

Buying Peace with Diamonds? Power-sharing Agreements in Sierra Leone

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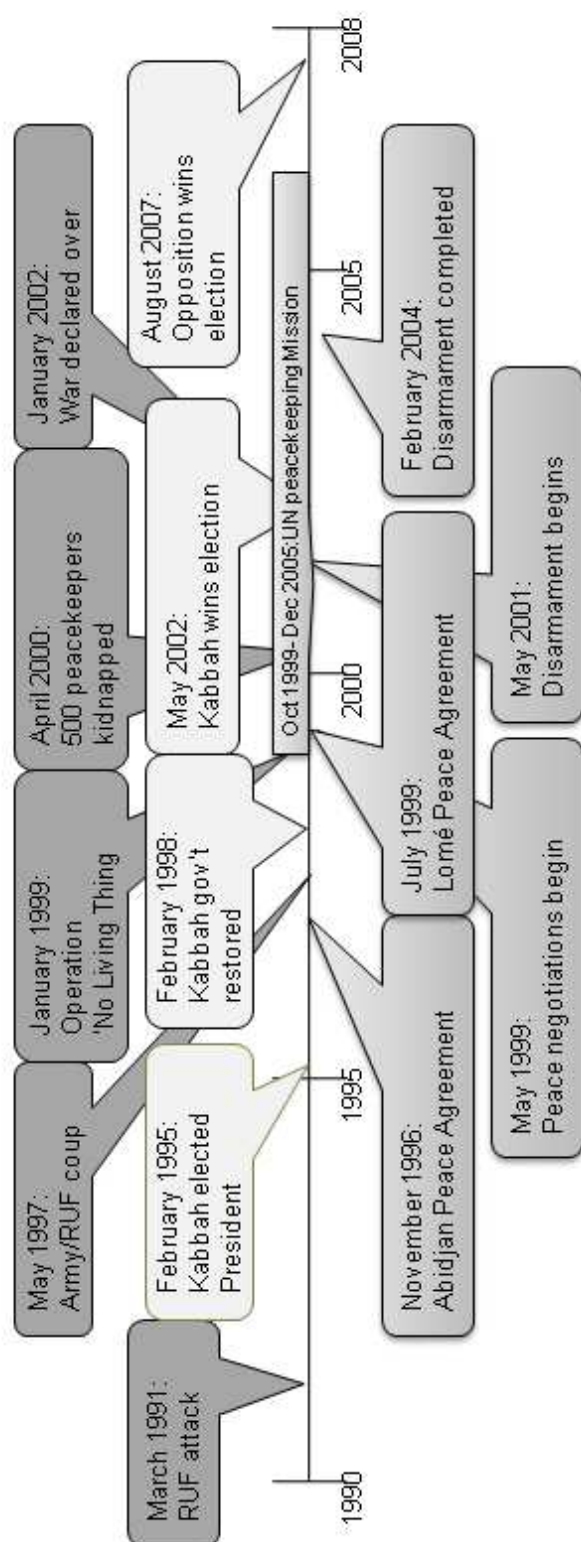
Power-sharing provisions were crucial in convincing rebels from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) to sign the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement. Although the government of Sierra Leone was reluctant to share power with the rebels, its weak military position, the war-weary population and international pressure led President Kabbah to give in to the RUF's strong demands for power-sharing. However, neither the government nor the RUF abided by the terms of the agreement, and peace was only established following the agreement's breakdown. Nonetheless, granting the RUF positions and offices in the capital Freetown through sharing of power made it easy for the government and foreign forces to control the RUF and to put them out of action when it was clear that they were not complying with agreed terms.



The Sierra Leonean Civil War: 1991–2002

Sierra Leone experienced an 11-year civil war in the 1990s, fought between the RUF and the government of Sierra Leone. The war was rooted not in ethnic or religious rivalries, but rather in the gradual withdrawal of the state from rural areas and the subsequent collapse of the country's patrimonial system of governance. The RUF's stated aims of overthrowing the government spoke to the long-running grievances of rural people against an overly centralized, corrupt government that had long neglected socio-economic development outside the capital and that had left many feeling disenfranchised and excluded. In particular, the role of the country's massive diamond deposits in exploitative agrarian relationships that marginalized young people helped to mobilize support for the RUF.

Timeline



Power-Sharing Agreements in Sierra Leone

Several attempts were made to end Sierra Leone's civil war, the most important of which were the 1996 Abidjan Accord and the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement. Both of these agreements included power-sharing provisions.

1996 Abidjan Accord

The 1996 Abidjan Accord called for a power-sharing Commission for the Consolidation of Peace; representation of the RUF in other power-sharing commissions, such as the National Electoral Commission; inclusion of the RUF in the Sierra Leonean army; and the withdrawal of foreign troops. However, the government representatives refused to concede to the RUF's demand of a power-sharing coalition cabinet and the agreement did not include representation of the RUF at the executive level through, for instance, ministerial appointments. The agreement collapsed in 1997 with both parties failing to abide by the terms of the accord and the staging of a successful military coup. The AFRC coup plotters invited the RUF to join their government, but the coalition was short-lived and ECOMOG forces restored the democratically elected Kabbah government in 1998.

1999 Lomé Peace Agreement

New negotiations were started between the RUF and the government in 1999, culminating in the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement on 7 July 1999. The political, military and economic power-sharing arrangement established in the 1999 agreement was intended to last until the 2001 elections. The agreement was an extension of the Abidjan Accord but, in addition, the RUF was promised several ministerial and deputy ministerial posts at the cabinet level. The leader of the RUF, Foday Sankoh, was made chairman of a government body established by the peace agreement for managing and overseeing strategic resources (especially diamonds), and given the status of vice-president.

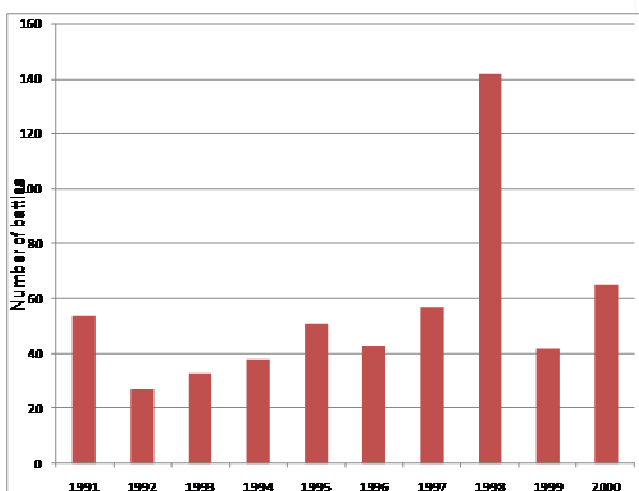
While the 1999 Lomé Agreement represented a victory for the RUF in terms of gaining access to political power and wealth, and granted legitimacy to both the government and the RUF, both the RUF and the government reneged on the agreement. Sankoh abused his control over diamond mining to empower the RUF with the means to continue pursuing the war through the exchange of diamonds for weapons, and splits within the RUF made disarmament difficult. Furthermore,

the government allocated less powerful cabinet positions than expected to the RUF, and excluded the RUF representatives from much of the government's work.

The Lomé Agreement completely collapsed after the RUF kidnapped 500 UN peacekeepers in May 2000. As a result of the kidnappings, Sankoh and other members of the RUF were arrested and stripped of their government positions. A British intervention secured Freetown, and together with the deployment of a large UN peacekeeping mission (UNAMSIL), this intervention marginalized the RUF as a fighting force. British troops reorganized and trained a new Sierra Leonean army, while the UN successfully monitored the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of almost 72,500 combatants. The civil war was declared over in February 2002.

Lessons Learned About Power-Sharing from Sierra Leone

Power-sharing was one of the primary demands of the RUF during the 1996 and 1999 peace negotiations. The government of Sierra Leone conceded to this demand during the 1999 negotiations in order to persuade the RUF to sign an agreement and terminate the country's civil war. However, peace was secured in Sierra Leone only after the breakdown of the 1999 Lomé Agreement. Thus, power-sharing merely played an indirect role in the post-conflict settlement of the Sierra Leonean civil war. Nonetheless, it was necessary to grant the RUF and Sankoh some power in order to encourage them to sign the agreement and come out



The graph shows the number of battles each year during the civil war. Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED)



Diamond Digger in Kono Region in Sierra Leone
Photo: Helga Malmin Binningsbø

from the bush. Having central RUF figures in the capital Freetown made it easier both for the government and for British and UNAMSIL forces to control the RUF. It also made it easier to subsequently remove the head of the movement following the May 2000 kidnapping episode.

Three lessons can be learned about power-sharing from the Sierra Leone case. The first is that the weak government had little other choice than to give in to the RUF's power-sharing demands in 1999. The RUF's aim was to overthrow the government but they realised they did not have the capacity to do so. The Sierra Leonean government, on the other hand, was too weak militarily to completely crush the rebellion by force. In this situation a power-sharing compromise was necessary to settle the peace agreement.

Second, the power-sharing agreement was never fully implemented. The RUF representatives in government were not able to carry out their duties, because of lack of competence and lack of cooperation from SLPP representatives (Kabbah's political party) in government. The RUF was also

dissatisfied with the ministries allotted to them. Although the Lomé agreement was a comprehensive power-sharing agreement the prescriptions in the text were poorly put into practise.

Third, some fighters within the RUF did not like the agreement, and were dissatisfied with the lack of cooperation and implementation from president Kabbah. Therefore, they refused to disarm and continued warfare. It is impossible to know whether Sankoh and the RUF were sincere in their peace attempts, but nevertheless the ongoing violence in the provinces, culminating in the

May 2000 kidnappings, made them an easy target for foreign forces.

In conclusion, power-sharing was necessary for the signature of the Lomé agreement, but the agreement failed due to, among other things, poor implementation and lack of sincerity from both the RUF and the Kabbah government. Peace was finally achieved in Sierra Leone when the UN peacekeeping mission was large enough to provide security and carry out proper disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programs.

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About the project

This policy brief forms part of a project entitled 'Power-Sharing Arrangements, Negotiations and Peace Processes', which has produced a series of policy briefs and reports on Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Kenya and Nepal.

The full report and policy briefs can be downloaded at:

<http://www.prio.no/CSCW/Research-and-Publications/Project/?oid=65122>

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The International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) is an independent and multidisciplinary research institute located in Oslo, Norway. The Institute is also involved in the promotion of peace through conflict resolution, dialogue and public information activities. PRIO owns and edits *Journal of Peace Research* and *Security Dialogue*.



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