict*, The Working Papers Series, Conflict Research Unit (CRU) Working Paper 20, Clingendael Security and Conflict Programme, The Hague, July 2003, p. 25.

This paper provides a brief account of the circumstances leading to the failure of Sierra Leone as a state and the resultant conflict of the late 20th and early 21st century. Subsequently, it outlines the steps that have been taken in the post-conflict era towards stabilizing the country – in particular with respect to building and consolidating the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) as subjugated to democratic civilian control.

The aim of the paper is to demonstrate that despite such measures, Sierra Leone lacks a sufficiently supportive regional state system within which to consolidate the peace process. As point of departure, the paper therefore stresses the necessity for the UN and ECOWAS to pursue a more integrated and long-term approach to regional conflict management. This, it is argued, is a *sine qua non* for the consolidation of peace in Sierra Leone itself.

At the same time, however, it is also clear that region-wide approaches to security and stability will not address the ‘root causes’ within Sierra Leone that led to conflict in the first place. The paper therefore looks at two conditions of inequality in Sierra Leonean society which will have to be dealt with consistently, the institution of the paramount chief and corruption. The paramount chiefs played a dominant role before and during the conflict of the 1990s, and continue to do so today. There is therefore a great need for deepening the understanding of traditional structures of authority, and in particular the dynamics of a governmental system, which is based on both liberal democratic administrative structures and traditional modes of governance. Corruption, which is widely accepted as a ‘root cause’ of the conflict, remains a considerable challenge to Sierra Leone’s stability, and suggestions are made for dealing more robustly with this malady.

THE SIERRA LEONE STATE – CREEPING FAILURE

The central administration in Freetown has long been perceived predominantly as tribalistic, corrupt and clientelist, reserved for a closed circle of strongmen. In other words, while Sierra Leone has nominally constituted a state in the international system since independence in 1961, the 1967 elections which propelled the All People’s Congress (APC) to power were ethnically permeated and exploited by a political elite, pursuing a policy line of rule-and-divide to sustain its privileges. The predominantly northern-based APC exacerbated the trend set by the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) during the early years of independence. It replaced a mainly south-eastern Mende hegemony of the SLPP with a violent northern patron-clientelist Limba/Temne regime.¹¹

Ultimately, the 1967 elections led to the cancellation of the multi-party system that was established on independence. In a political environment of this nature, Siaka Stevens, President and leader of the APC, was, until retiring in 1985, positioned to establish and consolidate a network of neo-patrimonial relations through which to manipulate links between ‘state’ power, political factions and market opportunities.¹² Fundamentally, Stevens’ strategic agenda – coveting private forms of power politics and wealth accumulation –

¹¹ It should be noted, however, that contrary to common perceptions, data compiled in the report *What the fighters say: a survey of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone* suggests that the ethnic breakdown in the RUF and CDF was nearly identical with respect to the major groups in the country, the Mende and the Temne. Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein, *What the Fighters Say: A Survey of Ex-Combatants in Sierra Leone*, Working Paper no. 20, Center on Globalization and Sustainable Development, New York, August 2004, p. 18. Indeed, it has been argued that the Sierra Leonean conflict cannot be regarded as ethnically based. Malan, Mark, Phenyio Rakate and Angela McIntyre, *Peacekeeping In Sierra Leone: UNAMSIL Hits the Home Straight*, ISS Monograph, no. 68, January 2002.

¹² Clapham, op. cit., July 2003, p. 10.

effectively undermined any popular legitimacy of state concepts and practices in Sierra Leone. Independence had come about more as a consequence of voluntary withdrawal by the British suzerains, than because of demands for national self-determination by a ‘united people of Sierra Leone.’¹³ Precisely because building and consolidating somewhat accountable structures of authority across the country’s territory have been so conspicuously under-prioritized, little popular sense of belonging – and being accountable – to a distant central government has consequently been fostered.

The post-independence era was fraught with randomly handed down judgments by the courts (including death sentences) on the orders of the government; violence became an inherent part of elections; the media became shackled by dictatorial press laws and repressive measures against vocal journalists. The police force became packed with APC party loyalists; soldiers were allowed free rein with the unaudited accounts of the army budget; and professionals in non-state institutions – lawyers, journalists, university lecturers – were cowed either into silence or into toeing the government’s line. Many fled the country. Among the unfortunate consequences of these developments has been a consistent drain of well-educated individuals from the country.¹⁴ It may be noted that this circumstance will constitute a long-term challenge to recruitment of properly trained staff for central and local state institutions and impede the true consolidation of Sierra Leone as a state.¹⁵

In sum, the failure of Sierra Leone as a ‘legitimate state’ has been a long-term process, underpinned by a profound lack of domestic leadership. Central to building a state administration in Sierra Leone will now be exactly that: *building* a state, i.e. confer on the leadership and population of Sierra Leone what a legitimate state may look like. However, as in the case of the paramount chieftaincy institution, there is a profound danger that the structural pitfalls of pre-war Sierra Leone will simply be replicated in the 21st century. That is, the economic and political space that was opened with the end of the conflict was vulnerable to take-over by new drivers in old cars. In brief, it is not the structures of democratic institutions, which ‘make them’ democratic – it is their human resources.

Legitimate political authority was nominally re-established with the election of Kabbah, heavily pushed for and financed by the international community. He was sworn in as President in April 1996 in what may be referred to as the first Kabbah administration (1996-97). The government was, however, overthrown by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), a fraction of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF) led by Corporal John Paul Koroma, on 25 May 1997. Koroma would later run for president during peacetime elections in 2002.¹⁶ His bid in the latter part of the 1990s for power was compounded by continued hostility towards senior officers and attempts by Kabbah (strongly encouraged by the IMF) to ‘downsize’ what remained of the disbanded army as well as to cut rice rations. It has been suggested that more than ushering an accountable

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Indeed, the process of ‘brain drain’ continues in the post-conflict era. According to the Arab Satellite TV station, Al-Jazeera, about 100 Sierra Leonean nurses, lab technicians, caterers and plumbers left Sierra Leone at the end of July 2005, after being contracted to perform the “mundane” tasks underpinning the US-led presence in Iraq. It is estimated that there are 440 Sierra Leoneans working in Iraq under a contract signed by the Sierra Leone government with a private US supply company. Al-Jazeera, 31 July 2005, see: <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/81E10E65-F8E7-43BD-9D83-3A846BDEF3BC.htm>.

¹⁵ According to the UNDP, the literacy rate was 36% in 2002, and Sierra Leone was ranked overall 177th in the 2004 Human Development Report, see: http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/cty/cty_f_SLE.html.

¹⁶ International Crisis Group, *Sierra After Elections: Politics as Usual?*, Africa Report no. 49, Freetown/Brussels., 15 July 2002, p. 1.

government to power, Kabbah provided external allies with a figure, who could be publicly supported.

The scramble for Sierra Leone in 1997 effectively dissolved any clear line of demarcation between the categories of ‘official,’ ‘rebel,’ and ‘international’ actors, ‘allies’ and ‘enemies.’ AFRC, a military regime similar to that of National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), entertained strong ties with Foday Sankoh’s Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the primary rebel group in the Sierra Leonean conflict. Another private military company, Sandline, was hired by the dethroned president, and assisted Kabbah’s return to Sierra Leone. Apart from Sandline, a predominantly Nigerian West African Force (ECOMOG), numbering 12,000-15,000 men, had been sent to assist Kabbah. However, supposedly retained RSLMF troops turned against their allies, sent in the name of ECOWAS, killing 1,200 Nigerian soldiers. An ECOMOG counterattack forced the RUF, who had seized the capital in January 1999, out of Freetown. The cost in life and damages was heavy, and the RUF retained control of the rest of the country, including the diamond rich eastern regions.

From a position of strength, the RUF reached a settlement with the government when signing the Lomé Peace Agreement on 7 July 1999. In October 1999 UNAMSIL, numbering a 6,000-member peacekeeping force, was deployed to complement ECOMOG. A coalition government was created between the SLPP and the RUF. Sankoh was pardoned for his direct and indirect participation and orchestration of war atrocities and was handed the chairmanship of the Strategic Mineral Commission, which equalled a post as vice-president of the country.¹⁷ Indeed, based on experiences from the Mozambican peace process, Article III, paragraph 4 of the Agreement stipulated that parties to the agreement “shall approach the international community with a view to mobilizing resources for the purpose of enabling the RUF to function as a political party.”¹⁸ In sum, the RUF had transformed from a random collection of rebels to a political movement within a decade, and was unashamedly handed four ministerial and four deputy ministerial positions.¹⁹ While the AFRC was largely sidelined during the peace talks in Togo, its leader, Koroma, was made chairman of the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace.²⁰

As one commentary suggests, The Lomé Agreement was abundant on carrots and meagre on stick.²¹ The Agreement was repeatedly violated by the RUF, culminating in composite strategic blunders: hostage taking of 500 UNAMSIL peacekeepers, deployed as part of the Lomé package, the gunning down of twenty demonstrators from civil society groups outside Sankoh’s home and attacks on the Republic of Guinea. In brief, once in government, it was evident that there were no incentives to disarm combatants. What is more, there was no provision on the table in Togo to do so; provisions which would precondition that rebels-turned-state-officials put down their arms before taking up seats in the newly consolidated parliament. With fighters holding on to their weapons and entrenched in the diamond mines, the RUF leadership was having the cake and eating it too. Just as Jonas Savimbi in Angola

¹⁷ *Peace Agreement Between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone*, 7 July 1999, art. IX, par. 1, see: <http://www.sierra-leone.org/lomeaccord.html>.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, art. III, par. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, art. V, par. 3-4.

²⁰ Mohamed Gibril Sesay & Charlie Hughes, *Resolving Go Beyond First Aid: Democracy Assistance and the Challenges of Institution Building in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone*, The Working Papers Series, Conflict Research Unit (CRU) Working Paper 34, Clingendael Security and Conflict Programme, The Hague, January 2005, p. 5.

²¹ Patrick L. N. Seyon, *Peace Never Had a Chance in Sierra Leone Under the Lomé Agreement*, in *The Perspective*, April/June 2000, see: <http://www.theperspective.org/lomeaccord.html>.

and Taylor in Liberia before him, so too Sankoh was in a position to continue fighting if things did not go his way. This is in fact what happened.

It is also clear that the RUF only constituted a loose composite organizational structure, that it was neither an integrated nor a coherent whole with clear lines of communication. Speaking to this circumstance, the so-called West Side Boys, an unorganized collection of former RUF/AFRC combatants, roaming the Occra Hills around Freetown, abducted a number of British soldiers and SLA officers in August 2000.²² Furthermore, one survey conducted in 2004 suggests that ex-combatants were not aware of the significant political gains of the RUF following the Lomé Agreement; e.g. only 12% of the RUF ex-combatants were aware that Sankoh was in fact offered the chair of the Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources as part of the Lomé package.²³

In the midst of the May 2000 upheavals of hostage taking and assaults against Freetown, it was the UK's 800-strong paratroop force, initially deployed to protect the airport and greater Freetown area, which enforced peace. Sankoh, now jailed, was replaced by the interim leader Issa Sesay, who was more committed to the disarmament process. The peace process was further solidified by the signing of two additional protocols between the government and the RUF in Abuja, Nigeria. In January 2002, the end of the disarmament process was announced and with it the end of a ten-year conflict. In May that same year, elections saw Kabbah re-elected as president, achieving a landslide victory with just over 70% of the vote. His party, the SLPP, won an overwhelming majority of seats in parliament.

MILITARY CONCERNS

Peace and stability in Sierra Leone is secured for now, thanks to several reasons, one being the perseverance of UNAMSIL peacekeeping contingents, which initially numbered 6,000 military personnel, including 260 military observers.²⁴ By March 2001, the Security Council had increased the strength of UNAMSIL's military component to some 17,500 troops throughout the country, including rebel-held areas. UNAMSIL facilitated disarmament and demobilization of around 48,000 combatants – including more than 3,000 child soldiers – the majority of which were members of the RUF and the militia assisting the government, the Civil Defence Forces (CDF). There are (as of August 2005) 3,400 peacekeepers deployed in the country, who will be withdrawn as UNAMSIL is phased out at the end of the year.

During the Cold War, the security sector fell exclusively within the domain of national political and security institutions.²⁵ Neither intergovernmental development nor security agencies concerned themselves directly with governance. In post-conflict Sierra Leone, however, important steps towards consolidating military security are long-term commitments by the British led International Military Advisory and Assistance Team (IMAT) to train and reform the RSLAF until 2010. Indeed, Sierra Leone constitutes the first case in which the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) has spent funding, earmarked for development, on security sector reforms. The underlying rationale of this novel approach to development is the simple logic that no meaningful and sustainable

²² Malan, Rakate and McIntyre, op. cit., January 2002.

²³ Humphreys and Weinstein, op. cit., July 2004, p. 29.

²⁴ UN Security Council, *Resolution 1270*, S/RES/1270, 22 October 1999, par. 9.

²⁵ Necla Tschirgi, *Peacebuilding as the Link between Security and Development: Is the Window of opportunity closing?*, International Peace Academy Studies in Security and Development, New York, December 2003, p. 9.

development in Sierra Leone will prevail without adequate security provisions. In sum, the UK response to peacebuilding in Sierra Leone has been said to represent an unprecedented attempt at following an integrated approach to development, including both military, political and aid interventions.²⁶

As for IMATT's role in guiding and charting the Military Reintegration Programme, it has included the provision of advice to the Government, the Ministry of Defence (headed by President Kabbah), and, of course the RSLAF itself. Furthermore, IMATT has deployed personnel throughout the country within the chain of command. Military personnel not only serve in the capacity of consultants, but also as officers – from the RSLAF headquarters in Freetown, down to the level of advisory teams, located with the brigades in upcountry Sierra Leone.

There is an ever-present chance that the RSLAF will once again become a dominant political power in Sierra Leone. Precedence was set in 1992 as Valentine Strasser, a junior military officer in the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), overthrew long-time dictator Siaka Stevens' successor, Joseph Momoh, and established the NPRC. Strasser's rise to power may be cast in terms of pure power politics and by default rather than strategic planning. Indeed, as salary disbursements to soldiers and officers were three months overdue, it has been suggested that what had initially been a demonstration turned into a palace coup.

In other words, a strong and efficient IMATT-trained RSLAF will have to be counterpoised by a government that holds a democratically obtained mandate, and acts accordingly. Hence, RSLAF as a destabilizing factor will depend on the ability of national and international actors to lay the foundations of a state system, which provides basic benefits, and equally important is perceived as and appreciated to be doing so by the general population. Stability will be conditioned by the success of these endeavours.

This will prove all the more important, as what IMATT strives for is a fundamental restructuring of the defence sector to institute civilian oversight of the army, thereby advancing democratic control and accountability. In this respect, the inevitable duty of the army is to be loyal to the democratically elected government of the day, as well as to make its views known to Parliament through the Parliamentary Defence Committee. However, as concluded in the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as 'lamentable', "[c]orruption remains rampant and there is still no culture of tolerance in political discourse. Many ex combatants testified that the conditions giving rise to the conflict persist in the country, and, if given the opportunity, they would fight again. Yet distressingly, the Commission did not perceive any sense of urgency among public officials to respond the myriad challenges facing the country."²⁷ Furthermore, the Commission was left with the impression that all efforts to move decisively forward in the peacebuilding process, including implementation of the National Recovery Strategy and the Poverty Reduction Strategy paper, are largely donor driven.²⁸

IMATT's long-term commitments to reform the military component of the security sector and its placement of officers in key positions of the RSLAF, will unquestionably serve as a stabilizing factor in the years to come. Furthermore, the British government has allegedly

²⁶ Toby Porter, *The Interaction between Political and Humanitarian Action in Sierra Leone, 1995 to 2002*, Journal of Humanitarian Assistance, March 2003, p. 71, see: <http://www.jha.ac/>

²⁷ Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Report (provisional), October 2004, p. 4, par. 20.

²⁸ Ibid.

guaranteed to intervene within 48 to 72 hours in the face of imminent challenges to Sierra Leonean security.²⁹ It should be noted that the internal coherence of the RSLAF remains to be tested as it still has only a limited role to play in internal security. Indeed, the British Military Adviser to the Acting Sierra Leone Chief of Defence Staff effectively controls the Army. In 2003, apart from great limitations to the RSLAF's scope of manoeuvring with respect to infrastructure and logistics, it also became evident that the army was in no position to counter insurgencies by Liberian combatants into Sierra Leone.³⁰

What is now of dire importance, if the army is not to serve as a long-term destabilizing actor in Sierra Leone political life, is to ensure that an accountable army serves a government which is itself precisely that: accountable. Worst-case scenario will be that the RSLAF emerges as well-trained and equipped to defend the territory of Sierra Leone and to act upon the newly adopted Military Aid to the Civil Power (MACP) policy, only to turn against the Government in Freetown.³¹ In the 1990s, in the midst of conflict, this scenario unfolded on two occasions – when the NPRC overthrew the APC in 1992 and again in 1997 when the AFRC downed Kabbah and the SLPP, who had assumed power in democratically held elections in 1996.

The MACP policy, while constitutionally provided for in several countries, including the UK, could itself serve unintended purposes in the case of Sierra Leone. In the past, emergency provisions have been abused to silence political opponents, as was the case when President Siaka Steven clamped down upon widespread opposition in 1971 by banning the vocal and burgeoning National Democratic Party (NDP) of Dr. John Karefa-Smart.

For the time being, the relationship between Sierra Leone's ruling party and the RSLAF is questionable, and potentially destabilizing. In some areas, the SLPP has been estimated that approximately 80% of the military personnel voted for Johnny Paul Koroma's People's Liberation Party (PLP) during the May 2002 elections (the next general elections are held in 2007).³² The relationship between the government, i.e. the SLPP, and the RSLAF therefore remains potentially unstable.

Additionally, porous borders have not only left Sierra Leone vulnerable to rebel incursions from Liberia and Guinea, but also to trafficking of minerals from and through the country. While the international Kimberley Certification Process (KPC) has curbed diamond smuggling, the process suffers from lack of international oversight (a peer review system was created in October 2003, but remains to be fully implemented). While the *extent* to which the black market diamond industry fuelled the Sierra Leonean conflict is still being debated, the vested interests of the political elites across the countries of the Mano River Union are undeniable.

The Sierra Leone Government is unable to manifest strong controls and checks at the local level, and there are persistent allegations of a 'culture of diamond smuggling' at the heart of

²⁹ International Crisis Group, *Liberia and Sierra Leone. Rebuilding Failed States*, Report no. 87, Dakar/Brussels, 8 December 2004, p. 21.

³⁰ Marianne Ducasse-Rogier, *Resolving Intractable Conflicts in Africa. A Case Study of Sierra Leone*, The Working Papers Series, Conflict Research Unit (CRU) Working Paper 31, Clingendael Security and Conflict Programme, The Hague, September 2004, p. 62.

³¹ In brief, following the rationale of the MACP, the RSLAF is required to assist the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) in scenarios covering public order. Government of Sierra Leone, Security Sector Review Secretariat, *The Sierra Leone Security Sector Review (SSR)*, March 2005, p. 12, par. 15.

³² International Crisis Group, *op. cit.*, 15 July 2002, p. 1.

the central administration.³³ With these circumstances in mind, diamond smuggling will remain a great challenge to Sierra Leonean stability. It should be noted that this state of affairs does not in any significant way deviate from practices in pre-war Sierra Leone, where government officials were habitually complicit with a flourishing illegal economy. It is well-known that Stevens and his followers, constituting a loosely structured collection of loyalists, generated great profits from Sierra Leone's diamond fields through patrimonial networks of strongmen.

In present-day Sierra Leone, the National Revenue Authority (NRA) heads the fight against smuggling and illegal trade, including the collection and accounting for all duties, taxes, revenue and penalties. However, the RSLAF plays an essential role in assisting this body in fulfilling its mandate, precisely because it has been tasked to take the "lead in averting threats of border porosity."³⁴ As the March 2005 Sierra Leone Security Sector Review states, the RSLAF is required "[t]o allocate military personnel for routine non-military tasks, for example fishery protection, anti-smuggling operations and VIP protection."³⁵ Hence, apart from a human, physical and financial resource deficit, the RSLAF may also be devoid of the political support that is needed to robustly manage Sierra Leone's wealth. It is yet another potential bone of contention between government officials with vested interests in the illicit diamond trade, and an emerging national army that is yet to play an independent role in maintaining Sierra Leonean peace.

REGIONAL CONCERNS AND THE TAYLOR FACTOR

In his twenty-fifth report on UNAMSIL, Annan notes that there are "currently no major external threats to the security of Sierra Leone."³⁶ Internally, Sierra Leone is now calm enough to allow the remaining 3,400 peacekeepers deployed in the country to be withdrawn, and for UNAMSIL to be phased out. The peacekeeping force was originally supposed to withdraw from Sierra Leone at the end of 2004, but its mandate was extended because of potential instability and outright conflict in the remaining Mano River basin countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia. In other words, while it may be that there is no external threat to Sierra Leone *per se*, political life in the sub-region is unstable. There is a persistent danger that social, political or economic instability within countries in neighbouring countries could spill over into Sierra Leone.

For instance, considerable tension was building up in Guinea-Bissau ahead of the June 2005 presidential elections and arms were allegedly smuggled into the country to support civilian militias; in late May Prime Minister Carlos Gomes accused former president Kumba Yala, deposed by a coup in 2003, of attempting to topple the serving government.³⁷ Joao Bernardo "Nino" Vieira, the former military ruler of Guinea-Bissau, scored a narrow victory over Malam Bacai Sanha, the candidate of the then ruling party, in the second round of the country's presidential elections.³⁸ In August 2005, Vieira was officially named president of

³³ Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Report (provisional), October 2004, p. 8, par. 40.

³⁴ Government of Sierra Leone, op. cit., March 2005, p. 48+53+65, par. 124+139+181.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 48, par. 124.

³⁶ UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, op. cit., 26 April 2005, par. 17.

³⁷ IRIN, *GUINEA-BISSAU: Visit by West African leaders fails to defuse tension*, 23 May 2005, see: http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=47236&SelectRegion=West_Africa&SelectCountry=GUINEA-BISSAU.

³⁸ BBC, *Army man wins G Bissau election*, 28 July 2005, see: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4723627.stm>.

the country by the electoral commission, albeit under allegations of electoral fraud.³⁹ In Togo, violence followed the April 2005 presidential election, and thousands were put to flight. Talks in Lomé on forming a government of ‘national unity’ between newly elected President Faure Gnassingbe and Togo’s main opposition parties, including exiled opposition leader Gilchrist Olympio, failed.⁴⁰

As one conflict preventive measure for the Mano River Basin, the report of the TRC ‘calls on’ the Liberian Government to “publicly acknowledge the role of its predecessor in promoting war and armed conflict in Sierra Leone.”⁴¹ The report is silent on whether the ‘public acknowledgement’ should come from the current interim government, headed by Gyude Bryant, or the government which will assume power after presidential and general elections on 11 October 2005. What is clear is the fact that the person, embodying Liberia’s role during the conflict in Sierra Leone, ex-President Charles Taylor, remains at large. In July 2005, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea requested that Nigeria would turn over Taylor for prosecution, alleging that he has continued to interfere in the affairs of all three countries, unashamedly disregarding the 2003 peace accord, which ended Liberia’s civil war.

Although Taylor has himself denied it, it is a well-known fact that he provided training, much has been made of the symbiotic interdependence between Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and the RUF. In the late 1980s, Sankoh, a would-be revolutionary at the time, met Taylor in Libya during a ‘self-defence’ program. Allegedly, they made a pact. Sankoh and his group would help Taylor liberate Liberia, and returning the favour, Taylor would provide a base from which assaults could be planned and initiated on Sierra Leone.

Subsequently, Sankoh assembled and trained a force comprising 385 commandos in Liberia, who became the vanguards of the RUF. In turn, Taylor authorized nearly 2,000 combatants from the NPFL to serve as ‘Special Forces’ within the rank and file of the RUF.⁴²

Foday Sankoh died in a Freetown hospital on 30 July 2003 while in custody of the Special Court. His partner in crime, Charles Taylor, remains on the loose. According to a 30-page confidential report to the Special Court in Sierra Leone, he “is a clear and present danger to West Africa and until he is in custody the entire region will be unstable, risking further conflicts.”⁴³ According to the report, Taylor masterminded an assassination attempt against Guinea’s President Lansana Conté in January 2005, plotted to overthrow the government of Côte d’Ivoire and broke the terms of his asylum in Nigeria, by travelling to Burkina Faso on 26 February (Taylor has been in exile in Nigeria since the war in Liberia came to an end in 2003).

As Taylor remains a destabilizing factor in West Africa, the call by the Special Court in Sierra Leone on the UN Security Council to help bring him to justice is a very welcome step. What is more, a statement of the Security Council has called for all individuals indicted on serious crimes against humanity by Sierra Leone’s Special Court to face trial (Taylor has been charged on 17 different accounts). At present it appears inevitable that Taylor will be put on

³⁹ UN News Centre, *Annan calls for Guinea-Bissau’s acceptance of Supreme Court’s election ruling*, 23 August 2005, see: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=15519&Cr=Guinea&Cr1=Bissau>.

⁴⁰ BBC, *Togo opposition shuns peace talks*, 20 April 2005, see: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4464079.stm>.

⁴¹ Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Report (provisional), October 2004, p. 141, par. 414.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 23, par. 72.

⁴³ Africa Confidential, *Warlord on the loose*, 27 May 2005, vol. 46, no. 11, p. 6.

trial.⁴⁴ This will most certainly be redemption to many as a symbolic act of bringing key actors responsible for atrocities committed during the Sierra Leone conflict to justice. However, it is also clear that his prospective imprisonment will not fundamentally change life conditions of the majority of the Sierra Leonean population or the security environment as a whole.

The instability across West Africa, manifested in volatile political environments and embodied by personas such as Taylor, is pronounced. Dealing with the root causes of the conflicts and conflict potential in the sub-region may prove to be a task too big for any one of the states to deal with themselves, as it has in the past.

The premise of peacebuilding is to address root causes of a conflict and to build state structures from local to state level that approximate a liberal democratic mould. A future scenario is therefore suggested that may provide new opportunities to refocus international intervention and peacebuilding as a long-term process of 20 plus years by addressing the possibilities of regional administration.

PROSPECTS FOR REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION

In the 2004 UN Report of the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, a single intergovernmental body dedicated to peacebuilding is called for. This body, denominated the Peacebuilding Commission, should have as its core function to identify countries which are at risk of sliding towards collapse; to organize, in partnership with the national Government, proactive assistance in preventing that process from developing further; to assist in the planning for transitions between conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding, etc.⁴⁵

Such lack of coordination, the report continues, is reproduced at the field level, where UN agencies and other bilateral and multilateral donors engage in some form of peacebuilding. They work too slowly and without adequate coordination, it is concluded.⁴⁶

In March 2005, Kofi Annan sought to open up of the possibility for transferring these ideas to practice at the field level in West Africa. Restoration of durable peace in the sub-region, he argues, requires that a number of key issues be addressed at the national and sub-regional level (including the exploitation of children, DDR programs for ex-combatants, cross-border flows of arms, combatants and refugees).

The presence of the UN Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau and the current mission structures in West Africa – UNOCI, UNMIL and UNAMSIL – provides for an opportunity to pursue a sub-regional approach to addressing such issues. Even as UNAMSIL withdraws at the end of the year, the deployment of a United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) to further the in-country peacebuilding process will provide a relatively strong UN presence in Sierra Leone for at least one year from 1 January 2006. In sum, deeper inter-mission cooperation would be pursued on the basis of well-

⁴⁴ It is decisive, however, that the timing of Taylor's arrest is carefully considered, particularly in regards to the pending elections in Liberia on 11 October 2005.

⁴⁵ Report of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, *A more secure world: Our shared responsibility*, United Nations Department of Public Information, 2004, p. 83, par. 264.

⁴⁶ In passing, it may be noted that the 'integrated office' envisioned for 'post-UNAMSIL' Sierra Leone provides an attempt to ameliorate this circumstance *within the borders of the country*.

consolidated mission structures that are already in place and would, among other things, improve security along shared borders.

Above all, however, a strategy of this kind would acknowledge the porosity of state borders in the region, and enable and encourage UN personnel – civilian and military – to adapt mission structures to ground level realities. For the time being, the governments of Sierra Leone and Liberia, for instance, are incapable of properly patrolling internationally recognized borders, and it may be that the withdrawal of peacekeepers will add to these complications. The open border policies of the West African Monetary Agency (WAMA) pursued by the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) to promote free trade have had the unfortunate side effect of further complicating border control. In sum, these policies, largely based on the rationale of the EC and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), have reduced obstacles for international traffickers of drugs, arms, minerals and children to ply their trade unhampered. The intimate interconnectedness of political, economic – and personal – ambitions of actors in West Africa has been long established.

Cross-border integration of mission structures is one way of dealing with the nature of conflict and its potentialities in the region. At the same time it would reaffirm in practice that solutions are to be sought regionally, *not* nationally. As is explicitly stated in the UN Secretary-General report on ‘inter-mission cooperation and possible cross-border operations’ between UNAMSIL (and from 1 January UNIOSIL), UNMIL and UNOCI, such mission spaces may have the further effect of helping to avoid mission withdrawal at a time when there is a high risk of instability in neighbouring countries.⁴⁷

Finally, taking a regional approach through inter-mission cooperation could render the prospects for creating the basis for ‘peace and security’ in the region more robust. As the High Level Report indicates, inevitably “[w]hen peacekeepers leave a country, it falls off the radar screen of the Security Council.”⁴⁸ The report goes on to argue, that while the Economic and Social Council has created several ad hoc committees to address specific cases, results have been mixed. Even the proponents of these committees acknowledge that they have not succeeded in generating crucial resources to assist fragile transition.⁴⁹

It is also clear that cross-border mission structures raise a set of problems with regard to one of the pillars on which the UN was built, “the sovereign equality of all its Members.” However, as stated in the *Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* in 2001,⁵⁰ and as reconfirmed in the 2004 High Level Panel report: “[w]hatever perceptions may have prevailed when the Westphalian system first gave rise to the notion of State sovereignty, today it clearly carries with it the obligation of a State to protect the welfare of its own peoples and meet its obligations to the wider international community.”⁵¹

These shifts in conceptions of sovereignty and intervention, however, collide with a burdensome history of Western powers in the region. For example, the president of Côte

⁴⁷ UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, *Report of the Secretary-General on inter-mission cooperation and possible cross-border operations between the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, the United Nations Mission in Liberia and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire*, S/2005/135, 2 March 2005, par. 10.

⁴⁸ Report of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Threats, op. cit., 2004, p. 71, par. 225.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect*, December 2001.

⁵¹ Report of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Threats, op. cit., 2004, p. 17, par. 29.

d'Ivoire, Laurent Gbagbo, recently stated in public that the "UN continues to treat us as though we were still colonies. As far as Ivory Coast goes," he continued, "the Security Council systematically turns to France."⁵²

Regardless of such comments the availability of UN capacities in providing the full range of peace support mission management and capabilities will remain defining for 'peace and security' in the region. For reasons of legitimacy, it is of particular importance that ECOWAS takes and maintains the lead in regional peacemaking processes. However, ECOWAS only recently began with the process of building a military capacity, the so-called ECOWAS Stand-by Force (ESF), and still lacks a comprehensive vision of civilian mission structures and management. Hence, consistent UN presence in the West African sub-region will be necessary in the foreseeable future, and pursuing concepts of 'inter-mission cooperation' and 'cross-border operations' may constitute an innovative approach to peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding in the region. The political success of this initiative will be dependent on close collaboration and acceptance from regional stakeholders, particularly ECOWAS.

DEALING WITH THE ROOT CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

A new beginning in war-torn societies is when the real challenges kick in. One gross generalizing universal is that what needs to be tackled are not only the consequences of conflict, but its very source, the 'root causes.' As outlined above, the security environment of West Africa is fragile, and alternative approaches of the international community, including the UN, may prove more sensitive to ground level realities and thus more efficient. However, consistent and flexible approaches to keeping peace and providing security in the region will not address the root causes, the structural constraints within the borders of Sierra Leone, which together have induced the potential for conflict and its perpetuation. In this regard, there is an obvious need for sustained public participation in setting and pushing the peacebuilding agenda. The bottom line is that if the bulk of Sierra Leoneans, including former combatants, do not feel even a marginal change in their life conditions, including a degree of economic stability and social equality, the process towards peace will in all probability not be sustainable. Fundamentally, basic socio-economic needs of Sierra Leone's population do not appear to be of great priority to a government which seems intent on pursuing priorities of individual state officials rather than the individual citizen.

In addition to the 'generic' or 'standard' 'root causes' of conflict, including a faltering rule of law sector, rampant disregard of human rights and economic recession, Sierra Leone has been and is faced with a particular form of inequality, which is partly due to the chieftaincy system. The latter creates special needs to reconcile traditional and democratic forms of administration in Sierra Leone, and it will remain one of the most profound challenges to consolidating the Sierra Leone state across the country. Another considerable challenge for the future stability of the country, also pertaining to inequality in Sierra Leone, is that of corruption. If this politically sensitive issue is not dealt with in a consistent manner, faith in the current government will remain weak.

⁵² News24.com, *President Lashes Out at UN*, June 6 2005, see: http://www.news24.com/News24/Africa/News/0,,2-11-1447_1717494,00.html.

Inequality

As already noted ‘peace and security’ in a strict military sense constitute a minimum necessity, if economic and political development is to take place. However, there are no quick fixes to the challenges facing the emergent administration and the people of Sierra Leone, and it may be that the role that can be played by external donors is limited. The impact of the RUF speaks to the circumstance of creeping failure of the Sierra Leonean administration, detectable since the SLPP became the first ruling party in the country in 1961 led by Sir Albert Magai; *not* the inherent strength and organization of the insurgents. In the early 1990s, a relatively small number of RUF rebels, initially just a few hundreds, supported by NPFL ‘Special Forces,’ were able to wreak massive destruction in Sierra Leone.

Despite the relative negligibility of RUF forces, however, an estimated 50,000 people were killed during the conflict and up to half of Sierra Leone’s 4.5 million people were displaced as refugees. Additionally, as the conflict evolved, diamonds became an integrated component part of social, economic and political life just as they had been the object of political competition throughout the post-independence era in Sierra Leone. Military officers held lucrative postings in resource-rich areas such as Kono; assisted military strongmen and autocratic politicians in heading off threats of democracy, and postponed the day when they might be held accountable for their actions.⁵³ Some degree of political consciousness, however poorly articulated and combined with naked greed and extreme violence, also characterized combatants among the broader base of the RUF.⁵⁴

There is a danger in giving too much weight to how violent people explain and justify their violence – to others and to themselves. Several of the RUF ex-combatants have emphasized that they regarded themselves as fighting corruption, expressing dissatisfaction, and seeking an end to autocratic rule on all levels of society.⁵⁵ At the same time, it is also possible to give these discourses too little weight, and explain the conflict in simplistic terms as driven by a few greedy warlords, altogether rejecting considerations of genuine popular grievances. One consequence is that the root causes of the conflict are not addressed; that is, the structural circumstances of an in effect non-existent state, which had enabled extreme violence to spread unhampered. Indeed, as the territories of Sierra Leone came under armed challenge from the early 1990s, it is reasonable to conclude that there was no state in the sense of an institutional framework concerned with the provision of benefits to the public. In brief, there was a set of what were essentially individuals, abusing public office for personal goals of survival, wealth and recognition.

A further cause of distortion in the Sierra Leone matrix of equality has to do with the financial dominance of the Lebanese diaspora. First, the Lebanese community robustly dominates the diamond industry (with some 20 dealerships in the centre of Bo alone, for instance). In the 1980s, the share of diamond licenses held by a considerably influential Lebanese community rose from 15% to a staggering 78%. These were granted in return for formal support to the Stevens government. In concordance with the fact that the Lebanese businesses have been the mainstay of the country’s industrial and service economies, one family (Mackie) alone remains in control of around 40% of diamond revenue. Furthermore, Lebanese businessmen dominate the retail sector in the main towns of the country (building

⁵³ David Keen, *Since I am a Dog, Beware My Fangs? Beyond A ‘Rational Violence’ Framework in the Sierra Leone War*, Crisis States Programme Working papers series, no.1, Development Research Centre, LSE, August 2002, p. 2.

⁵⁴ For an opposite point of view, see Sesay and Hughes, *op. cit.*, January 2005, p. 56.

⁵⁵ Humphreys and Weinstein, *op. cit.*, July 2004, p. 26.

materials, fabrics, foodstuffs). While this is a concern, it is by no means because of Lebanese dominance *per se*, but because it illustrates the utter marginalization of the wider Sierra Leonean population.⁵⁶ It may also be, following Malan and Meek, that precisely because of the economic power of the Lebanese community in Sierra Leone, they inevitably carry some responsibility for community development as well as the state-building process.⁵⁷

The institution of the chief

In peacetime Sierra Leone, from the local level to the level of the state, administration was characterized by arbitrary rule by the few, who oftentimes stayed in power for life, once elected. On the local level, power was fixed to the institution of the paramount chief.

The political unit of the chiefdom did not arise with the coming of European colonialism. The Sierra Leonean forests contained the aboriginal Bulom, Loko and Lumba chiefdoms.⁵⁸ However, with the arrival of the British colonial suzerains in 1787, and subsequent expansion in 1896 into the hinterlands of the protectorate, Sierra Leone was increasingly governed through the offices of traditional rulers. In turn, they were accountable to the in-country British governor. By the use of force and indirect rule through loyal chiefs, the British rulers had some success in controlling ethnic and communal antagonisms, although violent resistance to the colonial administration and its Sierra Leonean proxies occasionally erupted. A two-tiered system of British common law and traditional public consultation and arbitration provided a means of mediating social and economic conflicts, although both systems were prone to discrimination and abuse. As will be argued below, consistent political interference into administrative matters of the chiefdom has historically been and still is a condition of political life in Sierra Leone, transcending the years of conflict.

By traditional law, the local chief, considered to be a direct descendant of the original settler of a village, was empowered to monopolize land and women and to enforce traditional law. The very framework of traditional forms of authority and land tenure established structural insecurities for women and the youth, in particular.⁵⁹ In the rural areas, where the majority of Sierra Leoneans live, customary law and chiefdom governance provided abundant opportunities for human rights abuses. Customary law was not codified. Rules of procedure in Native Administration Courts were not unified.⁶⁰ Hence, chiefs and court officials possessed the jurisdiction to determine court fines, interpret customary laws and organize court procedures. With dysfunctional supervision from central government, rural gerontocrats went about their business unchallenged as they decided what taxes to levy and who to banish from the community. Indeed, Sesay and Hughes comment, “[f]orced labour,

⁵⁶ Greg Mitchell, “*Terrorists Prefer Diamonds*”: *How Predation, State Collapse and Insurgence Have Fashioned The International Exploitation Of Sierra Leone’s War Economy*, Peace Studies Papers, Fourth Series, Working Paper 8, Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, March 2005, p. 1+24.

⁵⁷ Mark Malan and Sarah Meek, Extension of government authority and national recovery, in Mark Malan, Sarah Meek, Thokozani Thusi, Jeremy Ginifer, Patrick Coker, *Sierra Leone: Building the Road to Recovery*, ISS, Monograph 80, March 2003, p. 134-135.

⁵⁸ Festus B. Aboagye, *ECOMOG: A Sub-Regional Experience In Conflict Resolution, Management and Peacekeeping in Liberia*, Sedco Publishing Limited, Accra, 1999, p. 230.

⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, op. cit., 8 December 2004, p. 13.

⁶⁰ Sesay and Hughes, op. cit., January 2005, p. 55.

arbitrary fines, banishments, and discrimination against women and young people were part of everyday life.”⁶¹

Young men caught having an affair with a junior wife of a senior landowner could quite possibly be fined so heavily that they became quasi-slaves, cultivating rice, cocoa, coffee and cassava to pay back their debt. Alternatively, they became fugitives from (arbitrary) justice, unable and – more importantly – unwilling to pay their fines. And indeed, arbitrary rule and unlimited power held by the chiefdom gerontocrats have been cited as primary causes of the war.

On the run, some young men ended up in the slip flow of migrants pouring into the diamond areas of Sierra Leone, providing the human resources on which the vast illicit diamond trade depended. One side-effect of these migration flows was that the number of agricultural workers was sharply reduced, and hence eroded the preservation of local knowledge and practices. In brief, non-diamond sectors, including the cash crop sector (palm oil), the mineral sector (iron ore, rutile and bauxite), and a diminutive industrial sector heavily concentrated in Freetown, have been largely neglected.⁶² Ironically, diamond miners earned little more than they would have done as farmers, and were oftentimes directed through paramount chiefs, on whom state officials depended to extract earnings from the diamond industry.⁶³

Others would join the RUF, and return as rebels to avenge perceived past injustices. Indeed, paramount chiefs had not only become symbols of local inequalities, but also the worst aspects of central government. In some instances, fighters of the Civil Defence Forces (CDF)⁶⁴ have condemned corrupted chiefs as strongly as the RUF, the very group, which they were mobilized to counter. In sum, a great number of the paramount chiefs were linked with the corruption and unchecked violence that was attributed to the central government. In this regard, it may be worth noting that the majority of ex-combatants across factions were underprivileged individuals,⁶⁵ caught in the social vacuum between local communities ruled by autocratic chiefs and a failing Sierra Leonean state.

The process of resurrecting the administrative system of paramount chiefs formed a component part of the DfID funded 2000-2002 Chiefdom Governance Reform Programme (CGRP). Consultations have been held in all chiefdoms to facilitate interaction between chiefs and their people, and houses have been built to facilitate their return to their

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Clapham, *op. cit.*, July 2003, p. 22.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 14. See also Ana M. Perez-Katz, The Role of Conflict Diamonds in Fueling Wars in Africa: The Case of Sierra Leone, in *International Affairs Review*, winter/spring 2002, vol. XI, no. 1, p. 64.

⁶⁴ The CDF was formed from various groups of local civil defense volunteers defending villages from RUF incursions using traditional hunter tracking techniques and magical protections. Local groups of this type – generally a master hunter and a handful of apprentices – opposed the RUF from the outset of the war, but at first mainly under army tutelage. Later (from 1993) such groups began to operate independently in the south of the country. From 1996 they were amalgamated and expanded under the patronage of the new democratic government’s deputy Minister of Defense, Samuel Hinga Norman, a former captain in the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF). This resulted in the CDF militia, a large force with around 30-50,000 members. CDF personnel were trained in use of automatic weapons and counter-insurgency techniques by a private security company (Executive Outcomes, EO) and deployed in offensive operations against the RUF during a cease-fire negotiated to facilitate peace negotiations in Abidjan during 1995-96. By the end of the war the unconventional and uninhibited CDF – perhaps as versed in atrocity as its enemy – had become the force most feared by the RUF. Paul Richards, *The Political Economy of Internal Conflict in Sierra Leone*, The Working Papers Series, Conflict Research Unit (CRU) Working Paper 21, Clingendael Security and Conflict Programme, The Hague, August 2003, p. 9-10.

⁶⁵ Humphreys and Weinstein, *op. cit.*, July 2004, p. 23.

chiefdoms.⁶⁶ Furthermore, elections were held for the 63 vacant paramount chieftaincies out of a total of 149 during 2002 and 2003. It has been alleged that these elections have been an important step forward in the process of re-establishing local authorities chosen by the local communities. Nonetheless, while chiefdom governance has been restored, hindrances to what may broadly be referred to as ‘human rights protection’ remain unchecked, largely replicating past practices.⁶⁷

Popular grievances over the chiefs’ abuse of power in the past do not appear to have been greatly prioritized in this process. However, because monitoring mechanisms of chiefdom practices by the newly established local councils are not in place, paramount chiefs have been left in a position as local strongmen.⁶⁸ By way of example, Joseph Kallie Sesay representing Diang Chiefdom recently accused paramount chief, Sheku Magba Koroma III, of having converted more than Le100 million, approximately US\$42,500, of chiefdom revenue into personal use since assuming power in 1996. Additionally, Koroma allegedly blocked a European Commission sponsored Rehabilitation and Resettlement Support Programme to be implemented by the National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation as the contractor, Sedal Enterprises, denied him Le5 million, approximately US\$ 2,100.

In the process of facilitating rapprochement between the chiefs and the people, accountability and administration of chiefdom courts proved to be of considerable popular concern. The DFID-funded Governance Reform Secretariat subsequently drew up a project proposal for chiefdom courts reform, which nonetheless remains to be funded.⁶⁹ Above all, considering the role that paramount chieftaincies played in pre-war – indeed pre-independence – Sierra Leone, it is projects of this kind that are needed. Otherwise, the process of assisting the resurrection of paramount chieftaincies may end up as one of those honourably intended, yet ill-considered forms of external intervention, which are at best ineffective, at worst counter-productive to the Sierra Leone peace process.

The twenty-fifth report of the Secretary-General on UNAMSIL indicates that a grave concern in contemporary Sierra Leone is the potential for instability between local councils and paramount chieftaincies over the distribution of resources and responsibilities.⁷⁰ Indeed, news reports allege that taxes on the same goods and services are levied by both local councils and chiefdom administrations. Potential conflicts of interest also stand forth as some chiefs are members of both chiefdom councils and local councils.⁷¹

Without a razor-sharp division of labour between jurisdiction of the 19 local councils on the one hand and the 149 chiefdoms outside of the Western Area⁷² on the other, turf wars are imminent. This is particularly the case, as these two levels of administration have not co-existed since 1972, when local government was *de facto* suspended. Today, however, the local councils are tasked to oversee the performance of the chiefdom councils (as well as land surveying, registration and planning, regulating local commerce and industry, constructing

⁶⁶ Sesay and Hughes, op. cit., January 2005, p. 64.

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p. xxiv.

⁶⁸ In May 2004, Local Councils were elected for the first time in 32 years.

⁶⁹ Sesay and Hughes, op. cit., January 2005, p. 64.

⁷⁰ UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, op. cit., 26 April 2005, par. 49.

⁷¹ Department for International Development, *Identifying Options for Chiefdom and Community Governance in Sierra Leone*, October 2004, p. 19.

⁷² The Western Area and parts of Bonte Island are settled by the Krios, descendants of returned slaves, who do not live under the institution of the paramount chief. See Department for International Development, op. cit., October 2004, p. 8.

and maintaining roads and waterways, etc.).⁷³ At present, in mid-2005, the relationship between local councils and chiefdom councils remains unclear in terms of who collects taxes and distributes precepts from chiefdoms to Local Councils; the relationship and authority of paramount chiefs relative to local council chairpersons, especially in disputes over natural resources and land.⁷⁴

Among initiatives undertaken to clarify misconceptions of jurisdiction between local councils and chieftaincies have been 3-day workshops for paramount chiefs and local council Chairpersons on their respective roles and responsibilities under the Local Government Act. Such initiatives are an obvious necessity. However, because local councils, as opposed to chieftaincies, constitute a *de facto* new layer of governmental authority, much greater attention should be given to understanding an administrative conglomerate of this kind. This is the case with respect to both international and national actors involved in the Sierra Leonean peacebuilding process.

Furthermore, while the election of local councils is based on universal suffrage, held every fourth year, the paramount chief is elected for life by a limited number of chiefdom councillors, gerontocrats, that is, elderly male local tax payers. Only members of recognized ruling houses are officially allowed to contest the elections.⁷⁵

In sum, there is therefore a strong need to understand the administrative conglomerate of quasi-democratic institutions vs. the institution of a chief, and more importantly how this administrative set-up affects local conceptions of democratic conduct. In many ways, it appears that citizens of Sierra Leone are caught between a rock and a hard place. As point of departure, a budding belief in Sierra Leone as a democratic state depends on the government – central and local – delivering services to the population. In turn, if citizens perceive that services are indeed delivered, that paying taxes is translated into schools, medical care and roads, a change of culture may dawn on the horizon.⁷⁶ For the past several decades, however, the only recognizable source of authority and (quasi-)security has, for example, been provided by chiefs, rebel groups and the CDF. To build a sense of legitimacy of the central state, and its local representations, will therefore be a fundamental challenge of the Freetown administration in the years to come.

The equivocal relationship between central and local authorities has been further destabilized by uninterrupted interference of central administration officials into chieftaincy matters. Recently, Chernoh Alpha M. Bah, Director of the Africanist Movement-Sierra Leone, accused Agriculture Minister Dr. Sama Mondeh and other central government officials of manipulating the Sandoh chieftaincy elections in the diamond rich Kono District in favour of one aspirant, Sheku Fasuluku. His father, now deceased and former MP Aiah Sonsiama Fasuluku, was a key member of the SLPP. Considerable challenges to consolidate a complex

⁷³ Commonwealth Local Government Forum, *Country Profile: Sierra Leone, The Local Government System in Sierra Leone*, see: http://www.clgf.org.uk/index_profiles.htm.

⁷⁴ Department for International Development, *op. cit.*, October 2004, p. 18.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ It should be noted that the Sierra Leonean government is virtually destitute of domestic revenue raising capacity, almost entirely sustained from outside through aid. This clearly challenges the ability of local councils, for instance, to provide services financed by taxes collected among the population. World Bank data show that no manufactured goods were exported from the country from 1980 at all. With the collapse of the legitimate economy, the government's ability to collect revenues was cut off, and people who were deprived of livelihoods have needed to look for alternative means of subsistence, with crime and engagement in conflict as prominent among those alternatives. Clapham, *op. cit.*, July 2003, p. 19+22-23.

administrative network of liberal democratic and traditional administrative structures therefore remain. That this will be a challenge in the years to come is only emphasized by historical precedence of government interference in the local affairs of the chieftaincies. During his reign as ‘paramount chief’ of the Sierra Leonean state, Siaka Stevens systematically undermined any positive role that local chiefs may have been able to play, reinforcing the use of force and indirect rule, established during colonial rule. He removed all chiefs whose loyalty was in question and appointed outsiders to the throne. Tightening and further centralizing administration of the chieftaincies, Stevens abolished the old British offices of the district commissioners and replaced them with what has been referred to as provincial secretaries, i.e. individuals loyal to the central administration. Under the tutelage of patronage, paramount chiefs became lackeys of Stevens and his entourage in Freetown.

The further breakdown of meaningfully distinguishing between levels of authority in Sierra Leone, and ‘public office’ becoming an instrument for individual enrichment and security provision was, as could be expected, solidified during the conflict. The Kangari Hills, in the southern part of the country, was an important axis during the war between the CDF and RUF from 1998-99. Two powerful chiefs – Samuel Hinga Norman, the Kabbah government’s deputy Minister of Defence and principle architect of the CDF, and Norman’s main northern ally, the paramount chief of Bonkolenken, shared mining interests. A Mende, Norman had a gold mine secured by Sandline operatives (a private security company) in Valunia Chiefdom, his home area. The paramount chief of Bonkolenken, Bai Sunthaba, a Temne, once a mining engineer in Kono, was anxious to reclaim his chiefdom from the RUF, and turned to Norman for advice. The result was a decision to sponsor large numbers of Temne-speaking subjects as Kamajors (militiamen of the Mende tribe from the South and East of the country). That is to say, Temne speakers were initiated according to a Mende rite, a quite striking inter-cultural innovation. And indeed, with some military advice from Executive Outcomes, Bai Sunthaba succeeded in driving the RUF northwards, and regained his chiefdom.⁷⁷

For better or for worse, however, in the dissolution of war, the RUF, while causing massive havoc, has had significant ramifications for local-level conceptions of hierarchy. The movement ignited social consciousness of the right to equal opportunity and access to political power, within the circle of RUF combatants as well as among their victims. In effect, it has been argued, this has led to the social condition that “patrimonial deference is dead or dying.”⁷⁸ While without a clearly identifiable ideological basis and while conscripting through kidnapping or the temptation of winning power and status by wielding a gun, the RUF did represent genuine dissatisfaction in the population – on the local and the national level.

Officially, the basic political unit of the chieftaincy system is the ‘section’, made up of a number of towns or villages, headed by a section chief or sub-chief. The paramount chief has jurisdiction over the sections within the chiefdom. Paramount chiefs and section chiefs form the political hierarchy, together with town chiefs and village headmen. Paramount chiefs are elected for life from hereditary families known as ‘Ruling Houses’ by an electoral college of chiefdom councillors.⁷⁹ In all chiefdoms one chiefdom councillor is elected by every 20 taxpayers in that chiefdom. Chiefdom councillors assist the paramount chief in the

⁷⁷ Richards, *op. cit.*, August 2003, p. 29.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁹ Department for International Development, *op. cit.*, October 2004, p. 8.

administration of the chiefdom and the dissemination of directives. Collectively they constitute the chiefdom council, presided over by the paramount chief.

The Ministry of Local Government and Community Development, headed by Sidikie Brima, is required to monitor both the activities of local councils and the functions which chiefdom councils have sole responsibility for under the Chiefdom Councils Act.⁸⁰ On his recommendation and/or the recommendation of the Minister of Finance or the National Electoral Commission, the President may with the approval of two-thirds of all members of parliament take over local councils if they make a request and it is in the public interest, if a state of emergency has been declared or if it has become impossible for a local council to function. Nonetheless, according to the 2004 Local Government Act, the services historically provided and powers held by chiefdom authorities largely remain in place, namely to keep law and order, regulate land use, uphold customary law and the custody and practices of customs and traditions.⁸¹

Understanding relations between chieftaincies and democracy

Peacebuilding through governance programs that combine traditional authority and liberal democratic administrative structures needs to be fundamentally evaluated. As of yet, there is only very little authoritative information on the repercussions of decentralization for the institution of the chief – and *vice versa*.

A program should therefore be developed which opens up to the possibility of assessing the democratic nature of an administrative system of this kind (including popular conceptions of democracy, links between the institutions of paramount chiefs and local councils and the overall role of chiefs on the local level and on the state level). This is important in order to assess the overall sustainability of Sierra Leone and for the West African sub-region as a whole.

Governance shapes a society's capacity to reconcile conflicting interests and manage change in a peaceful manner. During the Cold War, international development and security agencies did not concern themselves directly with governance. As traditional peacekeeping has transformed into multifunctional peace support operations, integration of security and development has gathered momentum and led to the active involvement of international agencies in democratization projects, including constitution making, election monitoring and public sector reform and active popular involvement in the domestic political process of the host country.

In this regard, the peace process in Sierra Leone provides significant lessons to be learned. For all intents and purposes, such lessons may inform international interveners as they set out to rebuild weak or failed polities, whose populations have experienced conflict.

The provisional report of the TRC, released in October 2004, called “for the return of Chiefs to their traditional roles and functions.” However, the meaning of this statement and actions which should be undertaken to return ‘Chiefs to their traditional role’ is quite unclear. As the report itself indicates, “[n]ew chieftaincies created by the colonial power after the 1896 Hut Tax War were deeply resented by the long-standing hereditary ruling houses.”

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 20.

⁸¹ Commonwealth Local Government Forum, op. cit.

Furthermore, “[i]n the post-independence period, chieftaincies were corrupted by their co-option and politicization by successive central governments. Chiefs lost sight of their traditional roles and neglected their duties to their subjects.”⁸² In sum, the question remains what ‘traditional role’ denominates in the particular context of Sierra Leone. The TRC Report is silent on the issue. What it does state, and what may be noted as an obvious point of departure in this regard is that the legal responsibility and authority of the chiefs should be carefully examined.⁸³ It should be emphasized that these considerations do not constitute a frontal attack on the institution of paramount chiefs as such. Indeed, apart from constituting a historic focus of local political struggles, the institution of the chief has also, for better or worse, posed a bulwark against the encroachment of ‘state officials.’

The intention is rather to emphasize the urgent need for a deeper understanding of how traditional liberal democratic institutions can be calibrated against locally established structures of authority to constitute a stable system of administration for the future of Sierra Leone.

Very few international officials truly understand the nature and social structures of the paramount chief institution in Sierra Leone.⁸⁴ This may provide one simple explanation why any consistent approach towards reforming the chieftaincy system subsequent to its resurrection, has been conspicuously absent from all internationally-driven governance projects. What is clear is that an instinctive reluctance to engage with local complexities will not bring the process of building and consolidating a sustainable state system across the territories of Sierra Leone forward.

Contemporary corruption

One of the most conspicuous aspects of the current political Sierra Leonean landscape is the auto-protective tendencies of the SLPP government. It may, Eurocentric or not, be denominated as corruption, and largely a continuation of past practices. Tackling corruption will be a primer for the future – without it, the image of the Sierra Leonean central government will remain tarnished. Real economic development, building and consolidating state administration across the country’s territory are indeed of primary importance. However, as noted above, for better or for worse, ten years with the RUF shedding rhetoric of fighting a self-serving, clientelist Freetown administration, did not pass unobserved by the general population. It will therefore remain ever suspect that mechanisms put in place to monitor proper conduct of the government remain in the hands of those who are to be monitored, i.e. SLPP parliamentarians. In sum, there is a very real possibility that the social capital of trust evaporates to expose a government which does not significantly differ from Stevens’ pre-war APC regime.

The Freetown administration, heavily dominated by the SLPP, is unable to provide basic benefits to the general population. This circumstance is magnified by allegedly widespread corruption and a faltering rule of law sector (comprising activities of the police, the prosecution, the legal profession, the courts, the prison services, and human rights institutions such as the ombudsman).

⁸² Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Report (provisional), October 2004, p. 122, par. 256.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 123, par. 256.

⁸⁴ Discussion with DfID Sierra Leone official, Accra, July 2005.

Recently, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) pressed charges against the Director General of Sierra Leone Water Company (SALWACO), Justin Musa. He allegedly embezzled over US\$ 3.5 million provided by the African Development Bank earmarked for securing safe drinking water in the urban areas of Makeni, Bo and Kenema. A major concern remains, however, that the ACC is supervised by President Kabbah. According to Article 2, paragraph 2 of the 2000 Anti-Corruption Act, “[t]he Commission shall consist of... a Commissioner who shall be the head; and... a Deputy Commissioner; both of whom shall be appointed by the President with the approval of Parliament.”

In other words, institutionalized presidential interference, backed up by a parliament in which SLPP holds 83 of a total 112 seats, inhibits serious investigations of fraud into the higher echelons of government. What is more, the ACC and the Complaint Bureau for ex-combatants within the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, are both located in Freetown – i.e. in effect inaccessible to the vast majority of Sierra Leone’s population if known to it at all.

An obvious point to make is that corruption siphons money away from essential government services, scares off investment and inhibits development. Ultimately, on all levels of society, corruption or – maybe more appropriately, parallel institutions – remains stronger than law in Sierra Leone. The continued assault before, during and after the conflict on the rule of law sector has weakened capacities of state institutions to perform to the benefit of the average citizen of Sierra Leone.

Indeed, these are root causes, which transcend the years of conflict in the 1990s, and that cannot be allowed to persist if there is to be a consolidation of the peace.

A visible rule of law sector – serving justice

In a recent report from the UN Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit on the economic impact of peacekeeping, it was argued that discussions are oftentimes framed by “a handful of negative anecdotes.”⁸⁵ An oft-cited fact is that peacekeeping provides ‘peace and security,’ which is the condition for even basic economic development. However, ‘peace and security’ is a basic precondition for development in all sectors of society, be it the economic sector, the political sector or society as a whole.

Provided that ‘peace and security’ can indeed be sustained, what is now needed first of all, are decisive steps towards consolidating a strong and *visibly* independent rule of law sector, if necessary managed by international officials in key positions (currently an assistant Commissioner supplied by Britain’s Department for International Development (DfID) serves with the ACC).

The TRC and the Special Court were established for post-conflict reconciliation purposes. Corruption, however, and the abuse of public office have been an integral part of governance, since the Duke of Kent handed over ‘royal instruments’ on May 27th 1961, whereby Sierra Leonean independence was recognized.

⁸⁵ Michael Carnahan, Scott Gilmore and Monika Rahman, *Interim Report Phase I: Economic Impact of Peacekeeping*, Peacekeeping Best Practices, UN, April 2005, p. i, see: <http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbpu/library/ECONO%20IMPACT%20OF%20PK%20Interim%20Report.pdf>.

Ordinary people now need to attain a sense of justice being served in Sierra Leone, which will be a fundamental break from the immediate and more long-term past. This is particularly the case as data collected by the Sierra Leone government has found that 70% of the population continues to live on less than the National Poverty Line of Le2,111 (approximately US\$1) per day.⁸⁶

Above all, the appointment of the ACC Commissioner should be separated from the powers of the presidency. Of equal importance is to separate the positions of the chief judicial officer of the country, the Attorney General, and the Minister of Justice. By implication, the Attorney General should unambiguously enjoy tenure of office.

Such steps should subsequently be clearly communicated through FM radios to the general public. They should not be articulated as technical-institutional reforms, but in a language that the gamut of the Sierra Leonean population will understand; that central authorities, once and for all, are breaking with past clientelist practices. The circumstance that many Sierra Leoneans have no experience with functional state services suggests the extent of challenges ahead for internal and external actors as they have embark upon post-conflict peacebuilding in the country.

CONCLUSION

The political, social and economic dynamics which led to conflict in Sierra Leone during the 1990s can partially be traced back to the early years of independence. Hence, what will have to be tackled are not only the consequences of the conflict, but its very source, the long-term and deep-rooted causes. Central to building a state administration in Sierra Leone will now be to confer on the leadership and population of Sierra Leone, with their active involvement, what a legitimate state may look like. In this context it is worth mentioning that one size does not fit all. There are no general models which can easily be implemented without carefully calibrating them against ground-level realities.

Significant steps have been taken by UNAMSIL and DfID towards both stabilizing the country and subsequently building the capacity of the RSLAF for democratic accountability. The army, however, may indeed prove a long-term destabilizing actor in the country, as it has been in the past, if it is not counterpoised by democratically elected, but more importantly, accountable leaders. While international commitments to defence sector reforms will no doubt provide short and medium-term security and stability in Sierra Leone, there is a danger that a well-trained and efficient army will turn against the government that it serves; for real political reasons or because of real grievances over a Freetown government and other structures of authority that cannot or will not provide basic benefits to the population.

Initiatives taken within the borders of Sierra Leone may indeed be conducive to the peace process. However, the country fundamentally lacks a supportive regional system to consolidate the peace process.

Therefore, in concordance with the March 2005 UN report on ‘inter-mission cooperation and possible cross-border operations’ in West Africa, it is suggested that the UN, in close

⁸⁶ Government of Sierra Leone, Poverty Alleviation Strategy Coordinating Office (PASCO), *Status Report on Preparatory Activities for the Full Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Sierra Leone*, 15 September 2004, p. 4, par. 11.

cooperation with ECOWAS, should pursue a more integrated and long-term approach to regional conflict management. There are obvious, perhaps insurmountable, political sensitivities involved in creating mission-structures that cut across internationally recognized borders. Considering the changed nature of international intervention in the post-Cold War era, however, and the ensuing greater leeway of the international community, such innovative approaches may be well worth while exploring. First, in the particular case of West Africa, the presence of the UN Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau and three regional UN missions in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire provide for a unique possibility to pursue sub-regional security strategies. Second, such strategies would assist in acknowledging the porosity of state borders in the region as well as enable and encourage UN personnel – civilian and military – to adapt mission structures to ground-level realities. Finally, a regional approach could lead to a clearer understanding of the circumstance that there are no quick fixes to building regional and sustainable peace, and that a long-term approach is necessary.

It is equally true that while alternative region-wide approaches to security and stability may prove more efficient, such an approach will not address the deeply and historically rooted structural constraints to peace within the borders of Sierra Leone. The bottom line is that if the bulk of Sierra Leoneans do not feel even a marginal change in their life conditions, the process towards peace will in all probability not be sustainable.

This paper has therefore explored a number of the circumstances that are in great need of being addressed in the immediate future; circumstances which have enhanced the potential for conflict in the first place and still apply to the current political landscape of Sierra Leone. In peacetime, from the local level to the level of the state, administration has been characterized by arbitrary rule by the few, who as a rule stayed in power for life, once elected, and handed down power to apprentices in a clientelist manner.

International actors have been intent on resurrecting the institution of the paramount chief in Sierra Leone, as it has been regarded as decisive in reconsolidating local authority. A major concern, however, has been that repression exercised by chiefs locally in the post-independence era has largely been reproduced during and after the conflict, which came to an official halt in 2002. The very powers vested in the local chief – elected for life by a limited suffrage – therefore remain of significant concern, particularly as no initiative has been taken to reform this institution. This may prove particularly urgent as the newly re-established local councils and the central government, mandated to monitor chieftaincy matters, remain to be fully functioning. It will also be a primer for strengthening the process of decentralization.

Furthermore, a greater understanding is needed of how traditional liberal democratic institutions can be calibrated against locally established structures of authority to constitute a stable system of administration in Sierra Leone. Shying away from engaging with local complexities will not bring the process of building and consolidating a sustainable state system across the territories of Sierra Leone forward. A framework should be developed, which opens up for the possibility of assessing the democratic nature of an administrative system of this kind (including popular conceptions of democracy, links between the institutions of paramount chiefs and local councils and the overall role of chiefs on the local level and on the state level). This is important to assess the overall sustainability of Sierra Leone and, indeed, to gain greater understanding of the dynamics in the West African sub-region as a whole.

Sierra Leone as a state was never consolidated in earnest following independence. The structures of corruption and repression that existed throughout the post-independence era have not been robustly dealt with – neither by national nor international actors. Excessive top-down control and abuse of public office largely remain intact. Because these circumstances to a large extent contributed to the destabilization of Sierra Leone in the first place, corruption will have to be consistently dealt with in a manner which the general population can understand and appreciate as a robust pursuit of equality by the establishment. As pertains to the ACC, its Commissioner should be separated from the powers of the presidency. Of equal importance is to separate the positions of the chief judicial officer of the country, the Attorney General, and the Minister of Justice. By implication, the Attorney General should unambiguously enjoy tenure of office.

It is evident that the utter breakdown of Sierra Leone in the 1990s was preceded by long-term ‘bad,’ if not the outright absence of governance. Central to building a state administration in the country will now be exactly that: *building* a state. It makes little sense to ‘re-build’ what was patently broken prior to the civil war, for it is the nature of that state that gave rise to violent conflict in the first place.

In closing it is important to make the obvious point: while building a functioning state in Sierra Leone will be a daunting task, there are obvious limits to what international agencies can meaningfully do – not only because of limited knowledge of the context in which they work. If a robust national leadership from the local to the national level is neither in place, nor genuinely responsive to international initiatives or, more importantly, outright popular grievances, Sierra Leone’s future stability will remain uncertain. What is certain is that weeding out the root causes of the recent conflict, indeed to fully understand them, will be a long-term process.



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