
PART II – THE AFTERMATH OF WITHDRAWAL IN SIERRA LEONE

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Introduction

In 2002, Sierra Leone emerged from a decade of civil war with a joint declaration signed between the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Sierra Leone Army and the quasi-official Civil Defence Force. Parliamentary and presidential elections were held that year, reinstating the Sierra Leone People's Party and its leader, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, who had been forced from power in the late 1990s.

Though the last contingent of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) withdrew in December 2005, the Sierra Leonean state still relies heavily on external support for security, particularly from the British government, and the newly (re)established security forces have yet to prove their ability to deal with potential security threats. There were no reports of major incidents of unrest in 2006, and many viewed the extradition of Charles Taylor from exile in Nigeria to the Special Court for Sierra Leone in March 2006 as the major security challenge of that year. The court promptly requested the relocation of Taylor's trial to The Hague, citing security concerns – an indication that Sierra Leone's national security apparatus is still not fully functional and is likely to remain reliant on external support for some time to come.

As in the foregoing study of public perceptions of security in urban Liberia, the focus in this briefing is on local perceptions of general and personal security, and

particularly on the actors considered to provide protection or pose a threat.¹ The same multi-method approach was used, involving a combination of a survey poll covering three urban areas, focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-standardised interviews, thus providing for a structured and focused comparison of empirical data gathered in both countries. The fieldwork was conducted between April and June 2006. The research centres on the following issues: Who provides security? How has the situation changed compared to the period before the end of the civil war? Has it changed since the withdrawal of the bulk of external troops? And finally, are the same types of actors considered security threats in both countries?

Results show that although both general and personal security have improved substantially in Sierra Leone since the peace agreement was signed in 2002, the security situation remains fragile.² Since the departure of the last contingent of UNAMSIL troops, which during its deployment had provided for the bulk of security in urban Sierra Leone, informal security actors have come to play a more significant role in the security arena. Given that the fieldwork was conducted shortly after UNAMSIL's withdrawal, the sustainability of the current post-conflict phase cannot be determined. However, the results reveal the significant vacuum left by the multinational force and exposes the inability of the national security forces to fill it.

Security Actors in Post-conflict Sierra Leone

Since independence in 1961, Sierra Leone has witnessed six general elections and five military coups. The civil war began in 1991, when the RUF – led by former army corporal Foday Sankoh and backed by Liberia's Charles Taylor – launched a rebellion against the autocratic rule of former Major-General Joseph Saidu Momoh. He was overthrown by Captain Valentine Strasser, who brought

in Executive Outcomes, a private military company, to drive back the RUF. Strasser was himself ousted in a military coup and in early 1996, Brigadier General Julius M. Bio handed power to the newly elected President Kabbah. The president signed a peace accord with Sankoh's rebels later that year, but both the RUF and the Sierra Leone military continued their efforts to destabilise the country. Following a series of agreements in late 2000 and early 2001, UN- and UK-sponsored peacebuilding efforts began showing signs of success. The new British-trained Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) also began deploying, the joint declaration was signed and Kabbah won a landslide victory in the general elections, consolidating his position in power.

Notwithstanding the major role played by the 17,300 strong UNAMSIL force in maintaining a stable security environment, British involvement in Sierra Leone has probably had the most significant impact on the country's security sector. In addition to the training of government armed forces by the British-led International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT), the British government has also committed itself to an 'over-the-horizon' guarantee to intervene within 48-72 hours in the event that sustained fighting breaks out.

Upon completion of its disarmament and rehabilitation programme for more than 70,000 civil war combatants in 2004, UNAMSIL handed primary responsibility for security in the capital over to the local police and armed forces. The country's progress towards peace was considered so significant that UNAMSIL troops withdrew in December 2005. In January 2006, an assistance mission, the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL), succeeded UNAMSIL.

Community Perceptions of Protection and Threat

In a recent survey of policing agencies in Sierra Leone, Bruce Baker identified three types of policing structures: those operated

Table 1: Perceptions of general and personal safety in urban Sierra Leone

	Public safety (%)	Personal safety (%)
Not safe at all	13.4	10.3
Fairly unsafe	37.9	27.5
It's okay	32.3	40.9
Very safe	14.7	20.7
No answer/ Don't know	1.7	0.7

N = 702 (total sample)

by the Sierra Leonean state, those private and community structures that have state approval and those without state authorisation.³ He found that in contrast to widespread opinion, citizens do not always choose state policing over the non-state alternatives. In fact, he states that many consider non-state policing a viable alternative to the often distant and inefficient state police. Though this may reflect the current state of affairs – and the results of the survey confirm the importance of non-state actors – Sierra Leoneans do indeed expect the state security actors to be in charge of a properly functioning national security apparatus.

A noteworthy result from the survey is that Liberians have a more favourable perception of their country's general security situation than their neighbours, although Sierra Leone has enjoyed a longer post-conflict phase. Only 47% of Sierra Leonean respondents rated the security situation in their country as 'okay' or 'very safe' (Table 1), compared to 60.4% in Liberia, and they have a much more negative perception of the overall security situation. A majority of respondents in both countries – 61.6% in Sierra Leone and 69.3% in Liberia – felt personally 'very safe' or 'okay', although Sierra Leoneans appear to be more sceptical about their personal safety than Liberians (37.8% compared to 29.7%).

The FGDs confirmed the general scepticism, with discussants agreeing that

Table 2: Perceptions of security actors in urban Sierra Leone

	Security actors	Very important to personal security	Somewhat important to personal security	Does not affect personal security	Somewhat a threat to personal security	A big threat to personal security
State actors	Sierra Leone Police	71.1	16.7	3.4	4.7	3.3
	Republic of SL Armed Forces	65	19.1	5	5.6	4.4
	Mines monitoring officers	12.4	10.3	55	3.6	1.6
	Traffic wardens	21.2	30.5	34	5.1	2.8
International/ commercial non-state actors	Private security companies	19.8	34.8	38.6	0.9	0.7
Domestic non-state actors	Secret societies: Poro/Bondo/Ojeh	15.5	11.1	50.9	9.4	10.3
	Youth wings of political parties	13.8	16.8	33.5	21.8	8.5
	National Union of SL Students	28.6	18.9	36	4	0.6
	Ghetto Boys	1.7	2.7	16.2	24.1	52.7
	Bike Riders	17.4	21.7	30.1	16.2	10.4
	West Side Boys	1.9	1.0	17	18.8	55.8
	Civil Defence Force	7.7	12.8	20.5	19.5	34.6
	Revolutionary United Front	1.0	1.3	16.1	12.8	65.2

N = 702 (out of total sample of 700); percentages of ‘Don’t know’ and ‘no answer’ responses not shown.

though there had been no major incidents of unrest since the end of the last war, it remained an uneasy peace. The prospect of elections in April 2007 was noted as particularly worrisome.

As in Liberia, the Sierra Leone government and its security forces scored high in the respondents’ expectations for the provision of national security (Table 2). Unlike in Liberia, however, the armed forces of Sierra Leone were not dissolved, but underwent extensive retraining over the past five years. Surprisingly, it was the fact that the RSLAF stayed out of sight and were confined to their barracks that accounts for the discussants’ favourable assessment (Table 3). This to some extent explains why

more than two-thirds of survey poll respondents considered the RSLAF as very important for their personal security, despite the violent, even criminal, history of the military in the country.

FGD discussants had a relatively negative opinion of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP). This deviates from the positive ratings given to the SLP in the survey poll, where 71.1% of respondents considered them to be very important for their personal security. What explains this disparity? Interviews conducted with local and international experts on security-related issues reveal that, despite their high expectations about the role of national security forces, Sierra Leoneans are very

Table 3: Classification of security actors by focus groups

Positive	Neutral/Disputed	Negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSLAF • IMATT • UNAMSIL/UNIOSIL • Headmen/headwomen • Chiefdom Police • Community watch teams • Private security companies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sierra Leone Police Operational Support Division • City Council • Secret societies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poro - Ojeh(masked society) - Hunter's society • Chiefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sierra Leone Police • Prison authorities • Ex-combatants • Criminals (e.g. armed robbers) • Ghetto Boys

aware of the shortcomings of the police forces in particular. As with their Liberian counterparts, the SLP receive external support and training, in this case from the Commonwealth Police and the civilian police section of UNAMSIL. However, their ability to perform their duties is hampered by a lack of equipment and insufficient remuneration for their services.

Among non-state informal security actors, private security companies (PSCs) and secret societies appear to play a more significant role in terms of providing security in Sierra Leone than in Liberia. A majority of respondents (54.6%) in Sierra Leone said that PSCs were important for their personal security, compared to 38.3% in Liberia. While about half the respondents in both countries considered secret societies to have a negligible effect on their personal security, almost a third (26.6%) of Sierra Leonean respondents rated them positively compared to 15.5% in Liberia. Among Sierra Leone's traditional non-state actors, the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) were generally considered to be a threat to personal security (54.1%). The FGDs confirmed these results. The negative perception of the CDF is partly attributable to their changing role during the civil war. Formed around a core group of traditional hunters, the CDF emerged when government troops failed to protect civilians against rebel attacks, but certain elements within

the CDF later resorted to extortion and acts of brutality.

Ghetto Boys, many of whom are ex-combatants, were given the worst ratings: more than half the respondents considered them a 'big threat' to their personal security. Likewise, 74.6% of respondents considered the West Side Boys – a rogue army faction that emerged at the end of 1990s but which has been officially disbanded – to be a threat or a 'big threat' to their security. The FGDs confirmed these views, and discussants agreed that the West Side Boys were capable of recruiting and reorganising at any time. The fact that many former combatants – whether Ghetto Boys, West Side Boys or RUF rebels – were unemployed and struggling to make ends meet, underscores this threat. For

Table 4: Perceptions of changes in security since before the end of the last war

	Public safety (%)	Personal safety (%)
Much worse	0.4	1.6
Worse	2.1	2.6
No change	4.6	4.4
Somewhat better	60	63.4
Much better	31.8	27.4
No answer	1.1	0.7

N = 702 (total sample)

it is from this group that those wishing to destabilise the security sector for their own personal gain, for example, would recruit.

The study allowed for comparisons of security perceptions of the current situation with the period before the end of the war. It also allows for comparisons of security perceptions after the war with and without UNAMSIL's presence and reflects a shift in respondents' attitudes marked by UNAMSIL's withdrawal in December 2005. The mapping exercises in the FGDs produced some striking results and led to the identification of additional actors who were considered relevant in the security sector: most prominent among them were the community watch teams. The map of the current security arena in Sierra Leone comprises far more actors than were present during UNAMSIL's deployment. Similarly, more actors were involved in the period before 2001, prior to the end of the civil war. This implies that with the presence of UN troops the need for security was covered. Moreover, the withdrawal of UNAMSIL troops produced a security vacuum that was filled not by state actors, but rather by private, non-state actors.

How can these results be interpreted? FGDs revealed that, as in Liberia, Sierra Leoneans ideally prefer state actors to non-state actors. Though this is no indication of their actual performance, state security forces are expected to provide security, particularly at the national level. For, as the findings from the FGDs reveal, citizens resort to privately produced security mostly by way of communal self-help organisations and, to a lesser extent, from commercial actors, for lack of a state-produced alternative.

As in Liberia, there has been a significant shift in security perceptions of Sierra Leoneans compared to 2001 (Table 4). Here too, a significant number of respondents considered their personal security situation to be 'somewhat' or 'much better' (90.8% in total; 86.1% in total in Liberia). Similar results were obtained as regards public security.

Lessons to be Shared with Liberia: Security Sector Reform and Reconstruction in Sierra Leone

Four key lessons are highlighted below and can generally be considered when designing security sector reform and reconstruction (SSR) strategies in other post-conflict societies:

First, the success of the reform of the Sierra Leonean army is a good example of the merits of non-commercial forms of external intervention as opposed to the employment of private military companies. The findings from the fieldwork reveal that the image of the RSLAF has improved substantially, and the training they received through the British-led IMATT team has certainly played a role in this respect. Those in charge of SSR in Liberia should reconsider the continued involvement of the commercial private security agency DynCorp to train the new national army, particularly as regards the concerns involving transparency and accountability deficits mentioned in the Liberia briefing.

Second, results from the Sierra Leone case study further underscore the importance of non-state actors in the security sector. Since the national security apparatus is still not fully functional, citizens will turn to such alternative informal actors for security provision for some time to come. Hence, this is not a short-term phenomenon and should be taken into account when designing security sector reform strategies.

Third, the concerns voiced by FGD discussants regarding groups of unemployed youth – mostly former combatants – and their negative assessment in the survey polls underline the need to focus on social background conditions. The creation of employment opportunities other than those derived from engaging in combat would serve to reintegrate such groups. This is particularly important in the run-up to the 2007 elections, when such groups would be vulnerable to manipulation by political leaders.

Finally, local ownership of the transformation process in post-conflict societies is crucial if it is to succeed. Two examples from Sierra Leone suggest a direction for Liberia. The Office of National Security (ONS), established in 2002, is a post-conflict innovation. It functions as the coordinating body of Sierra Leone's security agencies and serves as the secretariat of the National Security Council, the highest forum for dealing with matters relating to the security of the country. There are obvious benefits in having one overriding national body to coordinate all security agencies, particularly in terms of promoting effective security threat assessments.

Liberia's Governance Reform Commission could either duplicate the role of the ONS or establish a similar body to perform this key function. Second, the Police Partnership Boards (PPBs) that were set up in Sierra Leone have the potential to strengthen community policing efforts. Comprising community members, PPBs are intended to give citizens a voice in security-related matters, give police officers access to information they would otherwise not have and help to improving the image of the police force.

Conclusion

Although a sophisticated comparison may not be possible at this point, the two surveys allow for some preliminary conclusions to be made in the cases of Liberia and Sierra Leone and for some lessons to be learnt for post-conflict reconstruction in other countries. In general, the briefings reveal a number of similarities as regards public perceptions of security in both case studies.

First, and not surprisingly, there is overwhelming evidence that security conditions have improved dramatically in both countries since the end of the civil wars.

Second, state security actors – both the police and the military forces – received remarkably positive ratings despite obvious shortcomings in terms of equipment and

training as well as their general history of violence and oppression. These perceptions are most probably less a reflection of these actors' actual performance, but can in fact be interpreted as an indication of the high expectations citizens have for these actors. There is little doubt that there is a pronounced preference for state security actors to provide for security in both countries.

A third similarity is the significance of non-state informal actors in providing security. The researchers were able to identify non-state groups which were perceived positively, such as private security companies in both countries and Liberia's community watch teams. Others, particularly secret societies, received mixed results, though they were deemed irrelevant for the personal safety of larger parts of the population.

Probably the most clear-cut parallel between the two countries in terms of non-state actors can be drawn with regard to informal groups of young men – such as ex-combatants, Street Boys and Ghetto Boys – who were undoubtedly considered the most serious threats. This finding also points to the urgent need to (re-)integrate them into society by creating job opportunities, and makes it obvious that both Liberia and Sierra Leone face similar challenges in the social and economic arena in tackling the eradication of violent conflict.

Notwithstanding the many similarities, there are two major and interrelated differences between the two cases. First, though one would generally expect perceptions of security to be more positive in Sierra Leone with its lengthier period of post-conflict security than in Liberia, the findings are just the reverse. This may be explained by a second difference as regards public perceptions of security actors, namely the impact of the presence of the UN peacekeeping mission. In Liberia, UNMIL, with its troop strength of more than 15,000 soldiers, is considered to be the key provider of security. In Sierra Leone, when UN peacekeepers, who most

probably played an equally significant role during their deployment, withdrew in December 2005, the subsequent security vacuum was only partly filled by state and non-state actors. This, in turn, may have resulted in a significantly less favourable security perception.

Hence, there is no doubt that efforts to improve the performance of the security sector in both countries must continue. Foreign troops cannot and should not stay forever; in the long run there can be no alternative to a locally owned security sector in post-conflict societies. The findings suggest that in Liberia and Sierra Leone, a strong state security sector embedded in sound socio-economic development that takes into consideration the role of non-state actors will work best. Given the fairly divergent perceptions of the different groups, there can be no simple blueprint for the treatment of these sets of security actors. It may be worthwhile to consider some form of cooperation with the more positively rated actors – at least from a mid-term perspective – while other groups may warrant a tougher approach in case their fortunes do not improve sufficiently to reduce the threat they pose.

The development of a promising strategy to deal with non-state security actors requires deeper knowledge, particularly about the roles of different groups of actors, their relations and interactions as well as their impact in the rural areas. In short, further research into all aspects of an oligopoly of force is of the essence.

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Endnotes

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² Economist Intelligence Unit 2006, *Sierra Leone Country Profile 2006*, London; United Nations Security Council 2006, 'Third Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone', S/2006/922.

³ Baker, B. 2006, 'Beyond the State Police in Urban Uganda and Sierra Leone' in *Afrika Spectrum*: 41:1: 55-76.