Chapter Three: Overview of Armed Forces Involved in the Sierra Leone Conflict

1. Fighting Factions

1.(a) The Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF)
The Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF) is commonly known and referred to as the Sierra Leone Army (SLA). When RUF/NPFL forces commenced military operations in the south and east of Sierra Leone in March 1991, the SLA was under-staffed, under-equipped and often poorly trained. The SLA had three battalions deployed in the Eastern and Southern Provinces.

Until 2002, when the Government of Sierra Leone embarked on significant military reforms, the senior hierarchy of the SLA was as described in Figure 1 below.

Army Branch forces below Army Chief of Staff were and are divided into brigades, battalions, companies, platoons and sections, with a conventional officer and non-commissioned officer ranking hierarchy. In addition to barracks in provincial Sierra Leone, the SLA has a number of major installations in the Western Area, including the Defence Headquarters at Cockerill and the Armed Forces Training Centre near Waterloo.

From the beginning of the war in 1991, the SLA did not engage RUF forces unaccompanied. In addition to ad-hoc civilian initiatives, it fought alongside foreign forces primarily from other West African countries, at different times throughout the conflict.

Figure 1: Senior Hierarchy of the Sierra Leone Army before 2002 (Picture: SLA drill, May 1997)
civilian security initiatives and local militias, including those evolved from traditional hunting societies throughout Sierra Leone, the SLA fought alongside foreign forces primarily from other West African countries at different times throughout the conflict. This foreign involvement was also expressed through the provision of logistics, resources, military training and guidance to the SLA. As the war progressed, the SLA collaborated with a Liberian fighting force engaged in the Liberian conflict called ULIMO and a selection of international private military companies, including the Gurkha Security Guards and Executive Outcomes. In 1992, a contingent of the SLA made up part of the ECOMOG peacekeeping forces in Liberia.

On two occasions during the 11-year conflict, in 1992 and in 1997, members of the SLA overthrew the Government of Sierra Leone, establishing military regimes in its place. The two juntas were very different in nature. On 29 April 1992, junior officers of the SLA came to Freetown to complain about the desperate situation on the war front. They successfully staged a coup, ousting the then President and the All People’s Congress (APC) establishment. They created the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), swearing in 25 year-old Captain Strasser as Head of State. Shortly after the coup, SLA members looted civilian property in major centres, particularly in Freetown and the Western Area. In December 1992, SLA members suspected of having planned a coup were convicted of treason and executed, resulting in international condemnation of the NPRC. The NPRC engaged in an extensive recruitment drive, more than doubling the number of infantry available to the SLA by 1994. New recruits received only summary military training before being sent to the front lines and were unable to contain the RUF advance across the country, despite initial successes in 1993.

The swelling of the SLA ranks was accompanied by some breakdowns in discipline, compounding many of the problems already caused by the dramatic subversion of the traditional military hierarchy by junior officers. SLA attacks against civilians, including theft and summary executions of suspected RUF “collaborators” and the SLA’s inability to protect civilians from RUF attacks led to a profound deterioration in civil-military relations. Many called the SLA “So-bels”, or “Soldier-Rebels”, noting that in some cases there was little to distinguish the two. The NPRC regime came to an end with the Presidential and Parliamentary elections in February and March 1996, during which H.E. Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was elected President of Sierra Leone.

On two occasions during the 11-year conflict, in 1992 and in 1997, members of the SLA overthrew the Government of Sierra Leone, establishing military regimes in its place. The two juntas were, however, very different in nature.

Just over a year later, on 25 May 1997, SLA officers staged a military coup, ousting the Sierra Leonean President and establishing a military regime called the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The elected Government moved into Guinea. Unlike the NPRC, the AFRC chose not to fight the RUF; rather, the AFRC Chairman — Johnny Paul Koroma — called upon the RUF leadership to join the AFRC regime, which they promptly did. The majority of the SLA aligned with the AFRC, but some “loyal SLA” retained an allegiance to the elected Government. As the coup was driven by non-commissioned officers, most of the senior SLA officers who did not want to take part in the new regime went into hiding, chased by AFRC members. This military regime was ousted from power in February 1998 by an ECOMOG military intervention.

The situation of the SLA became a priority for the Sierra Leonean President after his reinstatement on 10 March 1998. During a presidential address delivered on 22 May 1998, President Kabbah revealed he had appointed the former ECOMOG Task Force Commander as Chief of Defence Staff to
The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) finds its origins in a movement to overthrow the regime of the All People’s Congress (APC). In 1991, the RUF was composed of around 230 members. These included former Fourah Bay College students, political opponents of the APC, former members of the SLA and other public figures that considered themselves victims of the APC regime. The majority were trained in Liberia at Camp Namma, although eight of the original members – referred to as “vanguards” – were trained in warfare and the “ideology” in Libya. RUF numbers swelled rapidly following their entry into Sierra Leone.

At first, many civilians joined the RUF voluntarily, seeing it as a solution to corruption and poverty. Nevertheless, the RUF commenced abducting and conscripting civilians shortly after, a practice that continued throughout the conflict. The RUF conscripted thousands of Sierra Leoneans of all ages and of both sexes to be trained as fighters at large training bases. These were opened from time to time depending on the state of the RUF advance, on the number of new conscripts and recruits and on the logistic support available. While one senior RUF officer was responsible for the opening of bases and the provision of training, this did not stop other, smaller training bases from being opened under localised commands. When the RUF needed “manpower” for planned actions, RUF members known as “Safari Teams” were sent to the villages to bring back civilians in accordance with pre-agreed figures. Children under the age of 15 were abducted, conscripted and trained to operate as Small Boy Units.
The NPFL clearly supported and even controlled, to an extent, RUF operations in Sierra Leone. NPFL members fought alongside RUF forces and the NPFL provided logistical support to the RUF as a whole. When they first entered Sierra Leone and during the early stage of the conflict, NPFL members, who not only outnumbered the RUF but also held most of the commanding positions, dominated the RUF forces. Although the NPFL withdrew from Sierra Leone in 1993, links with the NPFL and its leader were never severed completely.

Following the SLA coup in May 1997, the AFRC invited the RUF to join the regime. RUF forces joined with and strengthened AFRC positions throughout areas of Sierra Leone that the SLA had previously controlled. RUF members held ministerial positions in the Council of the AFRC and the movement re-branded itself the “Peoples’ Army”.

From the beginning of the movement, the RUF, whose leader – Foday Sankoh – was a retired signals corporal from the SLA, adopted a military-style internal organisation and disciplinary system, with clearly identified positions and tasks allocated to its members, as illustrated in Figure 2.

The Battle Field Commander (BFC) moved between front lines depending on the battles in preparation and ongoing military activity, while the BGC remained in the rear at headquarters. The Battle Group Commander’s (BGC) primary function was to take care of logistics, under the orders of the BFC. The Battle Front Line Commander (BFLC) moved between the front lines according to logistical needs. RUF forces were divided into brigades,13 battalions, companies, platoons and sections. A section was composed of 8 to 10 combatants and five sections made a platoon. A platoon was composed of 30 or more combatants and five platoons made a company. A company was composed of 100 or more combatants and five companies, plus an administrative one, made a battalion. A battalion comprised around 1,000 combatants; three battalions made one brigade.

Representatives from specific supporting units were attached at battalion level. The G-5 Unit was responsible for coordinating relations between combatants and civilians, including the collection of taxation and food contributions from civilians. G-5 was also responsible for disseminating political ideology. The Army Agricultural Unit was to take care of all farming and food production in the battalion. The S-4 Unit was responsible for the storage and distribution of food and was battalion quartermaster. The Intelligence Office Unit was responsible for monitoring all operations within the battalion and for sending intelligence reports to headquarters. The Combat Medic Unit was responsible for all medical affairs and the health for everybody in the

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**Table:**

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<th>Rank</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Leader</td>
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<td>Chief of Defence Staff</td>
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<td>Battle Field Commander</td>
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<td>Battle Front Line Commander or Inspector</td>
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battalion. The G-4 Unit took care of all arms and ammunitions. Armoury was a sub-unit and was responsible for the maintenance of all arms. The Logistics and Motor Pool was responsible for the maintenance of all mechanical and vehicular equipment in the battalion. The Signal Unit was responsible for internal and external communications. The Military Police (MP) Unit was responsible for disciplinary actions and, therefore, for the maintenance and enforcement of law and order. Military Police (MP) also escorted prisoners and were attached to brigades, battalions and companies. The Internal Defence Unit was responsible for all necessary investigations in the battalion and also served as a link between the G-5 and other operational units.

When they entered Sierra Leone in 1991, the RUF established a headquarters in Pendembu (Kailahun District), where they remained until 1993 when SLA forces retook the town. From 1994 until they joined the AFRC in Freetown, the RUF leader was not settled in one place but was generally mobile. When the RUF joined with the AFRC in Freetown, the high command established headquarters in Freetown. This was the administrative headquarters, the permanent radio base and the base for one of the most senior RUF officers. Important meetings involving the senior RUF command took place in Buedu until disarmament in 2001. The RUF defensive headquarters was moved as RUF forces captured towns, but remained in Makeni from 1999. As the RUF’s positions stabilised following the general retreat from Freetown in 1999, the territory under their control was subdivided further and a number of brigade headquarters were established.

The appointments of the most senior officers within the movement were approved personally by the RUF leader. Some appointments were approved by the Liberian President, in particular when the RUF leader was in custody in Nigeria in 1997 and then Sierra Leone in 1998. When the RUF leader was again arrested after the 8 May 2000 events, the then Battle Field Commander was made Interim Leader and would take instructions directly from the Liberian President.

The RUF set up a disciplinary system to deal with offences committed by its members. When an RUF member committed an offence, he or she was sent to the Military Police (MP), which would obtain a statement and issue a report. When the offence reached a certain level of severity, the MP had to refer the matter to the General Staff Officer Class One (GSO1), who in turn would convene a Board of Investigation. The report of the Board of Investigation would then be sent to the RUF leader or the most senior RUF officer, who would be responsible for taking appropriate measures, including recommending that a court martial be conducted. For minor offences, local commanders were vested with certain powers to conduct investigations and administer punishment in line with the gravity of the offences committed. Most of the time, commanders settled cases at the front line without going through the proper channels. The senior officers in charge of the RUF were allegedly aware of this conduct, but did not intervene to deter it. During the 11-year conflict, very few courts martial were conducted.

1.(c) National Patriotic Front for Liberia (NPFL)

The National Patriotic Front for Liberia (NPFL) emerged in the neighbouring country of Liberia in 1989. The NPFL’s aim was to oust the then Liberian President, Samuel K. Doe, who had been in power since 1980 and whose regime was accused of being corrupt and
excessively tribalistic. Backed up by foreign countries, the NPFL movement rapidly expanded its actions across the country towards Monrovia, the capital. In August 1990, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent to Monrovia a peacekeeping force known as the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). ECOMOG established a rear base near Freetown’s International Airport in Lungi. In September 1990, President Doe was arrested, tortured, killed and his body paraded through Monrovia by an NPFL splinter group called the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). An Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) was formed in November 1990. Despite a reconciliation accord signed in Yamoussoukro, Côte d’Ivoire, between the President of the IGNU and Charles Taylor, the NPFL leader, in October 1991, fighting continued in Liberia. In March 1991, the NPFL assisted the RUF in launching its “revolution” in Sierra Leone. NPFL members started fighting alongside the small RUF force. The strength and involvement of NPFL forces in Sierra Leone would decline over the subsequent years owing to the emergence of the United Liberian Movement for Democracy (ULIMO), a counter-revolutionary force comprised of supporters of the late President. The NPFL’s physical withdrawal from Sierra Leone did not, however, lead to the withdrawal of the NPFL’s active support for the RUF.

In March 1994, pursuant to the Cotonou Agreement signed in July 1993 between the NPFL, ULIMO and the Interim Government of National Unity, a tripartite Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG), headed by a five-seat Council of State replaced the IGNU. The three signatories each obtained one seat in the Council of State. Hostilities continued in Liberia and a splinter group of the NPFL, the NPFL-Central Revolutionary Council (NPFL-CRC) emerged and formed a coalition with the ULIMO-J. Following a new peace agreement signed in Abuja, Nigeria in August 1995, a new six seat Council of State was established, and the coalition obtained a seat in the Council.20 Pursuant to a peace accord signed between the same fighting factions in August 1996 – referred to as Abuja II – disarmament started and in February 1997, the various groups were disbanded. In July 1997, Presidential and Parliamentary elections were held in Liberia; Charles Taylor was elected President of Liberia, his National Patriotic Party also winning a majority of seats in the National Assembly.

1.(d) United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO)
The United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), mainly composed of former members of the Liberian Armed Forces (AFL) and other refugees who had found refuge in Sierra Leone and who were supporters of the late Liberian President, emerged in 1991 as an opposing force to the NPFL. In September 1991, ULIMO forces attacked NPFL forces in the west of Liberia, using Sierra Leonean territory as a staging point. ULIMO rapidly started fighting alongside the SLA to push the combined RUF/NPFL assault back into Liberia.

Over the subsequent years, the existence of this fighting force would be punctuated by rivalries between two personalities, leading to various splits and reunifications. In May 1992, the ULIMO Chairman was removed and the movement was split between two potential leaders, one of whom was accused of using ULIMO to wage a holy war while the other was accused of financial impropriety and hijacking the movement for political ends. Nevertheless, between August and December 1992, ULIMO reunited and resumed fighting with the NPFL. Following this, two branches of ULIMO clearly appeared: a Freetown-based branch, fighting alongside the SLA in
Sierra Leone, and a branch based solely in Liberia.

A reunification congress between the two branches in October 1993 and a selection of joint communiqués issued in early 1994, some at the initiative of the Sierra Leonean NPRC Chairman, did not prevent the two branches from fighting. One of the main points of disagreement was the participation of the ULIMO Liberian branch in the Cotonou peace process for Liberia in July 1993. In June 1994, the violence committed against civilians by ULIMO fighting alongside the SLA led a delegation of Sierra Leonean Chiefs to call for the withdrawal of ULIMO from Sierra Leone and also resulted into the disarmament of some members of the Freetown-based branch by the SLA.

In 1994, the two branches were clearly identified by two different acronyms: ULIMO-J (Freetown) and ULIMO-K (Liberia); the letters “J” and “K” referred to the names of the respective branch leaders. From the end of 1994 until 1996, ULIMO forces as such were not active within Sierra Leonean territory. In May 1995, demobilised ULIMO-J members based in Freetown were remobilised by Executive Outcomes, a private military company hired by the Government of Sierra Leone. The Special Task Force, as the ULIMO-J/Executive Outcomes force became known, assisted the SLA in driving back the RUF from the Western Area. The Special Task Force continued to operate under the umbrella of the SLA and Executive Outcomes in Bonthe District and briefly in Bo Town in late 1995 and 1996.

The ULIMO-J branch was formally included in the peace process in Liberia in August 1995. By signing the Abuja Agreement, the parties agreed to form a six-seat Council of State to exercise executive power in Liberia. The leader of the ULIMO-K branch represented ULIMO in the Council of State while the NPFL-CRC/ULIMO-J coalition received one seat and the ULIMO-J wing gained ministerial positions. However, factional fighting resumed and ULIMO-K and the NPFL collaborated to capture the leader of the ULIMO-J, who they accused of murder. This fighting culminated in the widespread destruction in Monrovia, the capital, in April 1996.

Peace negotiations resumed and resulted in the signing of a supplement to the Abuja Accord, referred to as Abuja II, which would be the first step towards the end of the conflict in Liberia. This provided for the representation of both ULIMO-K and ULIMO-J in the Council of State. ULIMO was officially disbanded in early 1997, pursuant to the Abuja II Agreement. Nevertheless, ULIMO resurfaced in Sierra Leone in 1997 and 1998 when some former members joined the Kamajors and others fought alongside the RUF/AFRC.

1.(e) Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)

On 25 May 1997, elements of the SLA staged a coup d’état and formed the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The AFRC released over 700 inmates from Pademba Road Prison, including Johnny Paul Koroma, an SLA officer who had been charged with a coup attempt in 1996 and who became their leader. The AFRC immediately suspended the Constitution of Sierra Leone and the H.E. Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah escaped to the Republic of Guinea by helicopter. In an address to the nation, Johnny Paul Koroma advanced as a justification for the coup the polarisation of the country “into regional and tribal factions”, and the lack of control of the President over the situation”. Amidst international condemnation of the explosion of violence and looting that accompanied the coup, Johnny Paul Koroma advanced as a justification for the coup the polarisation of the country “into regional and tribal factions”, and the lack of control of the President over the situation”. Amidst international condemnation of the explosion of violence and looting that accompanied the coup, Johnny Paul Koroma was sworn in as Head of State on 17 June 1997.

Immediately after the coup, the AFRC invited the RUF to share power. On
28 May, Foday Sankoh – at that time in custody in Nigeria for a firearms offence – broadcast a statement over SLBS Radio, encouraging RUF solidarity with the AFRC. Part of his statement is worth quoting: “You will always get instructions from me through Johnny Paul Koroma. They are our brothers. Let no one fool you. You have to work with them to put the situation under control, especially in the Western Area. As you [sic] the field commander, instruct your other Commander … to stand by for any reinforcement needed by Johnny Paul Koroma for any eventualities. We have to defend our sovereignty. You are to act on these orders immediately.”

On 30 May, the RUF declared their support for the AFRC on SLBS television and radio and on 1 June, the AFRC declared Foday Sankoh to be the Deputy Head of State of Sierra Leone. The RUF/AFRC Cabinet hierarchy was as follows: Chairman and Head of State, Vice Chairman and Deputy Head of State, Chief Secretary of State, Secretaries of State and Public Liaison Officers. In June 1997, the RUF/AFRC created a 17-member supervisory team to prevent the apparatus of civilian government from grinding to a halt following lengthy strikes by public sector workers.

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Immediately after the coup and throughout 1997, the RUF/AFRC found itself in an escalating military standoff with Nigerian forces stationed in Freetown and Lungi. ECOWAS established a Committee mandated to negotiate with the RUF/AFRC regime. On 29 August 1997, at its 20th Annual Summit, ECOWAS imposed sanctions on Sierra Leone, effective throughout all ECOWAS member States. The ECOWAS embargo included military hardware, supplies and spare parts, petroleum and petrol-derived products; an export ban was also imposed. A travel ban was imposed on AFRC members and their families, in addition to a freeze on their assets. Moreover, ECOWAS formally expanded the mandate of ECOMOG to include the use of force to impose sanctions against Sierra Leone. Effectively, this gave legal backing to a complete navel blockade of the Port of Freetown and the prohibition of air-freight traffic. On 8 October, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1132 (1997), imposing a range of global arms, oil and travel sanctions on Sierra Leone.

During peace talks in Conakry, Guinea, on 22 and 23 October 1997, the ECOWAS Committee of Five and representatives of the RUF/AFRC agreed to an immediate ceasefire and a six-month peace plan guaranteeing a return to civilian government by 22 April 1998.

Following RUF/AFRC attacks on ECOMOG positions and other breaches of the Conakry Peace Plan, ECOMOG intervened militarily. Starting on 6 February 1998, ECOMOG drove the RUF/AFRC regime from power and its forces from the Western Area. Ousted from Freetown, the RUF/AFRC alliance survived but the balance of power between the allies was inverted. The situation of the AFRC members was varied: most fled from Freetown into the Provinces with their leader, others surrendered to ECOMOG forces and many of the senior officers were charged with treason, convicted and executed in 1998.

Following the RUF/AFRC invasion of Freetown in January 1999, most of the AFRC forces withdrew to Makeni (Bombali District) and the rift between RUF and AFRC forces deepened. Johnny Paul Koroma did not take part in the peace negotiations in Lomé, Togo that concluded with the signing of a Peace Agreement between the RUF and the Government of Sierra Leone.

While provisions in the Lomé Peace Agreement granted Foday Sankoh status equivalent to Vice President, Johnny Paul Koroma was appointed as
Between October 1998 and the end of 2000, the West Side Boys, a splinter group from the RUF/AFRC alliance, concentrated its actions in the Okra Hills (Koya Chiefdom, Port Loko District). While it is not possible to say the West Side Boys did not fall under the command of the RUF/AFRC, their actions followed a clear pattern that was different from the RUF/AFRC and later RUF actions in Port Loko District. Although the group considered Johnny Paul Koroma to be their figurehead – his absence in Lomé and their belief that their interests had been inadequately represented was the origin of the West Side Boys taking UNOMSIL, ECOMOG and NGO officials hostage in 1999. Johnny Paul Koroma publicly dissociated himself from the group and officially disbanded the AFRC in mid-August 2000. The West Side Boys, primarily ex-SLA who aligned with the RUF/AFRC, achieved international notoriety by kidnapping 11 UK Royal Marines in late August and provoking a decisive military response from the UK that would all but destroy the West Side Boys.

1.(f) The West Side Boys
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1.(g) Civil Defence Force (CDF)
As RUF/NPFL forces expanded activities in the Southern and Eastern Provinces, numerous civilian initiatives emerged between 1991 and 1993 to assist the SLA. Across the Districts, NPRC and SLA authorities, traditional structures and popular personalities supported the foundation of civilian security schemes. This led to the creation of a number of vigilante groups sometimes known as Civil Defence Units (CDU), whose main role was to operate checkpoints. The traditional authorities selected civilians, usually experienced hunters and well-known community people, to join these CDUs. This quality control system guaranteed that Paramount Chiefs could exercise a degree of actual and moral authority over the CDUs. In addition, the mobilisation of tribal-based hunting societies was actively encouraged and supported by the NPRC authorities. Various State agencies were involved in administering the general mobilisation of various hunting societies, which included the “Donsos” in Kono District, the “Tamaboros” in Koinadugu District and the “Kamajors” in the Eastern and Southern Provinces. Affiliates of the Kamajor Society were the largest in number of these societies.

These local militia used their intimate knowledge of their immediate localities to assist the SLA in fighting the RUF/NPFL. Both the civil militia and CDUs were given bladed weapons and rustic single-barrel shotguns and deployed alongside the SLA during combat against RUF forces. As the
conflict expanded westwards across the country, similar initiatives emerged in Moyamba and Tonkolili Districts. Traditional hunters known as “Kapras” and “Gbethis” regrouped in the Northern Province.

The organisation of local militias entered a new phase in 1995, when initiation of civilians into the Kamajor Society began in Bonthe District (Southern Province). Hidden behind a veil of secrecy, Kamajor initiation ceremonies revolve around an assortment of mystical beliefs and charms performed by a High Priest Initiator. The purpose of the ceremony was to render initiates fit to serve at the war front, through the granting of special powers such as the ability to be “bulletproof” and being able to smell enemies. Initiators of the Gbethi Society called this process “washing”. Once initiated, Kamajors had to adhere to the rules of the Kamajor Society, which governed the conduct of the members. Infractions of the rules were believed to deprive Kamajors of the powers they had been granted at the time of initiation. In the early stages of this process, hunters and youths were nominated for initiation by chiefdom authorities. Once initiated, Kamajors were sent back to the chiefdom from which they originated.

The number of initiates and the rate of initiation into the Kamajor Society increased rapidly throughout 1995 and 1996. Kamajor deployment alongside SLA forces steadily expanded into the other Districts of the Southern Province and into the Eastern Province. By 1996, almost every chiefdom in the Southern and Eastern Provinces had their own Kamajor Society. The initiation of men into the Kamajor Society brought with it the structuring of this local militia at a chiefdom level. Other organised pro-government militias – Gbethis, Kapras and Donsos – were active in the Northern Province and in Kono District.

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The Civil Defence Force (CDF) emerged in late 1995 or early 1996 as a union of the various local militias active across the country. Members of the Kamajors were
the main force within the CDF and
presented strong resistance to RUF
attacks throughout the Southern
Province and, to a lesser extent, in
the Eastern Province. The role and
efficiency of the CDF in fighting the
RUF received formal recognition from
the newly-elected President in early 1996,
who appointed the then leader of the
Kamajor Society as Deputy Defence
Minister. This strong symbolic support
was backed up with practical support
when the Government of Sierra Leone
provided the CDF with staple food items
and gave them responsibility for
providing security throughout the
country. Although originally aligned with
and to some extent subordinate to the
SLA, the CDF progressively distanced
itself from SLA forces, objecting to their
action and behaviour. Rivalry and
tension between the two groups erupted,
frequently resulting in armed clashes.

On the national level, the internal
organisation of the CDF was as
described in Figure 3 to the left.39

Below battalion level, the CDF adopted
a regular structure similar that of the
SLA, dividing battalions into companies,
platoons and sections of varying
numbers. The CDF also put in place
administrative structures at the chiefdom
level. For example, in Dasse Chiefdom
(Moyamba District), the Chiefdom
Ground Commander was assisted by a
Deputy Chiefdom Ground Commander,
below whom were Section Commanders
and then Patrol Commanders. The CDF
also appointed civilians as Welfare
Officers to liaise between civilians and
CDF forces. Chiefdom commands often
merged to form battalions comprising
over 500 armed personnel.40

Following the military coup in May 1997,
the AFRC leader officially disbanded the
CDF and asked its members to surrender
and disarm to the Sierra Leone Police.
The CDF command rejected this order
and CDF members remained armed,
initially keeping a low profile before
regrouping to fight the RUF/AFRC. The
scale of their military actions increased
and progressively more initiates joined
the various components of the CDF, in
particular the Kamajors. With the
increase in the rate of Kamajor
initiations came a number of problems.
The CDF started to loose control over
the selection of initiates and there was
some loss of discipline among the newly-
initiated. The role of the traditional
authorities in selecting initiates was,
opening the door for the initiation of
children below the age of 15. Increasingly,
but notably in 1998, a
dichotomy between new members and
“old Kamajors” came to the fore.41

Following the restoration of the elected
Government, the President of Sierra
Leone placed the CDF under the control
of ECOMOG.42 CDF forces were
deployed in Freetown; both Kamajors
and members of a group called the
Organised Brotherhood of Hunting
Societies (OBHS) were deployed at
checkpoints throughout the Western
Area and deployed alongside
ECOMOG. CDF forces would be active
In September 1998, the President
decided to formalise their position,
stating that a Civil Defence Force with a
CDF Administrator would be appointed
to liaise with the SLA in every District.
The District CDF would report directly
to the Paramount Chiefs, thus restoring
much of the authority that had been
eroded during the development of the
CDF.43 However, the CDF continued to
impose a progressively more insidious
system of administration throughout the
territory it occupied, invading many
aspects of civilian life.

2. PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES

2.(a) Gurkha Security Guards Limited
In January 1995, the NPRC Government
entered in a three-month renewable
contract with Gurkha Security Guards
Limited (GSG), a British company based
in the Channel Islands. Nepalese Gurkhas have long been trained and incorporated into the UK armed forces pursuant to a tripartite agreement between the governments of Nepal, India and Britain. The British Government made significant cuts to the number of Gurkhas serving in the armed forces, resulting in their increased availability to private security and military firms. GSG’s contract was to train and advise the SLA in jungle warfare tactics and provide security for the SLA base at Camp Charlie, near Mile 91. GSG was not contracted to engage in direct military actions against the RUF. In February 1995, RUF forces killed two senior GSG advisers and the aide-de-camp of the NPRC Chairman during a road ambush near the Kaitkant Hills in Tonkolili District. The NPRC Government let GSG’s contract lapse in April 1995.

2.(b) Executive Outcomes
In late April or early May 1995, the NPRC contracted Executive Outcomes, a South African private military company, to train SLA forces. Executive Outcomes rapidly expanded operations into the Provinces, securing the diamond-rich areas of Kono District.

Executive Outcomes were also hired by mining and hydroelectric companies in Kono, Moyamba and Tonkolili Districts to provide security at their sites. Their departure from Sierra Leonean territory would be one of the main terms insisted on by the RUF during the peace negotiations that led to the signing of Abidjan Peace Agreement on 30 November 1996 between the RUF and the Government of Sierra Leone. Article 12 of the Peace Agreement provided that, “The Executive Outcomes shall be withdrawn five weeks after the deployment of the Neutral Monitoring Group (NMG). As from the date of the deployment of the Neutral Monitoring Group, the Executive Outcomes shall be confined to barracks under the supervision of the Joint Monitoring Group and the Neutral Monitoring Group.” In early 1997, Executive Outcomes left Sierra Leone.

2.(c) Sandline International
Sandline International is a British private military company linked both to Executive Outcomes and to an array of companies with commercial mining interests in Sierra Leone. On 23 December 1997, Sandline International entered into a contract with the exiled Government of Sierra Leone to assist the Government in removing the RUF/AFRC regime through the “provision of technical knowhow, military logistics and equipment” to a value of around 10 million US dollars. This included the provision of 2,500 assault rifles, 180 rocket launchers, 50 machine guns and quantities of ammunition and spare magazines. A number of finance problems reduced the money available to around 1.35 million US dollars. Sandline International flew 35 tonnes of weapons costing 700,000 US dollars to Freetown International Airport at Lungi. Landing on 23 February 1998, the shipment arrived well after ECOMOG forces had driven the RUF/AFRC from the Western Area. The arms shipment was
placed in storage by ECOMOG, who passed on a small number of weapons to the CDF commander for use by the Kamajors. Sandline International was also responsible for establishing an operations base at Lungi for use by the returning Government of Sierra Leone.

In late March 1998, a few weeks after President Kabbah’s reinstatement to power, UK Customs and Excise investigated Sandline International’s arms shipment as a possible breach of UK law implementing the arms and oil embargo imposed on 8 October 1997 by the UN Security Council. Ultimately, Customs and Excise decided that it was not in the public interest to prosecute Sandline International.

The details of the investigation and allegations made in the media, led to a political row in the UK concerning the possible involvement of Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials and ministers in the breaking of UN sanctions. On 18 May, the UK Government announced an independent inquiry into what had become known as “the Sandline affair”, to be led by Sir Thomas Legg. The report of the Legg Inquiry led to a series of administrative and policy changes concerning internal Government communications, particularly in the FCO, and the clear elucidation of future Government policies concerning both economic sanctions and private military companies. Following the submission of the findings of the Legg Inquiry, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee also conducted its own investigation into the handing of the Sandline Affair by the FCO.

3. PEACEKEEPING FORCES

3.(a) Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS) Cease-fire Observer Group (ECOMOG)

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional organisation comprising 15 member States, including Sierra Leone. It was created in 1975 and its founding Treaty was re-affirmed by all member States in July 1993. The ECOWAS Treaty allows ECOWAS to “establish a regional peace and security observation system and peace-keeping forces where appropriate”, although it does not have a standing military component.

Since 1990, the forward operating base of the ECOMOG mission in Liberia had
been located in Lungi, near the Freetown International Airport. The military mandate of ECOMOG, however, did not encompass Sierra Leone until 29 August 1997, when the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government authorised ECOMOG to “employ all necessary means” to enforce a comprehensive trade embargo on Sierra Leone. In addition to the ECOMOG forces already deployed in Sierra Leone in support of operations in Liberia, additional forces from ECOWAS member States were also deployed alongside the SLA in Sierra Leone pursuant to a series of defence pacts and agreements between those States and Sierra Leone. In early 1993, for example, Nigerian forces were deployed in Kono District while Guinean forces were active in Kailahun District. However, according to the Abidjan Peace Accord signed on 30 November between the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF, all foreign forces were to leave the country. 

The evolution of ECOMOG’s direct military involvement in Sierra Leone began with the AFRC coup on 25 May 1997. Nigerian forces reinforced the ECOMOG deployment at Lungi and the Nigerian force headquarters at Kossoh Town, near Freetown. On 2 June 1997, Nigerian forces – not acting under ECOMOG, the mandate of which did not cover Sierra Leone – attempted and failed to unseat the combined RUF/AFRC forces.

The military situation between the RUF/AFRC and Nigerian forces remained tense throughout 1997. Following the failure of diplomatic negotiations carried out by the ECOWAS Committee of Five, the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government imposed a trade, arms and petroleum products embargo on Sierra Leone on 27 August 1997. As noted, this decision also expanded ECOMOG’s mandate to include monitoring and supervising ceasefire violations and enforcing the sanctions and the embargo instituted by the authority of the Heads of State and Government against the RUF/AFRC regime.

Although Nigerian forces had established a de facto naval blockade of the Port of Freetown since the coup, the ECOMOG mandate allowed them to intensify enforcement operations. The UN Security Council supported the ECOWAS action and applied its own sanctions regime to Sierra Leone, authorising ECOWAS to ensure its strict implementation.

The continuous shelling of strategic locations in Freetown, the effects of the embargo and the RUF/AFRC’s inability to dislodge ECOMOG from Kossoh and Jui prompted them to continue the negotiations started early in the year. ECOWAS mediators, led by the then Nigerian Foreign Minister, hammered out a peace plan. This led to a ceasefire on 21 October 1997, followed on 23 October by the signing of the ECOWAS six-month peace plan for Sierra Leone (23 October 1997-22 April 1998). The central provisions of this agreement were the maintenance of a ceasefire and the return of the elected Government by 22 April 1998.

On numerous occasions during the remainder of 1997, RUF/AFRC, CDF and ECOMOG forces violated the spirit and the letter of the Conakry Peace Plan. During the seventh meeting of the ECOWAS Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Committee of Five on Sierra Leone, held in Abuja on 19 December 1997, “the Ministers deplored the incessant and unprovoked attacks on ECOMOG peace-keepers. They reaffirmed ECOMOG’s right of self defence”. In early January, ECOMOG had begun planning a military intervention to remove the RUF/AFRC from Freetown. On 6 February 1998, as the impasse in implementing the Conakry Peace Plan appeared to deepen,

ECOWAS reaffirmed the three options available for the resolution of the conflict, namely: the pursuit of dialogue; the imposition of a sanctions regime; and the possible use of force. On the same day, ECOMOG forces in Freetown commenced a military intervention that led to their capture of Freetown and the Western Area by 12 February.

Following the success of their Freetown intervention, ECOMOG forces commenced provincial operations in March. The ECOMOG force was divided into three brigades. The 24th Infantry Brigade would execute operations in the Northern Province and parts of the Eastern Province. The 26th and 15th Infantry Brigades would take responsibility for operations in the Southern Province and the remainder of the Eastern Province. After April, four “loyal” SLA battalions were put under the command of the ECOMOG 24th Infantry Brigade.

ECOMOG’s mandate in Sierra Leone was expanded following the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF on 7 July 1999. ECOMOG forces became a key component and actor in the peace process.

To reflect the provisions of the Lomé Agreement, ECOWAS redefined the mandate of ECOMOG on 25 August 1999. Although the Government of Nigeria had announced the drawdown of its contribution to ECOMOG, their withdrawal was delayed to ensure that there was no security vacuum during the deployment of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). At this time, ECOMOG’s additional responsibilities included monitoring the ceasefire, providing security for and disarming ex-combatants at DDR sites and guarding any arms and ammunition retrieved during the disarmament process. ECOMOG gradually scaled down its operations and UNAMSIL deployed in the areas previously under the control of ECOMOG. Out of the six Nigerian battalions deployed in Sierra Leone, four were absorbed by UNAMSIL and the remaining two had left Sierra Leone by 2 May 2000.

3. (b) United Nations Mission to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)

UNAMSIL peacekeepers, 2002.
monitoring respect for international humanitarian law” and at “monitoring the voluntary disarmament and demobilisation of members of the Civil Defence Force”. The presence of UNOMSIL within Sierra Leonean territory and the number of its personnel would vary over the subsequent months, as its terms of deployment were amended taking into account the security situation in Sierra Leone. UNOMSIL personnel were highly dependant on ECOMOG forces for their security.

In establishing UNAMSIL, the UN Security Council decided that UNAMSIL was to “take over the substantive civilian and military components and functions and to that end” decided “that the mandate of UNOMSIL shall terminate immediately on the establishment of UNAMSIL”. Furthermore, despite the ECOWAS statement of impending withdrawal from Sierra Leone, the United Nations included the role and functions of ECOMOG in the resolution, stating the “need for close cooperation and coordination between ECOMOG and UNAMSIL”, “commending the readiness of ECOMOG to continue to provide security for the areas where it is currently located” and noting the need “to conduct other operations in accordance with their mandate to ensure the implementation of the Peace Agreement”.

UNAMSIL force numbers would increase over the subsequent months as ECOMOG forces left Sierra Leone. In May 2000, hostilities resumed and UNAMSIL forces were targeted directly by RUF/AFRC forces. The capture of nearly 500 UNAMSIL peacekeepers by RUF/AFRC forces, a series of military events including the intervention of the UK Armed Forces and expanded combat operations by the SLA identified a clear need not only for an increase in UNAMSIL’s force strength, but a reform of its structure. In late 2000, the UN Security Council increased the number of authorised personnel in UNAMSIL to 13,000 and ultimately to 17,500.

The first of these expansions would be decided on 7 February 2000, with the Security Council approving the extension of the military component of the UNAMSIL to 11,100 military personnel, deciding the revision of UNAMSIL’s mandate and approving its extension for a period of six months. UNAMSIL’s force strength was increased to a ceiling of 17,500 by 30 September 1999. While the mandate of UNAMSIL was renewed in September 2003, recent UN Security Council Resolutions have authorised the gradual drawdown of UNAMSIL, paving the way for a possible withdrawal by December 2004.