

SMALL ARMS SURVEY

1

Occasional Paper No. 1

Re-Armament in Sierra Leone:
One Year After the Lomé Peace Agreement

by Eric G. Berman

A publication of
the Small Arms Survey



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Re-Armament in Sierra Leone

West Africa



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This map is a simplified representation of the geographical situation in West Africa. It is not intended to be a political statement. The map is based on the latest available information and is subject to change without notice. The map is not to be used for any purpose other than that for which it was prepared.

Glossary of Terms

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All People's Congress, also Armoured Personnel Carrier
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EO	Executive Outcomes
GSG	Gurkha Security Guards Limited
MLRS	Multiple-launch rocket system
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NCDDR	National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
PCASED	Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenade
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SAM	Surface-to-air missile
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNAMSIL	UN Mission in Sierra Leone
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOMSIL	UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone
US	United States
WSC	Weapons Storage Centre

Re-Armament in Sierra Leone

Summary

On 7 July 1999, the government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) signed the Lomé Peace Agreement in an effort to end over eight years of civil war between the government and the RUF. This conflict resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and the displacement of more than 2 million people – well over one-third of the total population – many of whom are now refugees in neighbouring countries. A central component of this agreement called for the RUF to disarm. But this did not happen. Instead, a year later, the RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, was in the custody of the Sierra Leonean government and the future of the peace accord was in grave doubt.

One thing was clear, however: far from disarming, all parties – the RUF, as well as the government and its allies – have been re-arming at an alarming rate. They are doing so in contravention of a 1997 UN arms embargo (amended in June 1998 to exclude the Sierra Leonean government) and despite a 1998 regional moratorium on the production, procurement and sale of small arms and light weapons.

Over a year after the Lomé Peace Agreement, the political and security situation remains extremely fragile. The RUF continues to obtain weapons illegally via countries such as Liberia and Burkina Faso, while the government of Sierra Leone has recently received substantial weaponry from the United Kingdom.

This paper explores the ease with which both the rebels and the government obtain weapons, particularly small arms and light weapons, and questions the efficacy of previous and current armament and disarmament policies. Given the easy availability of arms in the country, the weakness of the current government, the relative strength of the RUF, and the fluidity of alliances among the country's armed groups, the likelihood of continued conflict in Sierra Leone is great.

Re-Armament in Sierra Leone

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Photo: Ian Biddle, 2000

Re-Armament in Sierra Leone

Introduction

Armed conflict in Sierra Leone erupted in March 1991, when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) took up arms against the government of Sierra Leone. The incursion was led by Foday Sankoh, a former corporal in the Sierra Leone Army (SLA).

The government fell in April 1992, thirteen months after the civil war began, but it did not fall to the RUF. Instead, elements within the SLA overthrew President Joseph Momoh, whose response to the rebellion had been ineffective, and installed the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) to run the country. A young captain, Valentine Strasser, was made Head of State and ruled until January 1996 when he was overthrown by his Chief of Defense Staff, Julius Maada Bio.

A peace accord between the government and the RUF was signed in November 1996, bringing the rebels one step closer to power. The private South African security firm Executive Outcomes (EO) made considerable military advances against the RUF since Strasser hired the company in 1995. As part of the peace agreement concluded in Abidjan with the government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, whose Sierra Leone People's Party won the February 1996 elections that replaced the NPRC, the RUF agreed to cease their hostilities in exchange for the government terminating its contract with EO. The RUF quickly resumed the war after EO left the country in January 1997, making inroads and taking control of ever more territory. Executive Outcomes did not return.

When elements within the SLA overthrew Kabbah in May 1997, the RUF welcomed the coup and formed an alliance with the new government, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Major Johnny Paul Koroma, the AFRC leader, offered to make Sankoh his deputy. Sankoh accepted. Koroma also appointed several RUF officials to serve in his government.

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Many countries within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)¹ did not welcome the coup in Sierra Leone and actively took steps to re-install the democratically elected government. Guinea hosted Kabbah and Nigeria refused to release Sankoh, who was detained in March 1997. Guinea and Nigeria, honouring bilateral defence pacts with Sierra Leone, initially sent troops to fight the AFRC and the RUF. The ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which had been formed in 1990 to establish peace in Liberia, was subsequently given the additional mandate to intervene in Sierra Leone. Diplomatic initiatives gave way to military action in February 1998 and Kabbah was re-installed in March, ten months after being deposed.

While ECOMOG succeeded in retaking Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, it proved incapable of securing the countryside. The RUF let it be known that it was still a force to be reckoned with. As proof, the rebels committed a new wave of human rights violations. In January 1999, AFRC and RUF rebels laid siege to the capital, the culmination of an offensive that had begun in eastern Sierra Leone during the final months of 1998. ECOMOG managed to repel the attack, but only after thousands were killed and many more maimed and abducted.

Unable to defeat the RUF militarily, the focus shifted to finding a diplomatic solution. After tens of thousands of deaths and the displacement of more than 2 million people – well over one-third of the total population – negotiations were held in Togo and, on 18 May 1999, the government of Sierra Leone and the RUF agreed to a cease-fire. Two months later, on 7 July, the two sides signed a peace treaty.

¹ ECOWAS countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. In 1999, Mauritania indicated its intention to withdraw from ECOWAS.

Re-Armament in Sierra Leone

According to the terms of the *Lomé Peace Agreement*, in exchange for calling a halt to the war and disarming, the RUF was granted a general amnesty, given posts within the government, and guaranteed the right to form a political party to contest elections. Moreover, Foday Sankoh was appointed to chair a new body created to oversee the country's diamonds and other natural resources.

Although ECOMOG had been designated primarily responsible for monitoring the military provisions of the peace agreement, these tasks quickly were assumed by the United Nations (UN). Up to that time, the UN had played a relatively minor peacekeeping role in Sierra Leone. In July 1998, the Security Council authorized the small UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) to serve alongside the sub-regional force.² After it became clear that Nigeria, the largest troop contributor to ECOMOG, was going to withdraw its troops, the Security Council decided to replace this observer mission with a much larger peacekeeping force known as the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).³ The last ECOMOG troops departed Sierra Leone on 2 May 2000.⁴

However, in May 2000, less than a year after it was signed, the *Lomé Peace Agreement* unravelled when the RUF abducted and murdered UN peacekeepers. Although disarmament had formally begun in October 1999, as of March 2000, the RUF had not participated significantly in the programme. This changed in April when disarmament centres opened in the RUF strongholds of Makeni and Magburaka. A few RUF soldiers reported to the camps against the wishes of their commanders.

The UN refused to heed the RUF's demands to close the centres and return their men. Fighting erupted when the RUF killed a member of the Kenyan peacekeeping contingent. Several hundred members of the Zambian battalion sent to assist the beleaguered Kenyan contingent were taken hostage by the RUF outside of Makeni. A week later, Sankoh's supporters opened fire outside his house into a crowd of civilians demonstrating against the abduction of the UN peacekeepers. Several protesters were killed and dozens more were injured. On 17 May, the government of Sierra Leone detained and subsequently arrested Sankoh.

The international community responded to events in Sierra Leone with alacrity. The Security Council quickly moved to expand the mission's authorized presence to 13,000 troops⁵ and subsequently, in a move intended to strengthen the government, banned the sale of unauthorized Sierra Leonean diamonds.⁶

In their capacity as UN Member States, individual countries also contributed to the UN efforts to restore peace. Russia agreed to provide UNAMSIL with helicopter gunships. The United Kingdom (UK) unilaterally sent warships and a battalion of commandos to Sierra Leone. The United States (US) expanded its logistical assistance to UNAMSIL troops. Canada provided military cargo specialists and equipment to expedite deployment of the UN's "Blue Helmets". Between May and June 2000, more than 4,000 peacekeepers arrived in Sierra Leone – an increase of almost 50 percent.⁷ Several ECOWAS member states as well as other countries put significant pressure on Liberian President Charles Taylor to help win the release of the abducted UN peacekeepers.

² See UN Document S/RES/1181 (1998), 13 July 1998.

³ UN Document S/RES/1270 (1999), 22 October 1999.

⁴ UN Document S/2000/455, "Fourth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone," 19 May 2000, para. 59.

⁵ UN Document S/RES/1299 (2000), 19 May 1999. The mission had been expanded to 11,100 troops in February. See UN Document S/RES/1289 (2000), 7 February 2000.

⁶ UN Document S/RES/1306 (2000), 5 July 2000.

⁷ On 30 April, UNAMSIL's strength was 8,414; by 30 June it was increased to 12,423. Figures provided by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Suppliers of small arms and light weapons to Sierra Leone

Recognizing the important role that small arms and light weapons play in exacerbating conflicts, the international community and the Security Council, in addition to their peacekeeping role in Sierra Leone, have tried to control the flow of weapons into the country. Prior to establishing UNOMSIL, the Security Council responded to the May 1997 coup by placing the country under a variety of travel, economic and military sanctions.⁸ The arms embargo was amended in June 1998 after Kabbah had been re-installed. Sanctions were lifted against the government but were retained against the rebel forces.⁹

In October 1998, ECOWAS member states approved a three-year moratorium on the production, procurement, and sale of small arms and light weapons for the sub-region. At the same time, a Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED) was set up to support the moratorium's implementation.¹⁰

**Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW):
A Definition**

According to the United Nations, 'small arms' are defined to include pistols, rifles, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. 'Light weapons' are defined to include heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft, anti-tank and missile launchers, small mortars and ammunition and explosives.

Suppliers to the Revolutionary United Front

Relatively little concrete information is available on arms suppliers to the RUF. The government of Sierra Leone has recovered a couple of hundred weapons from the RUF over the years but has never tried to methodically trace their origins.

An attempt was made to introduce a registry of RUF weapons in 1994 at the Ministry of Defence, but without success.¹¹ As a rule, any weapons captured from the rebels were distributed to local units of the SLA or the pro-government militia. The weapons were not sent back to Freetown for investigation. Until recently, the UN Security Council's sanction committee on Sierra Leone has not been particularly active.¹²

Charles Taylor and Liberia: Charles Taylor's support for the RUF dates back to 1991. As leader of the *National Patriotic Front of Liberia* (NPFL), which took up arms against the government of Samuel Doe in December 1989, Taylor saw the RUF as a potential vehicle to help him achieve his objectives in Liberia. Taylor wanted to weaken ECOMOG, which he (correctly) believed to be blocking his attempts to take control of Monrovia.

The NPFL was already in the capital and preparing to lay siege to the Executive Mansion where Doe was garrisoned when ECOMOG troops arrived in August 1990, effectively halting Taylor's offensive. By assisting the RUF, Taylor hoped to divert attention and resources ECOMOG was devoting to its operation in Liberia.

⁸ See UN Document S/RES/1132 (1997), 8 October 1997.

⁹ UN Document S/RES/1171 (1998), 5 June 1998.

¹⁰ The moratorium, which went into effect on 1 November 1998, can be lifted exceptionally with the approval of ECOWAS member states. For background on PCASED, see, for example, Jackie Seck, *West Africa Small Arms Moratorium: High Level Consultations on the Modalities for the Implementation of PCASED*, Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2000, 73 p.

¹¹ Interview with Brig-Gen. (Ret) K.O. Conteh, former Chief of Staff, Sierra Leone Army (1994-95), 2 June 2000, Freetown.

¹² For the Committee's two reports, see UN Document S/1998/1236, 31 December 1998, and S/1999/1300, 31 December 1999, which present "factual summaries" of its activities but little in the way of detailed information or political analysis. This changed dramatically on 31 July 2000 when the Committee held an unprecedented exploratory hearing before the entire Security Council.

Re-Armament in Sierra Leone

Initially, Taylor's military assistance to the RUF was quite limited, being routinely very low on small arms and ammunition in the early years of the Liberian insurgency. Indeed, the RUF provided matériel to the NPFL for Taylor's offensive against Monrovia in October 1992.¹³

Taylor continued to provide weapons to the RUF even after he assumed the Liberian presidency in the July 1997 elections that ended that country's civil war, as well as after ECOMOG left Liberia late in 1999.¹⁴ For example, he provided the RUF with weapons during the period of the AFRC-led government (May 1997 to February 1998).

The extent of the relationship between Taylor and the RUF is difficult to document. The well-publicized reports of specific arms shipments to the RUF¹⁵ have been described as only the "tip of the iceberg". Proof of this activity is very scant, however. Those directly involved in breaking the sanctions tend to be close-mouthed about their activities.

The international presence in the border area between Liberia and Sierra Leone is thin, and humanitarian aid workers active in the region are hesitant to comment on military activity. *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF), one of the few international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) currently active in Lofa County, said that none of its personnel had witnessed any convoys or suspicious activity across the border.¹⁷

Not all arms delivered to Liberia are destined for the RUF. As Liberia remains under a UN arms embargo,¹⁸ Taylor has been forced to relinquish thousands of weapons as part of the disarmament programme that led to the July 1997 elections. Under significant international pressure, the weapons collected under this programme were destroyed. Many were new and had yet to be unwrapped.¹⁹

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Nevertheless, Taylor has not only been able to defy international arms embargoes, he has also managed to overcome significant logistical constraints. For example, Liberia suffers from poor infrastructure and a limited number of aircraft. Although the government's aircraft "fleet" consists of only two small Mi-2 light helicopters recently acquired from Libya, Taylor also uses private aircraft companies in the region.²¹

Despite the general state of disrepair of roads connecting Liberia and Sierra Leone, and the difficulties posed by the May-September rainy season, it is nonetheless possible to quickly transport a large volume of goods over this terrain. The seizure and disbursement of more than 800 tons of humanitarian relief supplies from Kailahun in Lofa County in August 1999²² underscore what can be achieved.

In addition, Taylor's "assistance" in securing the release of UN peacekeepers abducted in Sierra Leone should not be interpreted as a change in his relationship with the RUF. While his military rationale for aiding the RUF may no longer be valid, economic and security considerations ensure that the relationship will remain strong.

¹³ For example, the RUF provided Taylor with a howitzer for "Operation Octopus", the code name for the offensive. Interview with Col. K.S. Mondeh, former Supreme Council Member, National Provisional Ruling Council, 4 June 2000, Freetown.

¹⁴ A small number of ECOMOG troops had remained in Liberia to oversee the formal destruction of small arms collected during disarmament, which was formally completed in October 1999.

¹⁵ See, for example, the reporting of James Rupert of *The Washington Post*.

¹⁶ Interview with a Western military official, June 2000.

¹⁷ Interview with Benoit Leduc, Technical Coordinator, Médecins Sans Frontières, 9 June 2000, Monrovia.

¹⁸ UN Document S/RES/788 (1992), 19 November 1992.

¹⁹ Interview with Masimba Tafirenyika, Political Officer, UN Peace-Building Support Office in Liberia, 7 June 2000, Monrovia.

²⁰ Libya also provides Taylor on occasion with a Falcon presidential jet for official business. Interviews with UN officials, May and June 2000, Freetown and Monrovia.

²¹ For example, in June 2000, Taylor hired two Mi-8 helicopters from Weasua Airlines to ferry the freed UN peacekeepers back to Monrovia. (He did so even though the UN had provided aircraft to do the job itself.)

²² Interview with Ebou Camara, Representative to Liberia, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 11 June 2000, Monrovia.

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Even before it gained independence, Liberia was profiting from selling Sierra Leonean diamonds – at the latter’s expense.²⁴ However, the degree to which Liberia – or perhaps more accurately, Taylor – has become dependent on the revenue Sierra Leonean diamonds generate has become much more significant.

Taylor depends on an overlapping network of competing security organizations to monitor external and internal threats, and to report on one another’s activities. However, he has few resources upon which to draw to pay for these services as the Liberian economy is in shambles and foreign aid, not very significant to begin with, is becoming scarcer.²⁵

Therefore, access to Sierra Leonean diamonds provides Taylor with significant financial resources to keep him solvent and in power. *Partnership Africa Canada* in its report *The Heart of the Matter: Sierra Leone, Diamonds & Human Security*, documents the extent to which Liberia profits from its relationship with the RUF.²⁶ According to Richard Holbrooke, Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations, the RUF earns at least US\$ 30-50 million a year from diamonds sales - and it could be as much as US\$ 125 million. Most of this trade goes through Liberia.²⁷

Diamonds are a dictator’s best friend . . . ?

The RUF is reputed to earn between US\$ 30 - 125 million a year from diamonds sales. Most of this trade goes through Liberia – or perhaps more accurately, Charles Taylor who is increasingly dependent upon revenue generated by Sierra Leonean diamonds.

While Taylor was securing the release of the UN peacekeepers being detained in Sierra Leone he simultaneously stepped up his support to the RUF. As of July 2000, RUF troops under the command of Sam Bockarie were being trained and encamped in Liberia. They are said to be heavily armed with “surface-to-surface missiles”, assault rifles and anti-tank weapons.²⁸

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The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), citing Sierra Leone police documents that it obtained and believed to be credible, reported that on 1 June 2000, truckloads of small arms, including rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and AK-47 ammunition, were sent from Liberia for the RUF in Sierra Leone.²⁹

Taylor is also believed to have provided the RUF with 200 fully armed Liberian soldiers, as well as with an artillery piece described as a 40-barrel gun.³⁰ Stephen Pattison, a UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office official, told the UN Security Council on 31 July 2000, that Taylor had stepped up his support for the RUF in the past two months. He reported that supplies of arms, ammunition, fuel, food and medicines are routinely flown into RUF-controlled areas by helicopter from Liberia.³¹

²³ The identities of the perpetrators of the supply seizure and its recipients are not known. Knowledgeable sources believe Liberian security forces likely carried out the attack. There is far less consensus as to the identity of the recipients; whether the attackers were following orders; and, if so, at what level they were issued. Interviews with UN and NGO officials, June 2000, Monrovia.

²⁴ Ian Smillie, Lansana Gberie, and Ralph Hazleton, “The Heart of the Matter: Sierra Leone, Diamonds & Human Security,” *Partnership Africa Canada*, January 2000, pp. 45-47.

²⁵ For example, The European Union announced in June 2000 that it was suspending US\$ 48 million in development aid to Liberia. See *Sierra Leone Web*, 13 June 2000, available on the Internet at <www.sierra-leone.org>.

²⁶ Smillie, Gberie, and Hazleton, “The Heart of the Matter: Sierra Leone, Diamonds & Human Security,” p. 32.

²⁷ Richard Holbrooke, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of the United States to the United Nations in New York, “Statement before the UN Security Council’s Exploratory Hearing on Sierra Leone Diamonds,” 31 July 2000, *US UN Press Release #102(00)*, 31 July 2000.

²⁸ Douglas Farah, “Liberia Reportedly Arming Guerrillas”, *The Washington Post*, 18 June 2000, p. A21. It is likely that the “surface-to-surface missiles” are rocket launchers. Interview with Jakkie Potgieter, Senior Field Researcher, Institute for Security Studies (Pretoria), 8 September 2000, Geneva.

²⁹ “Liberia selling arms for diamonds,” *BBC News*, 6 July 2000. The BBC later provided transcripts of the two documents. See “Sierra Leone: Document One,” *BBC News*, 18 July 2000, and “Sierra Leone: Document Two”, *BBC News*, 18 July 2000. All three citations are available on the Internet at <news.bbc.co.uk>.

³⁰ “Sierra Leone: Document Two.”

³¹ Stephen Pattison, Head, UN Department, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, “Statement before the UN Security Council’s Exploratory Hearing on Sierra Leone Diamonds”, 31 July 2000, written correspondence with Catherine Mackenzie, First Secretary (Press), UK Permanent Mission to the UN in New York, 15 August 2000.

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Other Suppliers

Libya: The RUF has also received military assistance from Libya. Many RUF rebels have been trained there.³² Tripoli is believed to have provided weapons to the RUF. Documents allegedly written by Sankoh record Libya as having provided funding for weapons purchases.³³ In 1995, for example, the Sierra Leonean government captured some weapons from the RUF that included boxes of ammunition with Arabic writing, suggesting that the matériel came from Libya.³⁴

According to *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, Libya continues to ship weapons to the RUF. Libyan transport aircraft fly the matériel to Burkina Faso and then on to Liberia. From there, the weapons are flown by helicopter to the RUF strongholds, Kailahun and Pendembu. Airdrops to numerous locations within Sierra Leone have also been made.³⁵

Côte d'Ivoire: Côte d'Ivoire has also supported the RUF. Most of its assistance has been indirect, through aid to Taylor. Former Ivorian President Félix Houphouët-Boigny provided sanctuary and safe passage through his territory to transport war matériel to the NPFL. While Houphouët-Boigny's successor, Henri Konan Bedie, did not share his personal antipathy for Liberian President Samuel Doe,³⁶ Bedie is believed to have also assisted Taylor. There are credible reports that Ivorian assistance has also included direct flights of matériel to the RUF.³⁷ It is unclear if Gen. Robert Gueï, who overthrew Bedie in December 1999, supports Taylor.

Burkina Faso: Most weapons that reach the RUF through Liberia first arrive on the continent in Burkina Faso. In a groundbreaking study, a United Nations Panel of Experts investigating arms shipments to the *União Nacional Para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) reported that it had received credible information that Burkina Faso trans-shipped weapons to UNITA and others.³⁸ There is little doubt that the RUF is also a beneficiary of this supply route.

The *Washington Post* reported that the RUF obtained at least five large plane loads of weapons from Burkina Faso in 1998 and 1999. The weapons were flown directly to the RUF in Sierra Leone and also indirectly via Liberia.³⁹ According to Pattison, Burkina Faso has supported – and continues to support – the RUF with Burkinabé soldiers, weapons, training and advice.⁴⁰

Ukraine: Many of the weapons destined for the RUF originate in Eastern Europe with brokers from Western Europe serving as intermediaries. Details of such transactions tend not to be publicized.⁴¹ One that is known is believed to be typical of weapons shipments to the RUF.

Human Rights Watch detailed a shipment of small arms from Ukraine to Burkina Faso in March 1999. The transaction for the 67-ton delivery was made through a Gibraltar-based company, which in turn contracted a British-based firm that was a trade agent for a Ukrainian air cargo company. The

³² Indeed, Sankoh reportedly met Taylor in Libya.

³³ The Government of Sierra Leone has copies of letters dated 26 June 1996, and 4 December 1996, that it claims to be from Sankoh to the Libyan Embassy in Ghana, acknowledging receipt of US\$ 500,000 and requesting an additional US\$ 1.5 million for supplemental arms purchases. Documents courtesy of a Western diplomat, May 2000, Conakry.

³⁴ Interview with Conteh, 2 June 2000, Freetown.

³⁵ "International terrorism becomes a feature of Sierra Leone's war", *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, 25 July 2000, available on CD Rom.

³⁶ Doe killed Houphouët-Boigny's son-in-law, Adolphus Tolbert, the son of the Liberian President whom Doe overthrew - and also killed - in his December 1980 *coup d'état*. Houphouët-Boigny's daughter later married Burkinabé President Blaise Compaoré. This example of one family involved in three different governments illustrates how relational intricacies and intrigues can influence the (im)balance of political power.

³⁷ Written correspondence with Peter C. Andersen, Publisher/Editor, Sierra Leone Web, 19 August 2000.

³⁸ UN Document S/2000/203, "Report of the Panel of Experts on Violations of Security Council Sanctions Against UNITA", 10 March 2000, Enclosure, paras. 21 and 22.

³⁹ James Rupert, "Diamond Hunters Fuel Africa's Brutal Wars; In Sierra Leone, Mining Firms Trade Weapons and Money for Access to Gems", *The Washington Post*, 16 October 1999, p. A1, and Douglas Farah, "Rebels Get Arms Through Burkina Faso, Sources Say", *The Washington Post*, 6 May 2000, p. A15.

⁴⁰ Pattison, "Statement before the UN Security Council's Exploratory Hearing on Sierra Leone Diamonds".

⁴¹ For an authoritative report on this global network of arms merchants and brokers, see Brian Wood and Johan Peleman, "The Arms Fixers: Controlling the Brokers and Shipping Agents", *PRIO Report 3/99 and Basic Research Report 99.3*, Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1999. 139 pp.

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shipment is suspicious because Burkinabé armed forces use Western small arms. Kiev acknowledged that it shipped weapons to Burkina Faso, but stressed that it did so with the understanding that no re-export of the matériel would occur without its approval, which it did not give.⁴²

Other former Eastern Bloc countries: Besides receiving Ukrainian arms, the RUF is also reported to have obtained weapons from Bulgaria and the Slovakia. In January 1999, both the UK-based Sky Air Cargo and the Belgian-owned Occidental Airlines flew arms from Bratislava to Gambia and Liberia, at which point aircraft from a third company flew the weapons to Kenema in Sierra Leone for the RUF.⁴³ According to the US government, in July 1999 a diamond dealer in Sierra Leone arranged for the Dakar-based Continental Aviation Company to transport 68 tons of weapons from Bulgaria to the RUF.⁴⁴

In July 1999, a diamond dealer in Sierra Leone allegedly arranged for the Dakar-based Continental Aviation Company to transport 68 tons of weapons from Bulgaria to the RUF.

Guinea: The RUF also receives weapons from Guinea, but on a smaller scale and not as part of official policy. Little of this trade is documented and government officials in Conakry play down reported incidents of arms trafficking across the border with Sierra Leone.

Officials from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) do not believe refugee camps of Sierra Leoneans in Guinea are militarized. However, the Guinean army routinely confiscates weapons from Sierra Leone rebels, government soldiers or pro-government militia crossing into Guinea.

Nevertheless, aid workers active in the border area acknowledge that an unofficial “live and let live” policy exists whereby local officials, police and military personnel deal frequently with the RUF who control most of northern Sierra Leone.

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When this status quo is altered, the RUF has made its displeasure known. In the Forécariah region of Guinea, for example, the RUF attacked the Moola and Tassin refugee camps in April and May 1999, respectively, but only targeted government officials and soldiers. No refugees were harmed (although locals in Moola retaliated by razing the camp there).⁴⁵ The impetus, at least for the Moola attack, was to seek retribution against corrupt officials who did not provide weapons as agreed.⁴⁶

Government of Sierra Leone

The RUF also receives considerable weaponry from the government of Sierra Leone through seizure. Col. K.S. Mondeh, a former Supreme Council Member during the NPRC, acknowledged that the RUF “thrived on what they got from [the army] in ambushes”. He added that the rebels also obtained weapons that the SLA had abandoned.⁴⁷

Widespread corruption within the government and armed forces of Sierra Leone also netted the RUF substantial quantities of weapons. According to Mondeh, SLA troops, including officers, sometimes sold their weapons to the RUF.⁴⁸ There is much speculation that the corruption reached the highest official levels. For example, Maada Bio, who became President in January 1996, claimed that he overthrew Strasser because the president was not committed to holding the announced elections. More likely, Maada Bio had sought to cut a deal with Sankoh to ensure maintenance of the status quo from which both parties profited.

⁴² See “Neglected Arms Embargo on Sierra Leone Rebels Briefing Paper”, *Human Rights Watch*, 15 May 2000, available on the Internet at <www.hrw.org>.

⁴³ David Leppard et al. “British Firms Arming Sierra Leone Rebels”, *Sunday Times* (London), 10 January 1999, available via Lexis-Nexis.

⁴⁴ Holbrooke, “Statement before the UN Security Council’s Exploratory Hearing on Sierra Leone Diamonds”.

⁴⁵ Interview with Senai Terrefe, Associate Protection Officer, UNHCR, 25 May 2000, Conakry.

⁴⁶ Interview with an NGO official, 22 May 2000, Conakry.

⁴⁷ Interview with Mondeh, 4 June 2000, Freetown.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Re-Armament in Sierra Leone

The week before the scheduled elections in February 1996, representatives of Maada Bio and Sankoh began peace talks in Côte d'Ivoire with Sankoh claiming that he would only negotiate with Maada Bio and would not recognize the outcome of the elections. By some accounts, the SLA did more to try to derail the elections (without success) than did the RUF.⁴⁹

ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group)

The RUF has also obtained weapons by seizing them from ECOMOG troops. The Nigerians lost significant quantities of small arms and ammunition to the RUF in pitched battles as the rebels advanced on Freetown. In December 1998, the RUF routed ECOMOG at Kono, where the West African force had stationed most of its matériel, capturing all its weapons, which included three tanks.⁵⁰ ECOMOG is also reported to have lost small arms on occasion from ambushes after the RUF had been driven from the capital. For example, on 18 January 2000, RUF rebels disarmed 14 ECOMOG troops.⁵¹

There are also allegations that ECOMOG troops sold their weapons. An ECOMOG Force Commander has acknowledged that this occurred in Liberia.⁵² According to a senior RUF rebel, his men received arms and ammunition from Nigerian ECOMOG troops in exchange for cash, diamonds, food and medicine.⁵³

Furthermore, the circumstances surrounding the loss of equipment in September 1999 from the Guinean battalion serving in ECOMOG are not clear. However, in light of a subsequent incident discussed below, there is reason to speculate that the weapons may have been sold. Besides communication gear and two vehicles, the Guineans lost 46 AK-47 rifles, 14 assorted pistols and 15 boxes of 7.62mm ammunition.⁵⁴

Not all of the weapons ECOMOG lost were seized by the RUF, however. According to an eyewitness, members of the ex-SLA ambushed a column of Guinean soldiers at the end of January 1999, and captured a large trailer of small arms and ammunition. The ex-SLA commander had initially given the Guineans a promise of clear passage through the area under his control, but he reneged on this promise when he recognized that his troops were running low on ammunition.⁵⁵

The AFRC also captured weapons from the Malian battalion in ECOMOG. The weapons were seized during an attack on Malian troops in May 1999, near Port Loko. They were later used by forces loyal to Johnny Paul Koroma *against* the RUF in May 2000.⁵⁶

UNAMSIL (UN Mission in Sierra Leone)

The Guineans were the first United Nations⁵⁷ contingent to lose their weapons. None of the UN military observers serving in UNOMSIL (earlier UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone) were armed. The advance team from Kenya, the first troop-contributing country to be deployed as part of UNAMSIL, did not arrive until 29 November 1999. Early incidents at Segbwema and Buedu, in which the RUF briefly detained UN peacekeepers, did not result in a seizure of weapons.

⁴⁹ Ian Douglas, "Fighting for diamonds: Private Military Companies in Sierra Leone", in Jakkie Cilliers and Peggy Mason (eds), *Peace, Profit or Plunder?: The Privatisation of Security in War-torn African Societies*, Halfway House: Institute for Security Studies, 1999, pp. 184-85.

⁵⁰ Abdel-Fatau Musah, "A Country Under Siege: State Decay and Corporate Military Intervention in Sierra Leone", in Abdel-Fatau Musah and J. Kayode Fayemi (eds), *Mercenaries: An Africa Security Dilemma*, London: Pluto Press, 2000, p. 109.

⁵¹ UN Document S/2000/186, *Third Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone*, 7 March 2000, para. 11.

⁵² Gibril Gbanabome, "ECOMOG Sold Weapons to Rebels Arnold Quainoo", *Africa News Service*, 20 January 1999, available on the Internet at <www.nisat.org>.

⁵³ See *The NINJAS*, 28 January 1999, available on the Internet at <www.sierra-leone.cc/news128.html>. Citation provided by Peter C. Andersen.

⁵⁴ Internal UNAMSIL document, February/March 2000.

⁵⁵ Written correspondence with Corinne Dufka, Researcher, Human Rights Watch, 15 August 2000.

⁵⁶ Interview with Zainab Bangura, Campaign Co-ordinator, Campaign for Good Governance, 25 July 2000, by telephone.

⁵⁷ The UN stresses that the Guineans were not under UNAMSIL command when the incident occurred as they had yet to report officially to the duty station. It is common practice, however, for the UN to assume responsibility for troop-contributing countries' equipment on its way to the mission area.

Re-Armament in Sierra Leone

However, on 10 January 2000, a small group of RUF detained a reconnaissance element from the Guinean battalion near Kambia. The unit was relieved of its weapons, which consisted of three armoured vehicles (each fitted with a 14.5mm and a 12.7mm machine gun),⁵⁸ one 75mm self-propelled gun, one anti-tank gun, one anti-tank weapon, 485 AK-47 rifles, ten 82mm mortars, 24 light machine guns, 20 rocket-propelled grenades and 30 pistols.⁵⁹ At least two tons of ammunition was also taken.⁶⁰

There is little doubt that the third time a contingent from Guinea lost its weapons, it was the result of a commercial transaction. Officially, the RUF “seized” the weapons from the Guinean battalion.⁶¹ However, several Western diplomats, as well as UN and UNAMSIL officials, see the situation differently. Strategically, they point out, there is no military rationale for placing all of a battalion’s matériel up front with a reconnaissance unit.

As one informed observer put it, “Either the Guineans were really, really stupid, or some kind of a deal had been made”.⁶² The unofficial consensus is that, while the former cannot be ruled out, the likelihood is that someone was paid off. No one would hazard a guess as to the level at which this decision might have been made, but no one thought it went as high as Guinean President Lansana Conteh.

It also appears that at least one multiple-launch rocket system (MLRS) was part of the equipment lost. There is little consensus as to whether the RUF received one or two 40-barrel BM-21 systems from the Guineans. Nor is there agreement as to whether or not the weapons are operational.

In all subsequent instances, however, the UN’s “Blue Helmets” were relieved of their weapons as a result of hostile action. For example, elements of the Kenyan Battalion were twice ambushed in January 2000. The Secretary-General attributed the initial incident involving the Kenyans to having been the work of the ex-SLA⁶³ but UNAMSIL and others believe the RUF to have been responsible. The RUF seized a total of eight G-3 rifles, one pistol and several hundred rounds of small arms ammunition.⁶⁴

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As with ECOMOG, not all of the ambushes were committed by the RUF. In April 2000, in the Occra Hills area, which is controlled by forces ostensibly loyal to Johnny Paul Koroma, a group of armed men believed to be ex-SLA attacked five Nigerian UNAMSIL peacekeepers, taking their weapons.⁶⁵ In June, a Jordanian peacekeeper was relieved of his weapon in the same area.⁶⁶

The largest single incident concerned the detainment of the Zambian contingent on 2 May 2000. The Force Commander sent the Zambian battalion to support Kenyan peacekeepers who were under siege in Makeni. Shortly before the Zambians reached Makeni, however, the RUF managed to detain and disarm them. The peacekeepers were eventually released, but without their equipment. In an effort to play down the incident, and given the understandable focus on ensuring the well being of the hostages, UNAMSIL officials were reluctant to discuss what exactly was taken. It is widely believed that the battalion lost some 500 AK-47 rifles, a few dozen machine guns, assorted mortars, and several tons of small arms ammunition.

⁵⁸ Interviews with UNAMSIL officials, June 2000, Freetown.

⁵⁹ Internal UNAMSIL document, February/March 2000.

⁶⁰ At least one 5-ton truck, with an off-road capacity of 2.5 tons, was believed to have been filled with small arms ammunition.

⁶¹ UN Document S/2000/186, para. 11.

⁶² Interview with a Western military official, May 2000.

⁶³ UN Document S/2000/186, para. 11.

⁶⁴ Internal UNAMSIL document, February/March 2000.

⁶⁵ UN Document, S/2000/455, para. 19.

⁶⁶ Interview with Dufka, 15 August 2000, by telephone.

Re-Armament in Sierra Leone

The Kenyan battalion also lost considerable matériel to the RUF. UNAMSIL officials speak admiringly of the Kenyan troops' *esprit de corps* as they fought their way back to Freetown with limited firepower and depleted stocks of ammunition through a number of RUF roadblocks. One officer remarked that even wounded Kenyans had returned with their personal firearms. Yet Kenya's Minister of State for Defence, Julius L. Sunkuli, painted a more sobering picture of what Kenya had lost to the RUF. The Minister stressed that his was a "poor country [and] to lose that amount of equipment is not good at all".⁶⁷ Kenya lost eight armoured personnel carriers (APCs), each fitted with a 12.7mm machine gun, ten additional machine guns of various calibres, and 33 G-3 rifles.⁶⁸

Nigerian Blue Helmets in UNAMSIL have also lost equipment to the RUF. Nigerian peacekeepers were relieved of their weapons in Mange in April 2000.⁶⁹ A more significant incident occurred in Kambia on 3 May in which a company of Nigerians was briefly detained and relieved of its weapons.⁷⁰

The Indian contingent, which is particularly well equipped and well disciplined, has also lost weapons to the RUF. The detachment of 21 Indian peacekeepers in Kuiva, which the RUF detained in May 2000 and relocated to Pendembu, was relieved of all its weapons as well. However, another group of over 200 Indian peacekeepers, plus 11 UN military observers, whom the RUF surrounded in Kailahun in the same month, were never disarmed.

Suppliers to Government of Sierra Leone Before March 1991

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At the start of the civil war, the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) was small and lightly armed. During his 17-year rule from 1968 to 1985, President Siaka Stevens had deliberately kept the army small – about 2,000 troops – and without significant stores of ammunition.⁷¹ According to Major-General (Ret) J.S. Gottor, a former Chief of Staff of the Military Headquarters, in March 1991, the SLA consisted of only about 3,000 men, no more than 800-900 of whom could be described as a fighting force.⁷² In addition, almost half of those who were better trained and more fit were outside the country when the rebellion started. Some 350 were serving with ECOMOG in Liberia. Another 30 were taking part in the US-led Operation Desert Storm to liberate Kuwait from Iraq.

The country had few weapons, and those in its possession were generally in poor condition owing to age and lack of maintenance. For example, few of the country's Swiss Mowag armoured vehicles were operational by 1991. Even the SLA's small arms were not in good working order.⁷³

The government had received some 6,000 G-3 rifles from the UK and Nigeria during the 1970s and 1980s. Although these are powerful and accurate weapons, they also require greater care to operate effectively.⁷⁴ Therefore, soldiers preferred to use the AK-47 rifles which had certain perceived advantages; for example, the inside of the AK-47's barrel is chrome-plated and thus is more resistant to the damaging effects of rain and humidity than its competitors' barrels which are made of forged steel.

The government, therefore, sought to procure AK-47s in greater numbers. Freetown concluded an agreement with China to this effect in 1990.⁷⁵ A former Chief of Staff of the Sierra Leone Army,

⁶⁷ *Sierra Leone Web*, 23 May 2000, available on the Internet at <www.sierra-leone.org>.

⁶⁸ Written correspondence with Lt-Col. Haggai Dulo, Military Adviser, Kenyan Permanent Mission to the UN in New York, 16 October 2000. Other matériel Kenya lost in its retreat included communication equipment, generators, and some two dozen vehicles. *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ UN Document S/2000/455, para. 61.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Comfort Ero, "Sierra Leone's Security Complex", *The Conflict, Security & Development Group Working Paper No. 3*, London: Centre for Defense Studies, June 2000, p. 18.

⁷² Interview with Maj-Gen. (Ret) J.S. Gottor, former Chief of Staff, Sierra Leone Army (1992-1994), 3 June 2000, Freetown. Efforts were underway to create a second battalion but that was still far from being completed. *Ibid.*

⁷³ Interview with Conteh, 2 June 2000, Freetown.

⁷⁴ Interview with Gottor, 3 June 2000, Freetown.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Re-Armament in Sierra Leone

Brig-Gen. (Ret) K.O. Conteh, remembers the Chinese shipment to have included about 1,000 AK-47-type rifles and ammunition.⁷⁶

China provided more than just rifles. Conteh recalled that, in addition to the AK-47s, the consignment also included 50 machine guns, as well as a number of automatic grenade launchers and grenades.⁷⁷ Retired Major-General Gottor concurred with this assessment, adding that the Chinese also provided ten twin-barrelled, wheeled anti-aircraft guns and an assortment of 60mm, 82mm and 120mm mortars. He described the ammunition that accompanied the shipment as being a “huge amount”. The shipment arrived in the first half of 1991.⁷⁸

March 1991 - April 1992

Despite Freetown’s limited financial resources, the government was able to secure significant supplies of arms and ammunition in the months immediately following the start of the rebellion. Guinea

Nigeria was the most generous of Sierra Leone’s benefactors. It provided some 2,500 rifles and significant ammunition.

donated several consignments of ammunition to Sierra Leone, although the ammunition was generally not in very good condition. Conakry also provided trainers for the two artillery pieces in the government’s arsenal.⁷⁹ In addition, Sierra Leone received a free shipment of ammunition from Egypt, which included 80 boxes of AK-47 ammunition (1,500 rounds of 7.62mm per box).⁸⁰

Nigeria was the most generous of Sierra Leone’s benefactors. It provided some 2,500 rifles and significant ammunition. The weapons were used and in questionable condition, but they were free. Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida’s largesse had its limits, however. Upon hearing a rumour that Sierra Leone had purchased US\$ 500,000 of weapons from Russia or Ukraine, Nigeria refused additional requests for arms.⁸¹ In fact, the transaction that Babangida referred to never materialized. The government, working through a local businessman, became suspicious of the broker and pulled out of the proposed deal.⁸²

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The government proved less adept at securing the goodwill of its soldiers under arms. In response to the rebellion, President Momoh roughly doubled the strength of the army, which in April 1992 had swelled to perhaps 5,000 men.⁸³ However, failure to compensate the troops adequately, and insufficient progress in the war effort contributed to the May 1992 *coup d’etat*.⁸⁴

May 1992 - February 1996

Despite an increase in troops, the SLA under the NPRC proved no more effective against the RUF and increasingly relied on others for assistance. By April 1994, the SLA’s strength had grown to some 12,000 to 13,000 soldiers.⁸⁵ But its morale, training and logistics remained deficient.

Accordingly, the NPRC turned to troops from Guinea and Nigeria for assistance in combating the RUF. When this too proved insufficient, the government engaged the services of private security companies: first, the Gurkha Security Guards Limited (GSG),⁸⁶ and then Executive Outcomes (EO). The government also began to formally arm the civilian militia.⁸⁷

⁷⁶ Interview with Conteh, 2 June 2000, Freetown.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Interview with Gottor, 3 June 2000, Freetown.

⁷⁹ Interview with Mondeh, 4 June 2000, Freetown.

⁸⁰ Interview with Gottor, 3 June 2000, Freetown.

⁸¹ Interview with Conteh, 2 June 2000, Freetown.

⁸² Interview with Gottor, 3 June 2000, Freetown.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Wounded SLA troops reportedly were also responsible for funding and finding their own medical attention. Written correspondence with Andersen, 19 August 2000.

⁸⁵ Interview with Gottor, 3 June 2000, Freetown.

⁸⁶ For an account of GSG’s short stay in Sierra Leone, see Alex Vines, “Gurkhas and the private security business in Africa”, in Cilliers and Mason (eds), *Peace, Profit or Plunder?: The Privatisation of Security in War-torn African Societies*, pp. 129-32.

⁸⁷ Previously, SLA soldiers would, on their own initiative, often “give” their government-issued G-3 rifles to the Kamajors and other pro-government militia, upon receiving the much-desired AK-47. Interview with Conteh, 2 June 2000, Freetown.

Re-Armament in Sierra Leone

The method by which the government obtained weapons, as well as its suppliers, changed during the NPRC's rule. The NPRC obtained most of its weapons from Romania, Russia, and Ukraine, albeit through a third party. Items from Romania included: SPG-9 rocket-propelled grenade launchers, 75-100 automatic grenade launchers, various light and heavy machine guns, various mortars from 60mm to 120mm and around 1,000 rifles including around 500 "M-16-type" rifles with grenade launchers.

Purchases from Russia included ten-wheel armoured vehicles and ten-track BMP-2 amphibious vehicles. Systems from Ukraine included two helicopters, a Mi-17 transport and a Mi-24 gunship, which constituted the first components of an air force. The government did not receive any significant naval equipment.

In addition to these weapons, China provided a free shipment of small arms.⁸⁸ Gottor believed the total number of AK-47 rifles procured under the NPRC was perhaps 4,000. He could not be certain, he said, because the NPRC bought matériel without consulting or informing Military Headquarters.⁸⁹

March 1996 - February 1998

The government's arms procurement practices remained much the same under Kabbah as they had under the NPRC. Kabbah used the same arms broker as the NPRC, the diamond merchant Serge Müller. Kabbah paid Müller an undisclosed amount of money for new weapons but Müller initially refused to fill the order, saying that the government of Sierra Leone still owed him for previous shipments. Kabbah did eventually receive some small arms and ammunition from Müller, who still insists that the government owes him money. He has recently taken his case to court in Sierra Leone.⁹⁰

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The government also received some weapons from Executive Outcomes. In January 1997, the government's formal relationship with EO came to an end. Kabbah had wanted to maintain the relationship, but he elected to terminate the contract to meet a central demand of Sankoh to conclude the November 1996 peace agreement between the government and the RUF. Upon departing, EO provided the government with some small arms.⁹¹ The quantity of weapons was not significant however, as EO experienced a difficult time obtaining arms. It received at least one shipment of Bulgarian matériel, but the consignment was not more than ten tons.⁹²

When Kabbah was in exile in Conakry, he contacted the British company, Sandline International, for assistance. Sandline arranged for a 35-ton shipment of Bulgarian arms to assist ECOMOG in restoring President Kabbah. A British air cargo company, Sky Air, flew from Bulgaria to Nigeria on 22 February 1998, and from Nigeria to Sierra Leone the following day. It is unclear how much, if any, of this equipment the pro-government militia in Sierra Leone ever received. Some of the weapons were reportedly given to the Kamajors. Most, if not all, of the weapons were allegedly taken by Nigerian ECOMOG troops.⁹³ According to a Nigerian military officer, President Abuja eventually turned the weapons over as intended.⁹⁴

Besides raiding state armouries, the AFRC received significant arms from the traditional backers of its ally, the RUF. As the AFRC could not use the country's largest airport to receive arms,⁹⁵ it significantly expanded and developed the capacities of the airport in Magburaka. At least two or three Antonov-24s

⁸⁸ Interview with Mondeh, 4 June 2000, Freetown.

⁸⁹ Interview with Gottor, 3 June 2000, Freetown.

⁹⁰ Interviews with informed observers, 4 June 2000, Freetown and 16 August 2000, by telephone.

⁹¹ According to several reports, EO armed and trained the Kamajors. (See, for example, Khareen Pech, "Executive Outcomes - A corporate conquest", in Cilliers and Mason (eds), *Peace, Profit or Plunder?: The Privatisation of Security in War-torn African Societies*, p. 94.) According to another account, however, EO did little more than allow the Kamajors to sometimes accompany its men. The Kamajors also occasionally worked in conjunction with the SLA, which received EO training. Any weapons the Kamajors received came from the Government of Sierra Leone and not EO. Written correspondence with an informed observer, 5 September 2000.

⁹² Interviews with informed observers, 24 August 2000 and 4 September 2000, by telephone.

⁹³ Human Rights Watch, "Bulgaria: Money Talks, Arms Dealing with Human Rights Abusers", *Human Rights Watch Report*, Vol. 11, No. 4, April 1999, pp. 49-51.

⁹⁴ Ed O'Loughlin, "Sandline scandal arms shipment reaches forces", *The Independent*, 22 May 2000, available on the Internet at <www.independent.co.uk>.

⁹⁵ ECOMOG troops continued to control Lungi Airport, which serves the capital Freetown, throughout the AFRC's rule.

Re-Armament in Sierra Leone

landed in Magburaka in October and November 1997. The aircraft flew from Burkina Faso via Liberia. The shipments included various small arms and light weapons, and, some believe, Blowpipe anti-aircraft missiles.⁹⁶

March 1998 – July 2000

The United Kingdom has become Sierra Leone's biggest arms supplier since UN sanctions were amended in 1998. In October 1999, the UK announced it would provide the government of Sierra Leone with 132 light machine guns with two million rounds of ammunition, 7,500 rifles, 800,000 rounds of "training" ammunition, 24 81mm mortars with 2,000 rounds of ammunition, and various gear, including uniforms and boots for 3,000 troops.⁹⁷ In May 2000 London provided 10,000 self-loading rifles (SLRs).⁹⁸ In June, it added 5 million rounds of ammunition and 4,000 mortars.⁹⁹ In July, it announced yet another shipment of 5 million rounds of ammunition.¹⁰⁰

The United Kingdom has become the government of Sierra Leone's biggest arms supplier since the amendment of UN sanctions in 1998.

China also continues to provide the government of Sierra Leone with weapons. Although it had previously provided assorted small arms in the 1970s and 1980s, by several accounts, its recent supply of matériel was more generous than usual. The shipment, announced in November 1998, arrived around April 1999, and included a variety of small arms and light weapons.¹⁰¹ Freetown's desperate need for arms is likely only a partial explanation. China is also motivated by Taylor's relationship with Taiwan. Beijing does not want to see Monrovia expand its influence in the region.

There have been additional offers to provide Sierra Leone with weapons and military equipment. South Africa has discussed the possibility of training and equipping a signal squadron, as well as promising to donate military equipment, kits and uniforms to the SLA. A Bulgarian company has offered to give Sierra Leone a loan of US\$ 3.75 million to purchase weapons.¹⁰² As of July 2000, neither of these offers had been acted upon.

⁹⁶ Interview with an informed observer, 16 August 2000, by telephone.

⁹⁷ "Defense & Foreign Affairs: Strategic Policy", *International Media Corporation*, April 2000, available via Lexis-Nexis. An individual familiar with arms deliveries to Sierra Leone believes, however, that the government of Sierra Leone received a much smaller shipment of matériel than mentioned in this report. Written correspondence with an informed observer, 22 August 2000.

⁹⁸ "Britain sending more bullets to Sierra Leone", *The Guardian*, 14 July 2000, available on the Internet at <www.nisat.org>.

⁹⁹ Written correspondence with Tamsin Burfitt, UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 10 July 2000.

¹⁰⁰ "Britain sending more bullets to Sierra Leone", *The Guardian*, 14 July 2000, available on the Internet at <www.nisat.org>.

¹⁰¹ Interview with an informed observer, 4 June 2000, Freetown.

¹⁰² "Handing Over Note by Commander OC Medani", DHQ/SL/109/4/A, May 2000.

¹⁰³ "Summary Programme Information", Executive Secretariat, NCDDR, February 2000, pp. 2-3.

Disarmament in Sierra Leone

Weapons Retrieved...

Relatively few of these weapons in circulation have been surrendered or retrieved. The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme in Sierra Leone represents a formal and structured attempt to deal with the problem that the proliferation of small arms poses to the government. ECOMOG troops also took weapons from the RUF and the AFRC outside of this programme but without systematically accounting for them. NAMSIL has sought to recover weapons its peacekeepers have lost but, all in all, none of these initiatives can be described as an unqualified success.

Weapons Retrieved through the DDR Programme

The government of Sierra Leone's DDR programme predates the *Lomé Peace Agreement*. In the wake of ECOMOG's counter-offensive in February 1998, several thousand rebels and former government soldiers turned themselves in or were captured. Roughly 3,000 did not accept the government's offer to be re-trained and rejoin the loyal SLA to fight alongside ECOMOG. These combatants constituted the first crop of candidates for a DDR programme, for which the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) was established in July 1998. All were disarmed, but only 1,400 fighters graduated from the programme. The remainder escaped from detention during the rebel offensive on Freetown in January 1999.¹⁰³

The DDR programme envisioned in the *Lomé Peace Agreement* did not start smoothly. Disarmament was to commence within six weeks of the signing of the treaty.¹⁰⁴ However, by 18 August, disarmament had yet to begin. Several factors contributed to the delay: tepid donor support, administrative shortcomings, delays in the deployment of peacekeepers, and the RUF's disinterest in abiding by the terms of the agreement. Disarmament officially began on 20 October 1999, when the first disarmament site was declared open.

However, this date was essentially ceremonial as the centre at Lungi already existed before the peace agreement was signed. The programme really got underway on 4 November when four new centres were opened: two at Port Loko, one at Daru and one at Kenema. Four additional disarmament sites were opened on 17 April 2000, in Bo, Magburaka, Makeni and Moyamba.

By the time the disarmament process effectively collapsed after the RUF attacked UNAMSIL peacekeepers in early May 2000, some 12,500 weapons and 250,000 rounds of ammunition had been collected.

⁹⁶ Interview with an informed observer, 4 June 2000, Freetown.

⁹⁷ "Defense & Foreign Affairs: Strategic Policy", International Media Corporation, April 2000, available via Lexis-Nexis. An individual familiar with arms deliveries to Sierra Leone believes, however, that the Government of Sierra Leone received a much smaller shipment of materiel than mentioned in this report. Written correspondence with an informed observer, 22 August 2000.

⁹⁸ "Britain sending more bullets to Sierra Leone", The Guardian, 14 July 2000, available on the Internet at <www.nisat.org>.

⁹⁹ Written correspondence with Tamsin Burfitt, UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 10 July 2000.

¹⁰⁰ "Britain sending more bullets to Sierra Leone", The Guardian, 14 July 2000, available on the Internet at <www.nisat.org>.

¹⁰⁴ UN Document S/1999/777, Annex, "Peace Agreement Between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone", 12 July 1999, Article XVI, p. 20.

Re-Armament in Sierra Leone

Disarmament in Sierra Leone under Lomé			
Weapon Type	Number Registered as of 9 May 2000*	Weapon Type	Number Registered as of 9 May 2000*
AK-47 Rifle	4,287	RPG-7	217
AK-74 Rifle	1,072	Mortar	45
FN FAL Rifle	440	Pistol	496
SLR Rifle	451	Grenade	1,855
G-3 Rifle	940	“Other”	2,752
Machine Gun	140	Total	12,695
* The disarmament process effectively ended after the first week of May 2000		Ammunition	253,535

This chart records the numbers and types of weapons surrendered at Weapons Storage Centres after 4 November 1999, which is based on an Internal UN document.

The weapons collected were from virtually every major arms-producing country. Rifles included various makes of AK-47s (including Chinese, former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe),¹⁰⁵ Belgian FN FALs, German G-3s¹⁰⁶ and Mauser 98ks, and British SLRs and Lee-Enfield no.4s. Machine guns included the British GPMG, Chinese 12.7mm machine guns and RPDs from Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union.

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A few sub-machine guns were also recovered: the German Sten and the Israeli Uzi. Grenades included mostly Chinese varieties. Anti-personnel mines included Chinese and Italian models. No anti-tank mines were turned in as part of the disarmament programme, although the SLA recovered some from the border with Guinea. Mortars included 60mm, 82mm and 120mm, with Chinese 82mm mortars being the most common.

Other weapons collected included unexploded bomblets from French Beluga cluster bombs (dropped from a Nigerian Alpha Jet), a British Blowpipe anti-aircraft missile, a Soviet Spigot anti-tank guided weapon, two Soviet SA-7 surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), and 23mm anti-aircraft guns and Katyusha 122mm rockets from the former East Bloc. Besides receiving a variety of small arms ammunition, US 105mm shells (including white phosphorous ammunition) – presumably brought to Sierra Leone by a contingent from ECOMOG – were also turned in.¹⁰⁷

The quality of many of these weapons was suspect. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan acknowledged the generally “low quality” of the arms collected.¹⁰⁸ Those who enjoyed a closer view of the process were less diplomatic and charitable in their assessments.

The UK Deputy High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Steve Crossman, said that most of the weapons turned in during the DDR programme were in appalling condition. Some were unworkable. Many were homemade. Clearly, he said, they held on to the best.¹⁰⁹ Another person familiar with disarmament

¹⁰⁵ According to Brian Johnson-Thomas, many recovered AK-47s were of Ukrainian origin. Brian Wood, “Testimony Before the Security Council”, 31 July 2000.

¹⁰⁶ Many of these G-3 rifles were of Iranian manufacture. Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Ian Biddle, former Qualified Technical Representative, NCDDR, 24 August 2000, by telephone

¹⁰⁸ UN Document S/2000/186, para. 24.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Steve Crossman, Deputy High Commissioner, UK High Commission to Sierra Leone, 1 June 2000, Freetown.

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in Sierra Leone described much of what was turned in as “absolute crap”. He added that some of the weapons posed more of a danger to those firing the trigger than those in the sights.¹¹⁰

While it is natural that warring factions would be reluctant to turn in their best weapons and their best-trained troops, the largely laissez-faire attitude of ECOMOG, UNAMSIL and NCDDR did not help matters. For example, individuals were permitted to turn in weapons that should not have been accepted. Many were clearly not operable. During the early stages of disarmament, homemade hunting guns and single grenades were accepted.

While taking weapons out of circulation was rightly seen as a priority, the means by which this was accomplished created unforeseen problems. Individuals who registered at disarmament sites and submitted their weapons were deemed eligible to receive a Transitional Safety Allowance payment of US\$ 300.

When a person can in effect sell a US\$ 10 grenade for US\$ 300, this creates a demand for weapons.

Clearly, when a person can in effect sell a US\$ 10 grenade for US\$ 300, this creates a demand for weapons. In fact, there are reports that the DDR programme had the effect of bringing weapons into Sierra Leone from Guinea. Moreover, by failing to ensure that those

individuals handing in weapons were actually combatants, the theoretical number of “ex-combatants” was inflated, suggesting that progress was being made when, in fact, it was not.

Weapons Retrieved Unilaterally by ECOMOG

ECOMOG reportedly captured numerous weapons from the rebels during its counter-offensive in January and February 1999. These weapons were not turned in to the Weapons Storage Centres (WSCs). Rather, they were kept to replenish ECOMOG’s depleted stocks. There are reports that Nigerian troops returning from Sierra Leone sold weapons they smuggled back with them to criminal elements active in Nigeria.¹¹¹

Weapons Retrieved Unilaterally by UNAMSIL

Relatively few of the weapons seized from UNAMSIL have been retrieved. The three Guinean BRDMs taken in January have been recovered, but without their heavy machine guns.¹¹² Three of the seized Kenyan rifles were reclaimed.¹¹³ Roughly half of the weapons seized from the Nigerian company near Kambia in May were returned.¹¹⁴ A Jordanian soldier managed to recover his weapon.¹¹⁵

UNAMSIL has also retrieved weapons outside of the formal disarmament process that did not include weapons lost by the “Blue Helmets”. For example, in July 2000, when UN troops staged a successful operation to free the peacekeepers being detained in Kailahun, they recovered a large quantity of weapons and munitions from the RUF,¹¹⁶ including at least one surface-to-air missile (SAM).¹¹⁷ The SAM is believed to be of Ukrainian manufacture and to have come from Burkina Faso via Liberia.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁰ Interview with an informed observer, 18 May 2000, Conakry.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Anthony Okoro, “Crime Upsurge Linked to Abacha”, *P.M. News* (Lagos), 1 September 1999, available via Lexis-Nexis.

¹¹² Interviews with UNAMSIL officials, June 2000, Freetown.

¹¹³ Internal UNAMSIL document, February/March 2000.

¹¹⁴ Interviews with UNAMSIL officials, June 2000, Freetown.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Dufka, 15 August 2000, by telephone.

¹¹⁶ Written correspondence with Maj. Mike Evanson-Goddard, former UN Military Observer, UNAMSIL, 11 October 2000.

¹¹⁷ Holbrooke, “Statement before the UN Security Council’s Exploratory Hearing on Sierra Leone Diamonds”.

¹¹⁸ Written correspondence with Evanson-Goddard, 11 October 2000.

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... but not Destroyed

Most of the weapons collected under the DDR programme were not destroyed. ECOMOG, which oversaw the disarmament process and administered the WSCs until February 2000, only dismantled the weapons that had been surrendered. The weapons' working parts, such as the bolt carrier and the breech/slide assembly in rifles, were removed and separated. Many of these weapons could be easily reassembled within minutes. AK-47s permit the complete interchangeability of parts.

It is unclear why these weapons were not destroyed at the outset. One reason posited is that ECOMOG troops wanted to recover those weapons previously lost to the rebels. The same reason may have motivated the government of Sierra Leone. Kabbah may also have wanted to keep any weapons recovered for future use. The UN says that it always told UNAMSIL to destroy the weapons, but if this is true, then the instructions clearly did not reach the peacekeepers overseeing the process. They began to change their policies only in April 2000.

Even well intentioned initiatives went awry. The decision to have a ceremonial bonfire to destroy weapons is a case in point. The idea was to show the world that something positive was happening in Sierra Leone. The plans began to unravel when Brigadier-General Maxwell Khobe, the much-respected Chief of Defence Staff, died on 18 April. Kabbah declared a period of national mourning and postponed the scheduled arms destruction. Before the bonfire could be rescheduled, the WSC in Masiaka, where the weapons were being kept, was overrun. The RUF stole some 400 rifles that had been stored there.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

Despite the relatively bleak picture described in this paper, a number of factors suggest that the situation in Sierra Leone is not without hope:

- **First**, the country is relatively fortunate to have been at war for "only" ten years. Prior to 1991, the country had not engaged in armed struggle for independence and had only a very small army. The government had purposely sought to limit the size and power of the armed forces;
- **Second**, the combatants' lack of professionalism has resulted in their weapons generally being in a state of disrepair. Failure to adequately maintain and clean weapons degrades them - especially those used in a wet and humid climate such as Sierra Leone's. The same is true for ammunition, which must be stored in a dry, cool place to maintain its effectiveness; and
- **Third**, the United Nations has acknowledged that its earlier approach to the conflict was inadequate. It has realized that insufficient resources have been devoted to resolving the problem and that authorizing additional troops for UNAMSIL, without sufficient regard for countries' willingness and ability to supply them, cannot be continued.

Over a year after the *Lomé Peace Agreement* was signed, the political and security situation in Sierra Leone remains extremely fragile. Despite international arms embargoes and a regional moratorium on small arms and light weapons, the government of Sierra Leone, the RUF and other non-state actors such as the pro-government militia, are all re-arming at an alarming rate.

The RUF continues to obtain weapons illegally via countries such as Liberia and Burkina Faso, while the government of Sierra Leone has recently received substantial weaponry from the United Kingdom. Given the easy availability of arms in the country, the weakness of the current government, the relative strength of the RUF, and the fluidity of alliances among the country's armed groups, the likelihood of continued conflict in Sierra Leone is great.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Interview with an informed observer, 18 May 2000, Conakry.



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