

Chapter Six

The Dynamics and Nature of International Responses to the Sierra Leonean Crisis

6.0 Introduction

Consistent with our problem definition in Chapter One, that seeks to undertake a comparative analyses of the Liberian and Sierra Leone conflicts and the role of Nigeria and the international community in resolving these conflicts, Chapter Six is the second substantive empirical chapter that analyses the nature and dynamics of the Nigerian-led ECOWAS response and other international response mechanisms to the conflicts in Sierra Leone. This is both in continuation of and in comparison to Chapter Five which analysed Nigerian and international roles in resolving the Liberian conflict. As argued earlier-on in the introductory Chapter, this thesis seeks to examine if (a) there were any differences in the nature and design of international response mechanisms and (b) the way and manner in which such differences may have contributed to the outcome of such collaborative efforts. Adopting this approach is useful and important because not only does it show the difficulties faced by the international community in responding to two seemingly similar conflicts, but it, also, does show several things. First, it shows the changing nature of

Nigerian leadership¹; the extent of the commitment of the international community; and how these combinations impacted on the eventual resolution of the conflict. Not only that, our initial argument was that the dynamics and nature of the conflict itself was such that it did not lend itself to easy resolution because of the multiple interests of faction groups and the basic presupposition of Nigeria and the international community that faction groups could be ordered to lay down their weapons.

In Chapters Two to Five the argument was made that international governmental organisations (IGOs), whether global, regional or sub-regional, usually have among their objectives the prevention of conflicts and the peaceful settlement of disputes should conflicts take place.

However, intra-state conflicts and especially the nature of the Liberia and Sierra Leone conflicts had different characteristics that posed specific dilemmas for such multilateral organisations as to whether or not to intervene. On the one hand, in deference to state sovereignty and the non-interference principle, international organisations are tempted to turn a blind eye to such conflicts. At the same time, the most basic right – the right to life – has been found to be constantly violated on a large scale in intra-state conflicts around the world.² Warring factions tend to violate all tenets of conventional war and

¹During the period of intervention, five different Nigerian regimes were changed. The first regime that took Nigeria into the intervention process was led by Ibrahim Bagangida (1989 - 1993). This was followed by the short-lived Ernest Shonekan civilian caretaker administration in the aftermath of the cancellation of the 1993 democratic elections. Following this administration was Sani Abacha between (1994 - 1998), Abdusalaam Abubakar (1998 - 1999). Finally, a civilian administration led by the incumbent President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 - 2002) saw to the resolution of the Sierra Leone conflict.

²Since the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) submitted its report on the right to intervene and the right to protect there have been new developments in this field. However, it is my view that there are two key operational issues that have been overlooked and about which not much work has been done. These are: (a) the will to protect and (b) the capacity to protect.

target non-combatants.³ In addition, there are the spillover effects of refugees flocking into neighbouring states and the fear that such conflicts could be replicated in neighbouring states and could lead to the destabilization of a whole region.⁴

Perhaps, nowhere is the reluctance of international organisations to intervene better illustrated than the Sierra Leonean Civil War, which broke out in 1991. Neither the UN, the Organisation of African Unity (now African Union) nor the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which had earlier intervened in neighbouring Liberia, as discussed in the previous chapter were eager to get involved in Sierra Leone, in spite of the fact that, it had witnessed one of the worst human rights violations.

Against this background, this chapter examines the initial 'reluctance' of both the UN and ECOWAS to get involved in Sierra Leone, the dynamics of their eventual involvement and how they have impacted on the peace process up to date. What is interesting about the Sierra Leone case that needs examination is the way in which Nigeria through its Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and the Nigeria Armed Forces Agreement (NIFAG) with the Sierra Leone government bore the brunt of the 'international process' until United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) troops finally arrived. Even when the wider international community eventually intervened, there were frictions between the Nigerian-led troops and the other troops about command, control and leadership

These, I argue will need to be examined in some further detail.

³The targeting of non-combatants has almost become a specific aspect of what is increasingly being termed as 'new wars'.

⁴One can argue that the epicenter of West African conflicts is gradually shifting from Liberia, to Sierra Leone to Guinea and now Cote d'Ivoire. During the Ivorian peace talks in Lome, Togo, Gnassingbe Eyadema was reported to have mused about the next West African country to be engulfed by conflict.

responsibilities. These differences, which could not be kept under wraps, eventually became public knowledge with the public resignation of the Indian commander of UN forces and a public letter accusing the Nigerian military leadership in Sierra Leone of blatant corruption.

6.1 Dynamics of the War

On 23rd March 1991, a small band of rebels calling itself the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) entered Sierra Leone from Liberia with the avowed aim of overthrowing the All Peoples Congress government, which had ruled the country since 1968.⁵ That marked the beginning of a bloody civil war which has lasted more than a decade and in which peace has proved very elusive.⁶

The incursion was generally viewed as an extension of the Liberian crisis, which had begun two years earlier.⁷ Charles Taylor, now President of Liberia but then the leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) had threatened to invade Sierra Leone for offering its territory as a base for the launching of the ECOWAS's ECOMOG intervention. But it is, also, significant to note that the deep roots of this particular conflict

⁵For some of the historical arguments about the rationales for the conflict, see, Ibrahim Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction: The Origins and Character of the Revolutionary United Front', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36, No. 2, 1998; Abdullah, Ibrahim & Patrick Muana, 'The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone: A Revolt of the Lumpen Proletariat', in Christopher Clapham, ed, *African Guerrillas*. Oxford: James Currey.

⁶For the specific dynamics of the war, see Abdullah, Ibrahim & Yusuf Bangura, Eds, 'Youth Culture and Political Violence: The Sierra Leone Civil War', *African Development* 22, Nos. 2 & 3, 1997.

⁷See also Brown, M. 1999. *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner). Brown argues that the only conflict that has spilt-over, was the Liberian conflict into the Sierra Leone conflict.

lay in Sierra Leone's history. The argument I make in this chapter is that the particular ruling style of the All Peoples Congress (APC) era which had been characterised by, among other things, over centralisation of state machinery, rural isolation, factionalism and ethnic politics, corruption and abuse of power, as well as, neglect and misuse of youth, contributed in no small measure to the conflict.⁸ The nature and the survival strategies of the APC's rulers and their rivals created distinctive political conflicts that contributed to creating Sierra Leone's complex political emergencies.⁹

The incursion was timed to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of a failed coup attempt against the APC in which the rebel leader, Corporal Foday Sankoh, had been implicated, imprisoned and subsequently dishonourably discharged from the army.¹⁰

The rebellion had also begun just when the APC had grudgingly given- in to the re-introduction of multi-party democracy after more than a decade of one party rule. Thus when initial efforts by the ill-equipped and ill-trained Sierra Leonean Army failed to quell the rebellion, the APC government under General Joseph Momoh,¹¹ prosecuted the war half-heartedly, in part, as a strategy for avoiding the increasing international pressure on his government to introduce multi-party competitive democracy; until, it was overthrown by

⁸Anatole Ayissi & Robin Edward Poulton, (eds.), *Bound to Cooperate: Conflict, Peace and People in Sierra Leone*, UN Institute for Disarmament Research UNIDIR, Geneva, 2000. Also Abdullah, op cit, Abdullah Muana, op cit.

⁹Duffield, op cit and Reno, op cit.

¹⁰West Africa, 22-28 May 2000, p.18.

¹¹For a chronological development of the Sierra Leone crisis, see *Africa Confidential*, 'Chronology of Sierra Leone from 1991 to 1998: How Diamonds Fuelled the Conflict' at <http://wwwAfrica-confidential.com/sandline.html>, Reno, William. *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Also Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF) 'Footpath to Democracy' unpublished manuscript, 1995 at <http://www.sierra-leone.org>. Koromah, Abdul K. *Sierra Leone: The Agony of A Nation*. United Kingdom: Andromeda Publications, 1996.

junior officers in April 1992.

A military junta, the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) was established in 1992 with 27 year-old Capt. Valentine Strasser as Head of state. In the aftermath of the takeover, the NPRC rejected initial efforts by the RUF to hold out an olive branch for peace negotiations and rather opted for a military defeat of the RUF.¹² The next four years witnessed gross violations of human rights and crimes against humanity by all parties to the conflict¹³. The NPRC's enthusiasm to end the war soon waned as the young officers became mired in the very corruption that characterised the APC regime.¹⁴

By 1996, it had become obvious that the NPRC, like the regime it overthrew, was not only incapable of ending the civil war but was also using it as a pretext for the military's continued stay in power in the face of increasing domestic agitation for a return to pluralistic democracy. The NPRC's efforts to stem the tide of RUF attacks changed fundamentally when the government contracted the Executive Outcomes (EO) of South Africa to lead the onslaught against the RUF.¹⁵ The role of EO in the prosecution of the war is so crucial that a small section will be devoted to it. This section will seek to explain the role played by EO, their collaborative engagement with ECOMOG forces and the whole issue of the privatisation of war.¹⁶

¹²David J. Francis "Torturous Path to Peace: The Lome Accord and Post-war Peace building in Sierra Leone", *Security Dialogue*, Vol.31, No.3, September 2000, pp.257-373.

¹³Human Rights Watch. *Forgotten Children of War: Sierra Leonean Refugee Children in Guinea*. Vol. 11, no. 5, July 1999.

¹⁴Abdullah & Muana, op cit, p.181.

¹⁵For two of the most recent materials, see Abdel-Fatau Musah & J. 'Kayode Fayemi. Eds. *Mercenaries — An African Security Dilemma*. (London: Pluto Press, 2000); J. Cilliers & Peggy Mason, Eds. *Peace, Profit or Plunder: The Privatisation of Security in Africa*.(Pretoria: ISS, 1999).

¹⁶There is an increasing literature on the privatisation of war.

6.1.1 The Dilemmas of Sierra Leone's Mercenary Dependency

This section attempts to disentangle the web of disinformation concerning the role and deeds of corporations and mercenaries in Sierra Leone since 1994. Several issues inform the analysis to be undertaken here. The specific relevance to this thesis is reflected in the way that in Nigeria's and the international community's difficulties in dealing with the Sierra Leone conflict, there was a willingness to employ the services of a group of actors who had hitherto been overlooked.

Although the Sierra Leone government placed its trust in EO, the only country until then that had used them extensively was Angola and even then they had had to leave ignominiously. However, when EO entered Sierra Leone, because the Nigerian contingent present were having serious problems prosecuting the war, the ECOWAS countries then present quickly joined the EO forces and extended military support to the National Patriotic Revolutionary Council (NPRC) by reinforcing their troops' presence in Sierra Leone. This collaboration sought to:

“protect ... equipment in Sierra Leone. The situation in that country has of recent degenerated such that we are now more preoccupied with ensuring the security of our troops there” (Abiodun Alao)

With Nigeria, Guinea and Ghana troops collaborating with EO troops in Sierra Leone to prevent the collapse of Strasser's regime and later President Ahmed Tejjan Kabbah's government, one can argue that the presence of EO and their activities in Sierra

Leone had become legitimized.¹⁷ EO became so secure in the quality of work that they were performing in Sierra Leone that they praised themselves for “restor[ing] a legitimate, democratically elected government, displaced by a coup”. Similarly, their detractors were criticized that EO successes in Sierra Leone “should be supported and praised and not shot down in flames by ‘ethical’ journalists taking the moral high ground”.¹⁸

It is within this context of insecurity that domestic and international pressure for elections was applied. Local concerns that many parts of the country were insecure and inaccessible were overlooked.¹⁹ While Chief Norman, who was the leader of the Kamajor hunters had personally led his forces to fight the RUF, he interpreted the initial successes of EO and Nigeria as enough for elections to be held. But one thing that ought to be realized is that EO and Nigeria fought in very specific areas, especially the diamond mining areas that the RUF were based and exploited to support the struggle. By refusing to accept the fact that most of the country-side were still insecure and were under rebel control and thus accessibility would be difficult. Similarly, no serious demilitarization and demobilization process had been initiated. The end result was that even if elections were held, the credibility of any such process would be spurious at best. Part of the agreement for the cessation of insurgency activities by the United Revolutionary Front (RUF) was for the removal of all foreign troops, especially EO from Sierra Leone²⁰. Subsequent information

¹⁷See <http://www.eo.com/>.

¹⁸<http://www.eo.com/>.

¹⁹Interview with Chief Hinga Norman, Abuja, Nigeria 25 October 2001.

²⁰See Article 12 of Peace Agreement, 1996. Peace Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front, Abidjan, 30 November. Eventually, EO would be withdrawn “five weeks after the deployment of the Neutral Monitoring Group (NMG)”. Similarly, other foreign troops were to be repatriated not later than three months after the deployment of the NMG ‘

pointed to the fact that the elections were flawed by serious irregularities²¹. For example during the indicated interview with Chief Hinga, he asserted that any encampment and demilitarization process would not have to affect his kamajors since they are traditional hunters and were always armed prior to the outbreak of the conflict. This was eventually used by other unofficial armed groups like the Donso's and Gbeti's not to disarm.²²

Because of the precarious nature of the security situation in the aftermath of the elections the newly installed Kabbah government was forced to continue to use the services of these mercenaries although it contravened specific OAU (now AU) conventions. Not only that, because of the contractual obligations that the Strasser administration had with EO, the Kabbah regime was forced to continue to use their services. Since then Sierra Leone has managed to take a few small steps towards peace²³. On this tortuous and torturous path to peace in Sierra Leone, what has been the role of the United Nations and the ECOWAS?

6.2 Initial International Response

The Sierra Leonean crisis began at a time when the UN was preoccupied with the Gulf War and ECOWAS with that of Liberia and for a long time Sierra Leone largely

or six months after the signing of the Agreement, whichever is earlier.

²¹Abiodun Alao, 'Diamonds are Forever ... but so are Controversies: Diamonds and the Actors in Sierra Leone's Civil War', *Journal of Civil Wars*, Vol. 2, no. 3, (Autumn 1999), pp. 29 – 53, Interview with Chief Norma Hinga, Abuja, Nigeria.

²²Interview with Chief Hinga, *ibid.*

²³*West Africa* 7-13 May 2001.

escaped the attention of the international community. Thus, “half of the battle had been keeping Sierra Leone on the world’s radar screen”.²⁴

The then UN Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar had held a face-to-face meeting with the Momoh government two and half months into the outbreak of the war but he made no commitment to take direct steps to end the fighting.²⁵ And for the next three years, the attention of the UN was focused on the humanitarian needs of the displaced.²⁶

The first step by the UN to get involved in the Sierra Leonean Peace process was in 1994. Following a letter sent by Chairman Valentine Strasser requesting the UN Secretary-General to use his good offices in bringing the NPRC government and the RUF to the negotiating table, the UN appointed Felix Moshia as its Special Envoy to Sierra Leone. But his efforts failed since he could not contact the RUF.²⁷ It was his successor Berhanu Dimka, who late in 1995, succeeded in meeting the RUF leadership in Cote d’Ivoire. This marked the beginning of a series of contacts, which eventually led to the 1996 Abidjan Peace Accord.²⁸

ECOWAS’ initial response to the Sierra Leonean conflict was far more indifferent. ECOWAS as a body had regarded the war in Sierra Leone as an extension of that in Liberia and had assumed that the former would end when the latter did.²⁹ The implications

²⁴Human Rights Watch, June 1999:55.

²⁵Gershoni, Yekutiel, “War without End and End to a War: The Prolonged Wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone”, *Africa Studies Review*, Vol.40, No.2, December 1997, pp.55-76.

²⁶Human Rights Watch, June 1999, p. 55.

²⁷Ayissi & Poulton, op cit, pp.37-38.

²⁸See <http://www.sierraleone.com> for several articles interpreting the 1996 Abidjan Accords.

²⁹Gershoni, op cit, p.6.

of this assumption was that by the time ECOWAS and Nigeria decided to take the Sierra Leone cases, it had been allowed to deepen over several years. It was also initially not in a position to send another peacekeeping force to Sierra Leone when ECOMOG had proved so burdensome to the troop contributing states. It was not until 1995 that the NPRC government, through bilateral security accords, got Nigerian and Guinean forces stationed in Sierra Leone. Direct ECOWAS diplomatic and military involvement had to await the 25 May 1997 coup.

6.3 The Abidjan Peace Accord

The Abidjan Peace Accord signed on 30th November 1996 between the Kabbah government and the RUF was the first of its kind in the Sierra Leonean peace process. The accord provided among other things for cessation of hostilities, indemnity for all those who had committed human rights atrocities during the conflict and a power sharing arrangement with, the RUF and the establishment of three joint commissions to deal with issues of peace, disarmament and resettlement.³⁰

More significant for our purpose of this chapter was the UN's role in the whole process toward bringing peace to Sierra Leone. This is important because the UN in Liberia had established UNOMIL to support ECOWAS in resolving the crisis. What is important here is to understand and appreciate the extent to which the UN had learned from its Liberia experiences. Abidjan should be seen as the end-result of the earlier

³⁰Francis, op cit.

initiative of the UN together with the OAU, the Commonwealth, the Ivorian government and international non-governmental organisations like International Alert. Not only was the UN part of the process, which saw the Bio regime opening negotiations with the RUF in Abidjan in February 1996,³¹ but its Special Representative, Berhanu Dimka, also represented it at the Yamoussoukro talks in May 1996, the first with Kabbah's SLPP government.³²

The two-day Abidjan conference itself was jointly hosted by the UN and the Ivorian president³³ and together with the OAU and the Commonwealth stood as the moral guarantors of the peace agreement (Article 28).³⁴ The agreement also sought the technical and material assistance from specialised commissions of the UN (Article 20). The international community was to constitute a Neutral Monitoring Group to monitor the cease-fire (Article 11).

The UN's front line role in the Abidjan peace process illustrated above contrasted sharply with the factual role played by ECOWAS which as the sub-regional organization established to express consensual West African approaches was increasingly being sidelined. Apart from the host Ivorian government, ECOWAS member states (whether individually or collectively) were not represented in Abidjan and could therefore not be one of the guarantors. Neither was ECOWAS given any role in the implementation of the agreement. Infact, there is no reference to ECOWAS in the whole 28-article accord. This

³¹ Abraham, op cit. p.114.

³² Ayissi & Poulton, p.39.

³³ *Africa Recovery*, May 1996, p.3.

³⁴ *Africa Development*, Vol. XXII, Nos. 3/4, 1997, p.252.

virtual exclusion of ECOWAS from both the formulation and implementation of the accord somehow would contribute to its failure. At least, given the lack of professionalism of its national army and its questionable loyalty, it was important for Sierra Leone to buy into a regional security process and arrangement like ECOMOG as a medium term programme of stability and defence, but by the time Abidjan was signed, this did not seem to be the case.³⁵

Other factors, also, contributed to the failure of the Abidjan Accord and the eventual coup of 25 May 1997. First, although both parties had come to the negotiating table, the two parties did not negotiate in good faith. The RUF signed the agreement to ease the military pressure imposed on it by the civil defence force (CDF) – the Kamajors – and the government hired mercenaries, Executive Outcomes (EO). When left off the hook, the RUF resisted the implementation of the accord. For instance, Foday Sankoh was insistent that the UN forces who had been specially brought into the country to supervise the demobilisation exercise should be restricted to a mere 70 men instead of the 720 men proposed by the Kabbah administration.³⁶

On its part, the Kabbah government emboldened by the impact of the Kamajors³⁷ and the EO on the war assumed that an outright military option was possible and did not lay the Abidjan Accord before parliament for ratification³⁸. Thus the post-Abidjan situation

³⁵Yusuf Bangura, “Reflections on the Abidjan Peace Accord”, *Africa Development*, Vol. xxii, Nos. 3 / 4 1997, pp.217-241.

³⁶Abdullah, op cit, 229.

³⁷Hinga Norman interview op cit.

³⁸Francis, op cit, p.360.

was characterised by claims and counter claims on the part of both parties. Any hope of implementing Abidjan Peace Accord *in toto* evaporated following the arrest and detention of Foday Sankoh in Nigeria in March 1997 and an earlier “palace coup” within the RUF both of which were perceived to have been masterminded by the SLPP government³⁹. The international community was also partly to blame for this comedy of errors because it literally abandoned the peace process after Abidjan.

While there is no doubt that the Abidjan peace process was a failure, what it does mean in the context of this study is that the role of the international community does not necessarily guarantee peace in conflict situations if it looks for quick fixes and exit options and if there is no single state to act as a guarantor of the process. That while ECOWAS, with all its weaknesses had played a key role in Liberia, in Sierra Leone, this role was virtually negligible.

6.4 The 25 May 1997 Coup

The events of 25 May 1997 in which a coalition of the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) and the RUF overthrew the Kabbah government and established the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) junta buried the Abidjan Accord but got ECOWAS more involved at both the diplomatic and military levels in Sierra Leone.

ECOWAS’ eventual military involvement in the Sierra Leone conflict however proved controversial. In March 1997, the Kabbah government had concluded a bilateral

³⁹Abdullah, *op cit*, 229; Francis *ibid*, p.360; Ayissi & Poulton, *op cit*, 39.

defence agreement with Nigeria, both the SOFA and NIFAG mentioned earlier, which called on Abuja to provide training for the SLA and the presidential guard⁴⁰. At the time of the *coup d'etat* a Nigerian ECOMOG battalion happened to be transiting through Freetown's Lungi airport. This explains the presence of a large number of Nigerian troops in Freetown who intervened in support of the Kabbah government and tried to restore order.

Nigeria's mandate for intervening in Sierra Leone proved questionable. It was doubtful whether the bilateral defence agreement under both the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and the Nigeria Forces Agreement (NIFAG) had explicitly authorised the Nigerian troops in Freetown to respond militarily to the coup. Due to the problems of credibility faced by the Nigerian forces, it attempted to include Guinean and Ghanaian troops to give the operation an ECOMOG colouring. Although in terms of credibility this was a good strategy, because Nigeria had taken a solo approach to signing bilateral defence agreements with the government of Sierra Leone, its counterparts in the earlier ECOMOG experience did not trust their partner in the ECOMOG scheme and thus refused to join the force. Thus, whereas in Liberia, Nigeria sought some form of ECOWAS authorisation prior to intervening, in Sierra Leone, Nigeria responded militarily before it sought ECOWAS approval. Formal ECOWAS authorisation, however, was not granted until three months later. The implication of this is that by the time ECOWAS authorisation for the intervention came through Nigeria had lost credibility with its intervention partners.

This lacuna had serious implication for ECOWAS' involvement in Sierra Leone.

⁴⁰Eric G. Berman & Katie E. Sams, *Peacekeeping in Africa: Capabilities and Culpabilities*, UNIDIR, Geneva 2000.

The initial failure of the Nigerian-led force to oust the AFRC from Freetown was a psychological boost for the junta. It, also, provided opponents of the Kabbah administration, particularly defeated and disgruntled presidential candidates, Karefa-Smart and Abass Bundu, the opportunity to rally to the cause of the AFRC and question the legality of the intervention⁴¹. Abass Bundu had declared Nigeria's military actions as "totally unwarranted and unjustified". In addition, the international media continued to portray the crisis in Sierra Leone as a stand-off between the AFRC and the Nigerian-led ECOMOG force and highlighted the contradiction in a military dictatorship (Nigeria under Abacha) fighting to restore democracy elsewhere.⁴²

ECOWAS member-states were initially not unanimous on the appropriateness of the military option in Sierra Leone. Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire particularly, advocated a peaceful settlement. When ECOWAS Foreign Ministers met in Conakry on 26 June 1997 to review the situation in Sierra Leone, they created a Committee of Four, comprising Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Nigeria, as a means of getting around the apparent divisions within ECOWAS. This committee was enlarged in August 1997 to include Liberia.

The Committee of Four's initial negotiations with the AFRC in July broke down when the junta chairman, Johnny Paul Koromah, announced that his junta "would not be stampeded into hurrying matters beyond their appointed course" and proceeded to

⁴¹Lansana Gberie, "The May 25 Coup d'Etat in Sierra Leone: A Militariat Revolt?", *Africa Development*, Vol. xxii, Nos. 3 / 4, 1997, pp.148-170.

⁴²It is pertinent to note that that by this time, most of Nigeria's earlier collaborative partners in the intervention scheme had democratized and could not simply deploy troops without parliamentary approval. In some sense, Abacha was increasingly becoming a pariah among his peers.

announce a transition which would see him in office until 2001.⁴³ This forced the hands of the ECOWAS Authority in August 1997 to endorse stronger sanctions against the junta and to formally extend the scope of ECOMOG's activity to Sierra Leone "to assist in creating the conducive atmosphere that would ensure the early reinstatement of the legitimate Government of Sierra Leone".⁴⁴

The UN did not directly get involved in stabilising the situation in Sierra Leone following the May 25 Coup. What was important about the coup was the fact that the AFRC and the RUF formed a coalition government in which some of the old Sierra Leonean politicians and elites gave their support. But in terms of the norms and value systems that were about to be established, Nigeria and ECOWAS were consistent in condemning the coup. Rather, the UN declared the conflict a threat to international peace and security and commended ECOWAS on its efforts to restore the ousted regime and endorsed its sanctions regime. By resolution 1132 of 08 October 1997, the UN Security Council empowered ECOWAS to enforce an embargo against Sierra Leone.⁴⁵ Significantly, the resolution provided for the termination of sanctions if the military junta relinquished power and allowed the restoration of the democratically elected government (ibid.). While these measures strengthened the hands of ECOWAS, they did not come with the needed financial and logistical support from the UN. What this lack of initial UN enthusiasm to engage in Sierra Leone implies for this section and the thesis as a whole is that there was an increasing perception that the Sierra Leone case was unimportant to the

⁴³Gberie, op cit, p. 165.

⁴⁴ECOWAS Decision A/DEC7/8/97, Article 1.

⁴⁵Gberie, op cit., p.166.

international community. Furthermore, that the UN was selective in which conflict it would intervene in.

6.5 The Conakry Peace Plan

Despite its declared intention to stay in power for four years, the AFRC, under sustained civic and military pressure at both national and international levels, negotiated with the Committee of Five and signed a peace plan on 23rd October 1997 in Conakry, Guinea. For instance, two weeks before the meeting, ECOMOG sustained its military pressure on the AFRC with targeted bombings, which in turn intensified pressure by civilians on the junta to accede to the demands of the international community.⁴⁶

The Conakry Plan provided, inter alia, for:

- the immediate cessation of armed hostilities;
- The reinstatement of the legitimate government of President Tejjan Kabbah within a period of six months (precisely 22 May 1998);
- Cooperation of the junta with ECOMOG in order to peacefully enforce the sanctions;
- Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants;
- Immunities and guarantees to the leaders of the May 25, 1997 coup d'état; and
- Modalities for broadening the power base in Sierra Leone.

Representatives of the UN and the OAU acted as witnesses to the agreement, which also recognised that Foday Sankoh as a leader of the RUF, could continue to play

⁴⁶Gberie, op cit, p. 1997.

an active role and participate in the peace process.

A careful evaluation of this treaty and its provisions demonstrates the centrality given to issues of demobilisation and demilitarisation. Added to this was the decision to respect only governments that had come into power through the democratic process.

Chairman Koroma and his AFRC incessantly reneged on their promises and combined provocative statements with surprise attacks against ECOMOG and civilians. Not only did Koroma demand that the Nigerian troops leave Sierra Leone but also he insisted that his troops being the national army should not be disarmed.⁴⁷ To the AFRC/RUF coalition ECOWAS, whose military wing ECOMOG had fought on behalf of the Kabbah government, was hardly an impartial mediator.

On its part, the Nigerian-led ECOMOG had by late 1997 lost faith in the Conakry Peace Plan and had opted to pursue a military solution. Under the circumstances, an attack launched by the AFRC/RUF forces on 5 February 1998 outside Freetown provided ECOMOG with a justification to unleash its carefully planned operation, which led to the ouster of the coalition from Freetown. This paradoxically occurred while the ECOWAS Committee of Five was consulting the UN Security Council in New York as to the way forward to resolving this increasingly intractable conflict.⁴⁸

6.6 The Restoration of the Kabbah Government and its Aftermath

⁴⁷Berman & Sams, op cit., p.117.

⁴⁸BBC Focus on Africa, April-June 1998:11.

The immediate dividend of ECOMOG's 12 February 1998 ouster of the AFRC/RUF forces was the reinstatement of the Kabbah government, which had hitherto been in exile in Guinea. But that action had serious implications for the peace process in Sierra Leone: it rekindled concerns about the fact that ECOWAS and ECOMOG have become instruments of Nigeria's domination and raised skepticism about Nigeria's motives. The waters were muddied further by the furore that surrounded the involvement of Sandline International, a British company in the February 12 operations, reportedly with the consent of the British government. A fundamental issue was whether or not that action amounted to a violation of the UN arms embargo on Sierra Leone.

Without an army of its own, the Kabbah government would be more dependant on ECOMOG, which had logistical and financial difficulties of its own. The government thus became susceptible to any threats of ECOMOG's withdrawal. The withdrawal of the AFRC/RUF forces from Freetown into the countryside turned out to be tactical. When ECOMOG proved unable to militarily defeat them and secure the countryside, the rebels stepped up their campaign of terror.

Kabbah's government's policy of using the occasion of its reinstatement to exact retribution from alleged AFRC/RUF collaborators, instead of seeking a political compromise, undermined the peace process since it spurred the rebels to carry out further gross atrocities. The trial and continued detention of Foday Sankoh and the execution of 24 others are illustrative of this point. ECOWAS as a group did not do much after the reinstatement to kick-start the stalled peace process.

The UN's response following the restoration of the Kabbah government was also

significantly below what the situation demanded, in terms of the robustness of its response. The UN established a Trust Fund for Sierra Leone in March 1998 but contributions were negligible. The UN liaison office established in April 1998 had no more than 10 military and security personnel and its observer mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) was restricted to only 70 military observers ⁴⁹

The AFRC/RUF forces capitalising on ECOMOG's shortcomings and the demonstrated lack of the international community's commitment to the Sierra Leone government made its way back to Freetown in January 1999, and released detained AFRC and RUF members. It took ECOMOG three weeks to dislodge them.

The 06 January 1999 Freetown invasion had some intriguing consequences. For the period it lasted, the Kabbah government was restricted to the Lungi airport. Following the significant casualty toll its troops suffered, the Nigerian government announced its intention to withdraw from Sierra Leone. The Nigerian threat stepped up support for ECOMOG from Britain, USA, Canada, Italy and Netherlands. The UN responded to the flared-up hostilities by withdrawing its peacekeepers instead of augmenting its presence. UNOMSIL was reduced to a mere nine military observers.⁵⁰

Ghana and Mali, aided by the influx of Western support, increased their troops presence in Sierra Leone. Nigeria subsequently retracted its intention to withdraw and rather restructured its ECOMOG command. The issue of untenability of a military resolution was once more brought to the fore. This led to a series of diplomatic moves,

⁴⁹Berman & Sams, p cit, pp.122-3. See other relevant UN documents. UNSC, *The Fourth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone. S/2000/455.*

⁵⁰Human Rights Watch, June 1999, p.56.

which culminated in the Lome Accord of July 1999.⁵¹

6.7 The Lome Accord

The shaky steps towards the Lome Accord was taken on February 1999 when President Kabbah in a nationwide broadcast offered the RUF a chance to meet their imprisoned leader Foday Sankoh so that they could present their plans for peace to the government.⁵² Other internal measures taken prior to Lome Accord included the National Consultative Conference of April 1999 at which the “National Consensus on the Road to Peace” document was drawn; and joint RUF and Africa internal consultations⁵³

Both the ECOWAS and the UN played their respective roles with regard to the Lome Accord. President Kabbah had held consultation with four ECOWAS Heads of state in Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, Nigeria and Togo. The Togo President hosted the 44-day peace talks in his capacity as ECOWAS Chairman. In addition, the Committee of Five had participated in the talks and joined the ECOWAS Chair and the Executive Secretariat to endorse the accord.

In the case of the UN, its Special Representative, Francis Okelo was very instrumental in initiating the new peace process, just weeks after the Freetown invasion. He held consultative meetings with both the government and the RUF and was a signatory

⁵¹ECOWAS, Lome Peace Accord between the RUF and the Government of Sierra Leone.

⁵²African Agenda, No.1, 1999, p.10.

⁵³Ayissi & Poulton, op cit. p.44.

to the accord.⁵⁴ It is particularly significant to note that the UN Secretariat was not happy with the amnesty provision of the Lome Accord and its Special Representative had made such reservations before endorsing it. This would provide the basis for the UN support for the establishment of a tribunal following the failure of the Lome Accord.

The UN Contact Group on Sierra Leone, formed in 1998 to build support for Sierra Leone's efforts to restore peace, at its April 19, 1999 meeting in New York pledged its support for dialogue to reach a political settlement and resolved to mobilise international support.⁵⁵ To enable the RUF leadership to participate in the Lome talks, the UN temporarily lifted the travel ban and provided transportation and security guarantees.

The Lome Accord officially ended (at least temporarily) the armed conflict between the government of Sierra Leone and the RUF/AFRC, who agreed to total and permanent cessation of hostilities. The accord also provided for a political settlement of the civil war through a power sharing arrangement. The transitional mechanism provided included the following:

- the transformation of the RUF into a political party with rights, privileges and duties accorded to all political parties in Sierra Leone (Article 111);
- the appointment of Foday Sankoh as Chairman of the Board of the Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development (CMRRD), with the status of Vice President and answerable only to the President (Article V);
- the allocation of four cabinet and four deputy ministerial position to the RUF (Article V);

⁵⁴Ayissi & Poulton, *ibid*, p.43.

⁵⁵Francis, *op cit*, p.362.

- absolute and free pardon for the RUF leader and blanket amnesty for all crimes and gross violations of human rights by all combatants and their collaborators since the start of the conflict in March 1991 (Article IX);
- the establishment of a Commission for the Consolidation (CPP) to implement the post-conflict programme working through nine institutions (Article VI);
- equally significant were the roles provided in the Accord for ECOWAS and the UN in the Accord;
- ECOWAS was to appoint one of the five-member Council of Elders and Religious Leaders, charged to resolve differences of interpretation of the Agreement (Article VIII);
- ECOWAS was to revise the mandate of ECOMOG in Sierra Leone to peacekeeping, security of the state in Sierra Leone; protection of UNOMSIL; and protection of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration personnel (Article XIII);
- a request for additional troop contributions from ECOWAS;
- a request to the UN Security Council to provide assistance in support of ECOMOG (Article XIII);
- a request to the UN Security Council to amend the mandate of UNOMSIL to enable it undertake with ECOMOG disarmament and demobilisation (Article XIV & XVI); and
- both the ECOWAS and the UN were to stand as moral guarantors for the agreement (Article XXXV).

To what extent was the Lome Accord going to guarantee peace in Sierra Leone?

Generally the settlement was in the tradition of negotiated agreements, which are increasingly becoming a common means of ending intra-state conflicts. Such accords basically tend to appease warlords by giving them political power in exchange for military peace. Lome, therefore, attempted to address the security vulnerability of the parties to the conflict and to give each a fair share in political power and economic resources. But

given the fact that minerals, particularly, diamonds had become a major issue in the conflict, the control given to Foday Sankoh on the (CMRRD) put him at an undue advantage. There was no guarantee that he would not continue his looting ways.⁵⁶ Records discovered after Sankoh's villa was invaded in May 2000 revealed that for the ten months that he was in government he controlled more than 2000 diamonds mined by the RUF, which were never reported to the authorities.⁵⁷

If Lome was to be used as a means to appease all who had a potential for violence then one wonders why no concession was made to the AFRC? It was therefore, not surprising that the AFRC group had held UN and ECOMOG soldiers as well as civilians hostage and justified their action on the ground that they had been dealt out of the peace accord and the fate of their leader, John Paul Koroma and his lieutenants had been left in the balance.⁵⁸

Foday Sankoh for the period he was in government clearly demonstrated that while he would enjoy the perks that the amnesty-for-Peace Lome deal offered him; he wanted to keep his fighting force and diamond territories as a fall back investment.⁵⁹ This was expressed in the flagrant manner in which the RUF leadership obstructed disarmament and demobilisation of combatants.

⁵⁶See some of the fascinating arguments presented by Snow and Bagura on the issue of 'loot' in some of the contemporary wards.

⁵⁷*Newsweek*, July 10, 2000. p.22.

⁵⁸*The African Observer*, September 13-26, 1999, p.8

⁵⁹*Conflict Trends*, June 2000, p. 20.

6.8 UN, ECOWAS and the Implementation of the Lome Accord

Some of the provisions in the Lome Accord with regard to the respective roles of UNOMSIL and ECOMOG were somewhat ambiguous and would be exploited by the RUF in particular to delay disarmament. For example:

- Article XIV called on the UN Security Council to the mandate of UNOMSIL to enable it to undertake the various provisions outlined in the agreement.
- Article XVI (1) provided that “a neutral peacekeeping force comprising UNOMSIL and ECOMOG shall disarm all combatants of the RUF/SL, CDF and paramilitary groups”.
- Under Article XVI (3) UNOMSIL shall be present in all disarmament and demobilisation locations and to monitor the process and provide security guarantees to all ex-combatants”.

One of the ambiguities created here is that unlike the Cotonou Accord in the Liberian peace process, (where ECOMOG was to implement the peace agreement and UNOMIL to monitor the implementation procedures), the respective roles of ECOMOG and UNOMSIL were not clearly demarcated. This led to a ‘cold’ war between ECOMOG and UNOMSIL over who should head the disarmament exercise, funds and who should take the overall credit.⁶⁰

Secondly, given that there were less than 100 UNOMSIL troops in Sierra Leone at the time Lome Accord was signed, one wondered how its presence could be felt throughout the country without an increase in its size. And yet the RUF rejected the UN Secretary General’s proposal for 6000 UN peacekeepers.

⁶⁰*African Observer*, October 25-November 7 1999, p.8.

Thirdly, the UN Security Council Resolution 1270 created a new UN mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) to take over the functions of UNOMSIL and to replace ECOMOG. While this measure was to make the UN force more robust and to relieve the ECOMOG contributing states of their financial burdens, it tended to create operational problems on the ground, which the RUF exploited.

Foday Sankoh in a typical “giving a dog a bad name” fashion had accused UNAMSIL of not respecting the Sovereignty of Sierra Leone.⁶¹ Later the RUF abducted 500 peacekeepers along with their weapons in various deployment areas.⁶² This had strategically taken place during the transition period in which ECOMOG was withdrawing for UNAMSIL to take over. At the same time Foday Sankoh had feigned ignorance and held on to his government position until a civilian demonstration invaded his villa in May 2000.⁶³ Sankoh was later arrested and has since been in detention. Obviously these events threw the Lome Accord out of gear.

Among the factors which contributed to UNAMSIL’s initial troubles were the unfamiliarity of the terrain for the peacekeepers, the small size of its troops at the time, its timid peacekeeping mandate and the absence of a major power backing the operation. This last point was amply demonstrated by the impact the British battalion has made in stabilising the situation since May 2000.

Given the fact that the ECOMOG troops had better knowledge of the terrain and a better understanding of the issues and complexities involved, one wonders whether the

⁶¹West Africa, 13-19 March 2000, p.10.

⁶²*News Africa*, 21 May 2001, p.30.

⁶³*BBC Focus on Africa*, July-Sept. 2000, p.16.

UN retaining ECOMOG in Sierra Leone and picking the bill which was proving too much for the contributing states would not have been a better option. The excuse, however, was that the UN found itself unable to attract sufficient international support for the option, particularly, because of alleged ECOMOG atrocities and corruption⁶⁴ But it is this writer's view that it had more to do with the UN's traditional unwillingness to share its credit with a lesser organisation.

6.9 Post-May 2000

The act of betrayal the RUF demonstrated by the event of May 2000 has knocked the UN to the realisation that there is the need for more international commitment if peace could ever come to Sierra Leone. Since then the UN has replaced the Indian UNAMSIL Head, General Vijay Jetley (who was not only new to the terrain but had, also, generated controversy following allegations of impropriety against Nigerian troops), with General Opande, a Kenyan who had earlier headed UNOMIL. The size of UNAMSIL has also been increased to 13,000 with a possibility for further increase and its mandate made more robust with a shift from peacekeeping to peace-enforcement. The increased troops of UNAMSIL now include those from ECOMOG contribution states like Ghana, Nigeria and Guinea.

The UN Security Council has also imposed sanctions on Liberia in an effort to end its support for the RUF rebellion. The resolution, which followed findings of a UN

⁶⁴ West Africa 10-16 April 2000, p. 6.

investigation panel, provides an embargo on the sale of Liberian diamonds and foreign travel by its senior officials. The UN Security Council has also approved the establishment of an independent special court to try perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Sierra Leone conflict.

The ECOWAS, on the other hand, has not been supportive of the imposition of sanctions against Liberia and the establishment of a war crimes court in Sierra Leone on grounds that such actions would deter the rebels from making peace and handing over weapons.⁶⁵ ECOWAS leaders believe that Charles Taylor should be seen as a useful partner in the peace in Sierra Leone rather than the object of UN sanctions. It was from this perspective that ECOWAS had pleaded for two months grace for Liberia to put its house in order before the sanctions could take effect.

ECOWAS, however, has continued with its diplomatic initiatives since the events of May 2000. In August 2000, five West African leaders including ECOWAS Chairman, Alpha Konare of Mali and then OAU Chairman Gnassingbe Eyadema and Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo met with the RUF led by its interim leader, Issa Sesay to discuss the way forward.⁶⁶ A meeting in Abuja tried to kick-start the stalled peace process and this was followed by a historic visit by President Kabbah and two visiting Heads of state – Alpha Omar Konare of Mali (also ECOWAS Chairman) and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria – to the rebel stronghold of Kono District to assess the progress of the disarmament process there. Their host on this occasion was the interim leader of the RUF

⁶⁵See some of the resolutions by ECOWAS's Security and Mediation Council (SMC) that has placed the burden of evidence on the UN and not on the Taylor government.

⁶⁶*West Africa*, 14-20 August 2000, p. 21.

Issa Sesay.⁶⁷

In spite of these efforts on the part of the UN and ECOWAS, the Sierra Leonean peace process has taken just a few shaky steps forward since May 2000. The disarmament process has been on and off and elections have had to be postponed twice.

6.10 Conclusion

Let us conclude by distilling a few lessons from the Sierra Leonean experience. Firstly, the fact that the RUF wanted to seize power by force in spite of all the concessions afforded it by the Lome Accord clearly confirms the popular adage that 'impunity bites the finger that feeds it'.

Secondly, the events leading to the establishment of UNAMSIL is an indication that the UN has still not found a suitable formula for partnership in conflict resolution with subregional organisations like ECOWAS.

Thirdly, the humiliation of UNAMSIL reflects the wider failure of UN peacekeeping missions across Africa. Often such missions are poorly funded, poorly armed and uncoordinated. Measures therefore should be taken to convince the UN to attach the same level of urgency to conflicts in Africa as it does in other parts of the world.

Fourthly, the proof of the need for a major power to provide a backing for peace enforcement operations can be found in the stabilising influence of the British troops in Sierra Leone, one wonders, however, why they have not been integrated into UNAMSIL?

⁶⁷*West Africa* 17-23 September 2001.

Fifthly, it is of utmost importance that a workable solution should be found to the financing difficulties of regional forces like ECOMOG, which demonstrate that they could be a decisive force in the maintenance of sub-regional security. Since the UN Charter does not prohibit financing regional peacekeeping forces, it is time the Security Council undertook serious discussions in that direction.

Lastly, the role of external actors is vital in resolving conflict since they serve as credible third party guarantors. But this must be backed by a sustained diplomatic, economic and financial support in the post-agreement era.

The willingness of the sub-regional power, Nigeria, to take forceful measures to restore order in West Africa is striking. Such willingness and decisiveness are hard to come by in the wider international community. It is not often in the immediate national interest of states, to expend human and material resources in conflicts that do not have a direct impact on their security. It is usually only in the immediate interest of neighbouring states that are faced with a mass influx of refugees and other security threats, to find a solution to these conflicts, and they may not have the capacity to respond. In the West African sub-region, Nigeria's willingness and ability to respond made all the difference although as indicated, the country's domestic problems have affected the quality of its regional action. It is, however, arguable that Nigeria has been able to intervene in Liberia and Sierra Leone in such a huge scale because of a military regime, which is not accountable to an electorate.⁶⁸ As such, the regime was able to spend over 30 billion Naira (more than US\$3 billion) in Liberia, without any political repercussions. Whilst a civilian regime in Nigeria may find it

⁶⁸Funmi Olonisakin, *op cit.*, p.15.

difficult in future to conduct such an expensive operation or indeed, to get away with the casualty level incurred in Liberia, the desire to remain a sub-regional superpower might tempt such a regime to conduct peace operations.