

## **International Norms, Commerce, and the Political Economy of Insecurity in Sierra Leone**

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@ Résumé

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@ Introduction

In certain circumstances, international intervention -- whether economic, military, or political -- accomplishes the opposite of its stabilizing goal. This article shows how officials in Sierra Leone who presided over feeble state institutions at the outset incorporated into their own domestic political strategies the norms that guide international intervention. The implementation of these policies further undermined the aims of outside assistance. Although these international norms, which emphasize market-oriented reform, democratization, and state-building, undergird order in many states in the international system, they can also reinforce corruption and disorder in other contexts where political entrepreneurs are able to channel external resources for consolidation of extant or new local political structures based on alternative forms of control. The remainder of the article focuses on the role played by externally-prescribed economic reform, the politicization of multinational corporations, and the emergence of non-state security alternatives in providing new opportunities for state and local actors. These opportunities allow actors to avert common state-building strategies, and minimize the voice of ordinary Sierra Leoneans in local and national politics. I conclude by considering alternative ways to foster the creation of political order.

One example of how external intervention has stunted political development is military intervention. Outside intervention restored and continues to protect elected-president Ahmad Tejan Kabbah's government despite its limited ability to defend itself against coups and its record of endemic corruption. In May 1997, officers in the Sierra Leone Army staged a coup against Kabbah. A Nigerian-led Ecomog peacekeeping force, with international support, restored Kabbah to power. Nonetheless, Kabbah's government was not capable of restoring lasting peace

for several more years despite international assistance from the Nigerian forces and a small United Nations mission. In the 1999 Lome Peace Accords, rebel commander Foday Sankoh of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), whose group was notorious for amputating the limbs of civilians and for diamond smuggling, became Vice-President and Minister of Mines, with formal-legal control over the country's valuable diamond reserves.

The peace agreement failed, as a coalition of rebels and sobels (Sierra Leone Army "soldiers-turned-rebels") seized violent control over the country's diamond fields. Kabbah survived two more coup attempts in the next ten months before rebels once again entered the capital city in May 2000. This time, the British government intervened directly on behalf of Kabbah's government. The United Nations later deployed a larger mission of some 17 500 personnel at a cost of more than US \$722 million in 2001-02 to a country whose gross domestic product was only US \$780 million (World Bank 2004).

The magnitude of external resources and domestic failure raises a critical question. Why does intervention do so little to change the behavior of a political elite's corruption and of administrative failure? This article argues that international political and economic norms play a key role in shaping the strategies of state rulers who continue a legacy of undermining their own state's institutions. Rulers in states with a legacy of weak institutions manipulate international sovereignty norms and externally prescribed liberal economic reforms to control economic opportunities, which are intimately tied to political networks. To consolidate control, they form coalitions with outsiders and small networks of domestic cronies, leaving open little space for civil-society or meaningful representative government. This external support for weak state rulers enables them to forego state-building and taxation strategies that scholars such as Charles Tilly (1992) argue lead to representative democracy and service provision.

Sierra Leone's recent politics illustrates how international intervention, even on a massive scale in local terms, is compatible with rulers' political decisions that undermine external stabilization efforts. Democracy and human rights norms provided the international community with a rationale to restore Kabbah's regime despite its low capacity and corruption. Sovereignty continues to legitimate Kabbah's regime in the eyes of foreign creditors, investors, and firms that prefer transacting with internationally recognized state actors rather than shadowy non-state actors (Jackson and Rosberg 1982). This provides Kabbah with de facto control over contracting opportunities, especially to the extent that most Sierra Leonean entrepreneurs with the assets

necessary to broker formal deals with foreigners are already ensconced in Kabbah's political networks. Kabbah can thus sell or lease state assets to foreign firms and cede control over national sectors to foreign companies to keep assets out of the reach of domestic opposition whose control over assets would threaten to shift the domestic balance of power and threaten his tenuous grip on state power. Thus, foreign backers' strategies help make the state weaker even though they are designed to strengthen its capabilities and stimulate business activity in the formal economy.

Kabbah's behavior is not unprecedented. His predecessors, Julius Maada Bio, Valentine Strasser, and Joseph Momoh, pursued similar strategies by which foreign firms were granted concessions to operate in and control some of the nation's most lucrative sectors, including diamonds. After the resignation of longtime authoritarian president Siaka Stevens, who ruled from 1968 to 1985, subsequent rulers discovered that formal control of the state, whose institutions had decayed under Stevens' personalization of power, provided inadequate protection from rivals who remained loyal to Stevens. They found that revenue generated from foreign firms and creditors at once offered opportunities for personal benefit and an alternative means of political survival.

Reno's study of corruption and state decay in Sierra Leone labeled the nascent polity the "shadow state" (Reno 1995a). In the subsequent decade, it has become standard practice for Sierra Leone's rulers to pursue loans from creditors and contracts with foreign firms to control most economic sectors. I refer to the entirety of this process as "internationalization." Here, the "internationalized state" refers to the political strategies of rulers who find opportunities attendant in the international system to thwart opposition at home. Weak state rulers strategically use their position at the margins of the system to ensure their personal survival as heads-of state (Clapham 1996). Their states' empirical weakness and poverty allow them to seek aid from international actors, and, ironically, provides little incentive for government-led poverty reduction programs. Personnel in Freetown-based international non-governmental organizations, for example, speculate that Sierra Leone politicians lobby for the country to retain its yearly ranking as the least developed in the world in the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index to entice greater aid inflows.<sup>1</sup> Much of the aid that flows in is administered through existing national power structures, allowing it to be diverted from its intended recipients or for its distribution to be politicized. As Bates has shown, such rent-seeking

behavior usually leads to sub-optimal economic outcomes (Bates 1981). Economic underperformance makes the states engaging in such behavior perpetual candidates for debt restructuring. Additional aid engenders a cyclical process that becomes entrenched in the social fabric of many African countries.

"Internationalization" as used here is limited to states in which rulers pursue alliances with international actors in lieu of popular support. Social relations between weak states and external actors shape state-society relations. When rulers lack popular support from domestic society, they are likely to seek relationships with outsiders to procure resources that aid their domestic goals. Resources will be put toward managing domestic opposition whether through patronage ("carrots") or repression ("sticks"). When rulers enjoy popular democratic support, they remain likely to seek international capital, but with an eye toward pleasing domestic audiences and more transparent use of the resources. In weak states such as Sierra Leone, rulers' unresponsiveness to citizens should not be seen as a function of the failure of democratization or civil-society, but rather as rational short-term responses to personal political insecurity. As the case study below illustrates, inflows of foreign capital and political liberalization are in conflict with one another in countries whose rulers face insecurity vis-à-vis their societies. In states such as Sierra Leone, rulers forego domestic legitimacy in favor of consolidating relations with external benefactors. This helps explain why there has been little meaningful economic or political change in Sierra Leone despite free and fair elections there in 1996 and 2002.

International creditors, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), laud Sierra Leone's internationalization. Yet internationalization has left the state weaker and has in effect exculpated it from its non-performance of basic functions such as provision of security or electricity in the capital city. Fortunately for weak state rulers, the prevailing liberal doctrine of international financial institutions (IFIs) encourages less-developed countries to privatize national holdings, seek foreign direct investment, lower tariff barriers, and reduce government spending. The rationale is that such policies promote efficiency, increased production and exports, and real prices. Foreign direct investment is thought to provide capital that can be reinvested in domestic infrastructure and used to strengthen the domestic financial sector while also allowing countries to exploit their comparative advantage in exports. Reduced governmental spending, moreover, should minimize wasteful spending and bureaucratic rent-seeking while increasing administrative efficiency.

Yet in the world's weakest states one sees the opposite of the predicted outcomes. Western policymakers underestimate the politicization of economic reform in countries with embedded patronage networks and vast economic inequality. In Sierra Leone, reform programs have failed to empower an independent business sector or to create a middle class with the capacity to demand public accountability; rather, the political elite and foreign firms have colluded to control capital and distribute it to key actors for political loyalty.

Sierra Leone's experience over the last two decades shows how politicians incorporate externally-imposed reforms into strategies that perpetuate personal rule and worsen social exclusion and institutional decay. This crisis became acute during President Joseph Momoh's tenure (1985-92) when he courted foreign firms after failing to draw sufficient political support from the corrupt associates of the previous president, Siaka Stevens (1968-85). After leaving office, Stevens and his associates still controlled much of the unofficial economy, and thereby significantly reduced Momoh's ability to tax export revenues or regulate licensing and trade. Momoh and subsequent rulers bet that internationalization would allow them to survive by broadcasting a minimal amount of power through personalized strategic redistribution of resources to elites while enabling them to shed obligations to large segments of the population, rural youth in particular (Richards 1996, 2005). This strategy led rulers to abjure notions of being "governors" of society. Instead, they use their formal status to attract outside resources and protection from internal threats.

The narrow focus on internationalization caused neglect of domestic institution-building. Building effective state institutions is costly. Worse from the perspective of personalist politicians, creating alternative means for redistribution and adjudication would undermine their ability to "govern" an essentially stateless society (Vandewalle 1998). Given these disincentives to pursue order through conventional institutional means, state leaders are bound to continue and intensify internationalization, which reinforces state weakness and dependence on outsiders for basic goods and services.

Ironically, Sierra Leone's ongoing internationalization is compatible with Western prescriptions for liberalization. Throughout the internationalization process, creditor loans fueled politicians' abilities to implement economic policies that favored foreign firms at the expense of local communities. Many of these communities subsequently joined in armed rebellion against the state. This underscores the shortcomings of prescribing doctrinal reform programs in states

whose institutions are poorly-equipped to effectively implement them. Indeed, Sierra Leone's weak and corrupt bureaucratic institutions had little ability to prevent its rulers from hijacking reform programs for personal benefit. Therefore, international aid to the sovereign regime created a moral hazard such that the agents of state collapse had even less incentive to change their damaging behavior. This is especially true for democratically-elected regimes that enjoy increased international support in return for holding elections. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, democratization aid has been used to entrench clientage networks left over from Soviet rule (Cooley 2000). Indeed, Sierra Leone's current president has pursued politics similar to that which precipitated the conflict, even though he won contested elections in 1996 and 2002. This record shows that democratization in a very weak state may often fail to halt state decline, whose causes are more complex than a lack of formal representation. Indeed, as I show below, it can contribute to this process.

#### @ The Politics of Economic Reform and State Recession

When Joseph Momoh succeeded longtime president Siaka Stevens in 1985, he had little *de facto* power vis-à-vis the old patriarch. Stevens had built large patronage networks in Sierra Leone that diverted to private coffers much of the country's revenue from natural resources. In large measure, Stevens managed to retain control over clandestine commercial networks after his presidency, and many clients from his old patronage networks remained loyal to him. Upon entering office, Momoh confronted the dual challenge of wresting political control from Stevens while increasing taxable revenue to pay foreign arrears -- a task that required both control of clandestine diamond trading and protection from miners whose enterprise depended on evasion of state regulation. Despite the country's sizable diamond reserves, Momoh struggled to tax diamond income because his underpaid and corrupt police force often could not or would not arrest smugglers or enforce tax codes. Lebanese traders who had long been linked to Stevens used their privileged ties to Stevens' old cronies to evade taxes and smuggle diamonds through vast transnational shadow economic networks. Through the late 1980s, Stevens and his Lebanese associates remained in control of much of the country's unofficial diamond revenue.<sup>2</sup>

The institutional legacy left by Stevens' long, patronage-based presidency was a weak rentier state that depended on capital inflows rather than taxation of a productive economy. Since Sierra Leonean capital inflows came principally from diamond exports, the small circle of

beneficiaries who remained in control of shadow mining networks had few incentives to spend this income on services for common citizens; they could get rich regardless of the health, education, or productivity of other citizens.

Momoh reasoned that one way to overcome the challenges posed by Stevens' entrenched rentier networks would be to get outsiders to usurp control over diamond regions, thereby crowding out local operators. He awarded contracts to foreign firms on the condition they promise to marginalize Lebanese smugglers and their Sierra Leonean politician associates. This generated taxable revenue that came under the president's control and removed valuable assets from Stevens' associates. Momoh's end run created incentives for elites in Stevens' old networks to switch allegiance to him.

Moreover, Momoh saw foreign firms as more politically reliable than stalwarts from the Stevens regime. Diamond firms served as a bulwark between Momoh and communities in the diamond regions, many of which had long believed that they were the rightful owners of the diamonds (Inspector of Mines 1956). Firms depended on Momoh for contracts, and were thus legally beholden to him for access to the country's mines despite the government's inability, *ex post*, to enforce contracts.

The contracting arrangements between Momoh's regime and foreign firms were mutually beneficial in the short-term. The government lacked the capability to monitor and enforce its contracts, allowing mining firms free rein in the countryside. To maximize profits and prevent looting of mining sites, firms had to impose control over the diamond regions. This meant that they undertook to push illicit miners out of the mines. The removal of illicit miners enabled Momoh to tax diamond revenues, which gave him a greater proportion of patronage resources. But it also cut off social groups -- particularly young men -- whose survival depended largely on black market trade and who felt entitled to the diamonds that lay beneath the land on which their families had for generations. Exclusion from mining generated ill-will toward the government, and it became a source of mobilization in later rebel recruiting efforts (Abdullah and Muana 1998, 178).

Momoh's opening of the country's mining to new foreign investors made Sierra Leone an attractive candidate for new loans. However, IFI imposition of conditionalities exacerbated the erosion of Momoh's domestic social base that had already begun. Reforms, which included floating the exchange rate and removing agricultural subsidies, alienated what remained of the

clientage networks through which Stevens earlier used to garner popular support (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999, 122). Agricultural production dropped, food prices increased, and unemployment rose. As state revenues fell and bureaucracies collapsed, the president largely ceased to act even as a patron for those who had used bureaucracies for lower-level corruption. Although Momoh's internationalization strategy had indeed given him new allies and increased access to capital, the breakdown of patronage networks and the collapse of state bureaucracies exacted an enormous political toll, particularly with respect to the government's ability to exercise social control in the interior. In 1991, the Revolutionary United Front insurgency crossed the Liberian border into the Kailahun District and launched its first offensive. Formal economic collapse opened up space for a growing shadow economy that thrived as armed factions controlled territory and clandestine export market opportunities of exploitable natural resources such as diamonds and gold.

These statistics show the recession of any meaningful capacity, formal or informal, of the regime to assert authority (see Table 1). First, it is clear that the formal economy, of which exports are an integral part, collapsed after the war began in 1991. Between 1993 and 2003, the International Monetary Fund estimates that exports as a percentage of GDP declined by some 30.3 percent (see World Bank 2007). This economic collapse led to increased rates of unemployment, particularly among able-bodied young men. Second, the collapse of the formal economy gave rise to a shadow economy of smuggling, drug and arms trafficking, and money laundering that was outside the control of the president (Kandeh 1999). Exports of natural resources remained high, but the state was too weak to tax this trade. Contrary to liberal expectations, order and general welfare diminished as this kind of integration into the global economy deepened and intensified.

Momoh's political weakness and early inability to control private access to resources, coupled with his failure to procure unconditional loans from international financial institutions, left him ill-equipped to rein in enterprising local elites. The war limited firms' ability to monopolize control over mining, and local elites continued commercial ties with Lebanese traders with access to international diamond markets and foreign exchange in preference to Momoh's networks. Creditors prescribed deepened private partnerships with foreign firms, reflecting their belief that Momoh's failure to regularize mining had occurred because his internationalization program had been too shallow, not too deep. From creditors' perspective, big

firms could monitor and enforce mining codes where neither the state nor Sierra Leone entrepreneurs could. This would allow Sierra Leone to generate revenue to help offset balance-of-payment deficits. For Momoh, however, deepened internationalization reflected a desperate political strategy to help cope with his lack of control over domestic entrepreneurial strongmen whose accumulation increased their ability to mobilize opposition constituencies necessary for rebellion.

#### @ Foreign Firms as Political Allies

For foreign entrepreneurs, international legal sovereignty made Momoh an attractive business partner. This recognition meant that he controlled formal-legal access to resources despite his state's empirical political weakness. Private contracts also mitigated international financial institutions' burden to subsidize Sierra Leone's failing infrastructure in the midst of conflict. Although using concessions to foreign firms appeared to solve the problem of inefficiency associated with state control over resources as well as to the challenges posed by rogue bands of miners who had controlled the majority of the country's diamonds,<sup>3</sup> creditors underestimated the political value of foreign firms to personalist rulers.

The firms that arrived in Sierra Leone did not fit creditors' ideals of behavior. In 1989, for example, Momoh signed a contract with Scipa Finance, an Israeli firm, allowing it to mine in Sierra Leone's diamond districts. The company's chairman, Nir Guaz, raised official diamond exports and offered to assist Sierra Leone's payment of arrears to the IMF. Yet at the same time, Guaz integrated his firm into local shadow economies controlled by local strongmen who opposed Momoh's rule. By playing both sides, Guaz' firm opened up opportunities for Momoh's rivals to acquire foreign exchange and attract new political support. Despite protests from Momoh's rivals, government forces arrested Guaz for "economic sabotage" on Christmas Eve, 1989, the same day that Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Liberation Front (NPFL) invaded Liberia (Reno 1995b, 209).

Other firms provided security, but only in mining areas. This left open large areas in which rebels could regroup for offensive attacks. For example, Momoh offered "Sunshine Boule," an American firm from Houston owned by Jean-Raymond Bouelle, operating concessions for production at a tax rate of 22.2%, a sum lower than those previously levied against firms. Bouelle, the reputed "diamond czar" whose mining operations have extended from

Sierra Leone to Myanmar to Democratic Republic of Congo, where in the last he supplied then rebel leader Laurent Kabila with weapons and a private aircraft, is notorious for supplying mercenary support and weapons to host countries (Moody). In Sierra Leone, Sunshine Boulle hired a private paramilitary force to defend its exclusive right to operate in designated zones. This private security force relieved Momoh of the burden of financing another security agency in addition to the four that also monitored the president's rivals and each other (Reno 1995b, 210). The firm sought to limit the ability of local strongmen to mine in coordination with Momoh's rivals. In principle, this would strengthen the president's capacity to control resources for his own patronage purposes. This however, also ran counter to the aim of creating a stronger bureaucratic state.

Upon finding that contracting with foreign firms offered both financial benefits and much-needed security, Momoh intensified his courtship of foreign firms. He signed contracts that granted operating concessions to firms from Britain, the United States, Australia, and other countries. Because of the weakness of the rentier state's institutions, Momoh used these firms, rather than his own state forces, to perform functions that states would typically do themselves. With creditor support, for example, Momoh gave the German firm Specialist Services International (SSI) control over the Freetown port rather than allowing local administrators access to revenues generated by port taxes. SSI collected taxes and determined which imports would be allowed into the country. Predictably, relationships similar to those that characterized state-Scipa relations ensued. SSI's management waived taxes on a number of goods and services in exchange for fees paid under the table (Fofana 1994). Momoh signed another agreement with Pioneer Service NL of Australia that gave the firm the exclusive right to diamond mining operations in one district on the condition that it police surrounding territory.

Internationalization ultimately proved inadequate to control the entirety of the territory. Politicians ignored areas without significant resources while they competed with rebels for control over the diamond districts. In 1992, a group of Sierra Leone Army soldiers, led by a young, non-commissioned army officer named Valentine Strasser, overthrew Momoh. Strasser's forces marched from the interior, where they had been fighting against the RUF, to overthrow the corrupt regime that had been providing little material support for the SLA's battles against the RUF. The soldiers cited the Army's lack of medical care and supplies as reasons for the coup (Abdullah 1998, 204).

As competition for resources became especially fierce, foreign firms fled the growing violence. The RUF sought control over diamond mining in order to smuggle stones to Liberia to be exchanged for weapons. RUF commander Foday Sankoh assigned some young fighters positions in diamond mines while others were assigned to guard them. Sankoh sent other fighters in search of other resources for day-to-day consumption in what came to be called "Operation Pay Yourself." In a fashion similar to that of the Freetown government's, the RUF did not consistently pay combatants formal salaries. Instead, its leaders allowed combatants to loot the villages. The commanders required that booty be brought to them, and then they redistributed among the combatants.<sup>4</sup> Strategies such as "Pay Yourself" reinforced combatants' perceptions that those who were not associated with the RUF were by default its foes, as the rebels viewed independent societal wealth as threatening to their mode of coercion and as an impediment to their consumptive behavior.<sup>5</sup> Gangs of rebels looted villages, stealing everything from rice to gold to the zinc roofs of shanty homes to use for temporary rebel settlements in the bush and to weaken potential collective opposition relative to the strength of the rebel organization.<sup>6</sup>

In lieu of effective institutional means to resolve disputes, terror became a common tactic of the rebels to punish citizens' disloyalty and to acquire resources (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004; Keen 2002; Murphy 2005). During the RUF invasion of Freetown, rebels released all of the prisoners from the national prison, allowing them to exact revenge against state judges, prosecutors, and politicians who had a hand in their incarceration. Such predation, which commonly included amputations, led to a mass exodus of civilians, relief workers, and non-governmental organizations from the city. One correspondent reported that in and around Freetown, it was not uncommon to find RUF combatants driving white sport-utility vehicles with logos of non-governmental agencies still emblazoned on the side (Rupert 1997, 10), although the rebels, most of whom did not know how to drive, sometimes forced unlucky drivers to give them lessons.<sup>7</sup>

Lacking the sovereign status enjoyed by Strasser's regime, yet needing foreign exchange to finance its insurgency, the RUF needed to attract foreign support. Its control over many of Sierra Leone's diamond mines -- records obtained from the RUF indicate that it sold some 10 137 diamonds between November 1998 and January 2000 from the Kono district (Buchan 2000, 5) -- led it to be able to generate revenue for offensive attacks. The RUF circumvented its lack of international legitimacy by dealing with a foreign warlord, Liberia's president-to-be

Charles Taylor, who had strong connections to the international black market as a result of his past association with Samuel Doe's regime, his ties with Burkina Faso's president, and to Libya, where Qadhafi's forces trained him and others, including RUF commander Foday Sankoh, in the 1980s (Ellis 1999). The fact that the state had collapsed in Liberia, which left only an interim government, led companies to be willing to contract with Taylor because it was presumed that his group would quickly win the war and he would become the sovereign ruler.

The RUF's connection with Taylor's group ameliorated its problem of non-sovereignty in the foreign marketplace. A typical strategy used by RUF commanders was to sell diamonds to Lebanese dealers for ninety to ninety-five percent of their rough value. The dealers then smuggled the stones across Sierra Leone's porous border into Liberia, where they would arrange for the stones to be dispatched by air to main diamond trading centers such as Antwerp or Tel Aviv. Couriers typically received a commission worth one per cent of the stones' value. Some buyers used secret Swiss bank accounts, known as "mountain dollars," to launder profits from illicit transactions. In addition to Taylor's access to foreign markets, particularly after his ascent to Liberia's presidency in 1997, informants reported that smuggling stones into Liberia was particularly attractive because merchants could sell them for up to 120 percent of their value to Liberian drug traffickers seeking to launder money under the guise of legitimate commerce (Buchan 2000, 5). In fact, the al-Qaeda terror network became one of the main buyers of Sierra Leonean diamonds after the United States froze bank accounts of other alleged terrorist organizations whose clandestine financial networks had been discovered (Farah 2004).

These anecdotes illustrate a dark side of globalization. Countries such as Sierra Leone which lack secure property rights regimes will be more likely to encounter violent conflict as local authorities -- whose power is often viewed by communities as more legitimate than that of state politicians -- compete with state actors for access to and control over contested resources for sale in the global market. Externally-led reform programs, which are designed to enhance market competition, can marginalize local authorities and exclude non-sovereign social groups whose rights are unclear under law.

Moreover, the ability of central governments to make law that raises barriers to entry further exacerbates social tension. A World Bank (2004) study, for instance, finds that the average cost of starting a business in Sierra Leone is \$1 663.48 or some 1 268.4 percent of formal gross national income per capita, making business ownership in the formal sector

extremely difficult for ordinary Sierra Leoneans. This drives entrepreneurship into the unofficial sector. Visitors to Sierra Leone notice that even the country's leading telecommunications provider, CelTel, makes wide use of unofficial markets to sell prepaid call time and to thereby evade income and sales taxes.<sup>8</sup>

In response to exclusion from the formal economy, ethnic groups or communities often undertake collective entry into parallel economies to reduce risk and to realize economies of scale. Social mobilization for parallel economies, however, can represent a self-help strategy that further distances groups from the state, fosters competition and nationalism among groups, and can create divisions within social groups such as the RUF when leaders unequally allocate resources. Such dilemmas underlay much of the violence in the Sierra Leonean war.

#### @ Non-State Security

Non-state armed groups are not the only social groups which respond adversely to the internationalized state. The Sierra Leone Army (SLA) provides another example of unintended consequences associated with internationalization. Before Strasser's forces ousted him, Momoh expanded military forces dramatically, from three thousand to fourteen thousand troops. Ironically, this attempt to expand the military's capacity and centralize state control through coercion ended up further undermining state power. The poorly-paid and trained soldiers failed to establish control of shadow economy, which cyclically rendered the state unable to generate sufficient funds to pay soldier salaries. This led the large portions of the army to adopt their own version of "Operation Pay Yourself," as soldiers turned against the state, "fighting" RUF rebels by day and mining alongside them at night. This attempt to expand state power through militarization highlights the difficulty of and risks associated with state-building projects in fragmented societies. Momoh's military expansion armed thousands who might have remained neutral but ultimately became "sobels," casting the state into deeper crisis.

Foreign firms -- Momoh's and Strasser's focal points of rule -- also came under siege by rebels who realized that in the absence of foreign business partners, the state lacked even minimal capability to rule. Rebels kidnapped employees of several firms, prompting the flight of these firms. This dramatically diminished the income they had generated for distribution to Strasser's remaining patronage networks. Despite the adverse effects of previous lending behavior, creditors, fearing loan default if the state collapsed into complete anarchy, bailed out

the government by restructuring loans on the condition of adherence to reform, including reduction of state spending. This resulted in Strasser's regime laying off approximately one-third of the remaining civil service, thereby further fractionalizing the fragile patronage networks that remained (Reno 1998, 127).

This reform created significant social disruption in Freetown and further limited the government's ability to administer security in the capital. It also marked the complete collapse of state authority, insofar as the military had "gone sobel" and key foreign partners had fled the country. The absence of a centralized coercive agency, state or non-state, transformed security into a self-help endeavor, with remaining firms providing private security and the government hiring mercenary support to counteract RUF advances.

Intrepid foreign firms bought protection from outfits largely comprised of ex-Cold War intelligence operatives. These operatives' attempts to train factions of the SLA in counter-insurgency tactics underestimated the extent of sobel collaboration with rebels. Sobels, for instance, killed and allegedly cannibalized an American contractor who oversaw the operations of Nepalese Ghurka mercenaries and trained remaining loyal factions of the SLA (Reno 1998, 129). The failure of this mission led Strasser to turn to Executive Outcomes (EO), a private South African security company composed largely of black southern Africans who were co-opted by the apartheid-era South African regime to destabilize parts of southern Africa. The British human-rights group International Alert condemned EO as "an assortment of former assassins, spies, saboteurs and scoundrels" (Whitelaw 1997, 46). EO's capability was well-known throughout Africa after its intervention in Angola in which it provided security to Angola's government during its war against Jonas Savimbi's UNITA rebels (Howe 1998, 310). Despite the Sierra Leone government's inability to make initial payments to EO, the firm agreed to work that was conditional on government promises that Branch Energy, a corporate partner with links to mercenary activity in Angola and Papua New Guinea, would be offered mining concessions in the Kono diamond district. EO began a counter-insurgency mission in May 1995, drafting and training about ten thousand *Kamajor* defense forces. EO and *Kamajor* forces kept the RUF at bay and launched successful offensives on key mining districts.

The story of EO in Sierra Leone informs us of one way in which rulers of weak states with limited popular support can buy security to support their private goals. President Strasser used prerogatives unique to his status as a sovereign leader to offer legitimate contracts to

foreign firms to shore up his bankrupt regime's security. Bereft of other reliable alternatives, Strasser agreed to a triangular profit sharing arrangement among the Sierra Leone state, EO, and Branch Energy, which was granted operating concessions in the Kono diamond district. The concession to Branch led one analyst to claim that EO served as a powerful sub-contractor in corporate 'outsourcing of violence' (Hirsch 2001, 16). This outcome was the rational consequence of extreme state weakness and the ruler's political insecurity. For Strasser, who hired EO, this arrangement not only provided trained counter-insurgency forces but also kept precious diamonds out of the reaches of political opponents. In fact, according to the terms of the contract, Branch gave five percent of the value of all diamonds extracted and 37.5 percent of all net profits to the state, providing valuable revenue to pay arrears and to make payments to EO.

The international community initially lauded the security provided by EO. This is because creditors could expect increasing formal state revenues at relatively low expense. Moreover, the country appeared increasingly stable to foreign governments that were concerned about the potential costs of intervention. Arrangements with EO allowed Strasser to discuss with creditors and international non-governmental organizations the reduction of expenditures on the inefficient (and disloyal) state army, which claimed some seventy-five percent of state spending in 1995. International observers believed that privatizing of Sierra Leone diamond reserves would reduce state intervention in the economy and thereby state corruption and further increase the country's attractiveness to credible investors. Indeed, shortly after the arrival of EO in 1995, the IMF reduced Sierra Leone's foreign debt 20.1 percent from that of the previous year, and in the same year bilateral aid projects and budget support increased some US \$142 million from that procured in 1992 (Reno 1998, 126-31).

Despite the increase in foreign aid and temporarily-improved security, Strasser fell prey to his own military forces. Strasser's number two in the military regime, Brigadier Julius Maada Bio, ousted him in a bloodless coup.<sup>9</sup> Like his predecessors, Bio used creditor loans to finance private security and pursued a radical program to privatize most of the country's remaining national assets while jettisoning former clients who had been tied to these assets. For example, by 1997, foreign firms managed Sierra Leone's customs collection, fishery, Central Bank, state-owned National Development Bank, and the national lottery (Reno 1997, 182). Rather than diminishing opportunities for corruption, privatization created opportunities for those close to Bio to buy cheap shares of newly-private businesses, thus allowing him to (temporarily) appease

potentially threatening clients as well as dole out perquisites to his family and friends.

Bio followed through with planned elections, which had been agreed to by Strasser in exchange for a loan from Britain, and relinquished power to Ahmad Tejan Kabbah in 1996. Although Kabbah's election evoked optimism, the new ruler continued the radical reconfiguration of politics, paring down old patronage networks, constructing new ones composed of his own clients, and planning to privatize remaining national companies which were being protected by EO. This further fragmented state power, and Kabbah consequently made little effort to rule outside of Freetown and the diamond districts, leaving open large portions of the country for rebel safe havens.

EO's intervention ultimately ended because of persistent security concerns in the Kono diamond district, where rogue sobels and RUF rebels maintained clandestine mining operations and threatened to destroy Branch Energy's equipment. Ironically, in the stead of the government's ability to train and equip loyal local fighters, EO sub-contracted security to its own subsidiaries, which trained and equipped local fighters to carry out these ends (Hirsch 2001). These firms faced problems similar to those confronted by the Sierra Leone government: they lacked control over local fighters, many of whom mined alongside the rebels against whom they were ostensibly fighting. To be sure, Branch Energy lacked a secure operating environment in Kono district, thereby failing to generate sufficient revenue to produce incentives for EO or Branch to stay.

The impotence of the Sierra Leonean state quickly became apparent after the departure of EO. On 25 May 1997, a group of sobels marched to Pademba Road Prison in Freetown and released some six hundred prisoners, at least nine of whom had been jailed for plotting a 1996 coup (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999, 136-137). Johnny Paul Koroma, who was to stand trial for the earlier coup attempt, now staged a coup against Kabbah's regime. Koroma's Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) formed a coalition with the RUF. The coalition plundered Freetown, seeking out citizens who were believed to be sympathetic to Kabbah or the *Kamajors* and amputating their limbs. A combination of economic sanctions on Sierra Leonean "conflict diamonds," *Kamajor* resistance, and intervention by a Nigerian-led regional force helped to remove the AFRC regime in 1998 and restored Kabbah, who withstood two more coup attempts in the next six months (Kandeh 2003, 192). Finally, in 1999, the British intervened militarily and quickly quelled the RUF rebellion as well as that of the "West Side Boys," a faction allegedly

loyal to AFRC leader Johnny Paul Koroma. The UN consolidated efforts to end the war by sending a large peace operation of some seventeen-thousand peacekeeping troops to secure the country.

#### @ Sierra Leone: Back to the Future?

The security which UNAMSIL provides creates incentives for foreign firms to sign contracts to operate in Sierra Leone and for creditors to grant loans with increased confidence. This generates dynamics similar to those that occurred prior to the war in which the country's resources were concentrated in the hands of a narrow political class and their foreign partners. This could lead to further conflict as the UN withdraws the military component of the mission. The situation poses a dilemma: Sierra Leone is unlikely to grow economically without integration into the global economy, but the country's recent history of economic integration as described above reflects the political dangers of entry into the global market prior to adequate sociopolitical development. Similar to prewar dynamics, locals note that the once again regularization of the country's diamond reserves requires the government and firms to drive local miners away from the mines. NGOs' and IFIs' current obsession with "local capacity-building," "community-driven development," and "micro-credit" reflects the international community's awareness of the importance of grassroots development, but these norms are in conflict with the formal legal rights allocated to states through mutual recognition of sovereignty and with customary law practiced in many chiefdoms. Thus, although NGOs and IFIs may (or may not) make inroads toward grassroots capacity-building, the larger state-system still places legal control of state affairs in the clutches of state governments. In patrimonial systems, this control is highly personalized in the president, and is difficult to reform in lieu of viable institutions through which to administer the reforms.

Indeed, the restoration of Kabbah to the presidency had more to do with international sovereignty norms than it did with his commitment to good governance or to building a capable Sierra Leonean state. The international community's willingness to restore a president with a track record as spotty as Kabbah's raises questions about abiding by international sovereignty norms while attempting to build capacity at the local level. The notions of statehood, democratization, and free market economics continue to be manipulated by Sierra Leonean elites who have little intent to provide the public goods necessary to sustain these processes. These

legal perquisites to the unresponsive political class, combined with local capacity-building, could actually create more efficient rivals to the state, in the form of insurgencies or militias from marginalized communities that can act collectively in the stead of market opportunities or meaningful political inclusion.

Kabbah's current economic strategy, which centers on attracting foreign capital through privatization, is superficially congruent with creditor prescriptions but in fact further limits society's access to political offices and resources. To ensure greater personal control over privatization, for example, Kabbah recently appointed a National Commission for Privatization through which he has begun to privatize twenty-four state-owned enterprises, including the Sierra Leone Forest Industries, Sierra Leone Road Transport Corporation, Sierra Leone Airports Authority, the Guma Valley Water Company, and the National Power Authority. Jettisoning state bureaucrats from these remaining state agencies in favor of foreign allies suggests that the process of internationalization could once again create grievances among former regime elites. Kabbah can contract with foreign firms to 'sell sovereignty,' thereby allowing him at once to choose politically-friendly firms and to avoid accountability for non-provision of goods and services. As a result, a popular sense of exclusion from the country's resource base and any benefits from it could motivate fighters from the state's plethora of unemployed ex-combatants who seek retribution through the shadow economy and violent politics.

One consequence of internationalization and conflict worth reiterating is the collapse of the formal economy. This has occurred in Sierra Leone and other failed African states such as Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Somalia whose political institutions were very weak at the onset of intense liberalization. In these countries, foreign investment such as that described above has rendered the intended beneficiaries of reform, local entrepreneurs, as victims when foreign firms' operations crowd out local business. Rather than creating an independent business class and a robust middle class, which are the hallmarks of most stable democratic states, the implementation of creditor prescriptions opens up space for foreign entrepreneurs to consolidate control local resources and markets. In states with extremely weak political institutions, these processes create a pool of frustrated, unemployed citizens whose energies may be used by political entrepreneurs to organize violence against the state and neutral civilians.

## @ Conclusion

The preceding analysis generates policy insight. First, contrary to most current reform prescriptions, authority in weak states should be centralized, not decentralized, under the close oversight of powerful states before these states integrate their economies into the global economy. Centralization and state-making should involve the strengthening of state bureaucratic agencies, not further concentration of executive power. Samuel Huntington's classic study of political order and decay in developing societies highlights the need for order to be consolidated before the onset of liberalization (Huntington 1968). In countries beset by weak political institutions, such as Sierra Leone, decentralization creates more, not less, opportunities for rent-seeking, thereby promoting unstable long-run politics (Olson 1965, 1982). This is because decentralization fragments patronage networks as its members discover that they can violently appropriate resources without their old patron's assent.

Bureaucratization need not be technocracy, an area in which Sierra Leone has little capacity. Rather, it can also mean the institutionalization of local authority structures and norms of social reciprocity that already function in areas in the country. Building on extant legitimate social authority structures, such as Mende initiation societies, could begin to institutionalize a political process that could absorb new political demands -- including the democratization process -- as well as decrease the necessity of violent conflict as a mode of resistance and facilitate collective action among disparate groups under a common set of principles (Weinstein 2005).

To buttress the institutionalization of locally-legitimate authority structures, international actors could provide external guarantees of contracts and laws. Barbara Walter (2001) shows that third party oversight and enforcement dramatically increases the probability of success for the implementation of peace agreements. James Fearon and David Laitin (2003) and Stephen D. Krasner (2004) go further by prescribing "neotrusteeship" or "shared sovereignty" arrangements between powerful states and failed states. Although some critics argue that these arrangements resemble colonialism, both Fearon and Laitin and Krasner's models explain why powerful states would have good reasons to leave as soon as capable institutions are built. On the supply side, for both political and economic reasons, powerful states have incentives to mitigate the disorder that plagues the post-Cold War developing world. Fearon and Laitin observe that the increasing number of failed states that represent potential security threats impose diffuse costs on powerful

states. Instability in these same states also threatens to disrupt established trade partnerships. The costs of state failure are large enough that it would pay to address them, but not so large that doing so is necessarily worthwhile for any one state. Given the diffuse nature of these "public bads," incentives for multilateral intervention are compelling (Fearon and Laitin 2003, 7). The overlapping jurisdictions of multilateral intervention make a return to direct colonization untenable, nor do intervening multilateral powers desire to remain any longer than necessary, given that they bear substantial costs from these operations. On the demand side of state-building, multilateral intervention provides greater legitimacy, both locally and internationally, than do unilateral arrangements. At the grassroots level, one cannot ignore the protests held in Freetown in favor of a return of British colonialism or regular newspaper advertisements requesting a Western president, whom advocates believe would be less corrupt. And visitors to Freetown encounter citizens' widespread pleas for more international intervention for security and state-building such as that undertaken by UNAMSIL forces after the war's conclusion.<sup>10</sup> Similar observations are typical in Liberia as well.

Jeffrey Herbst offers more radical policy insights that address sovereignty as a root cause of perpetual state weakness. Herbst observes that the current sovereignty regime provides few incentives for weak states to provide public goods such as education, health care, roads, and security to citizens. He argues that states would be more likely to provide public goods if the international community changed the incentive structure. Rather than protecting state borders, the international community could recognize secessionist movements that provide more public goods in break-away areas than does the incumbent central government (Herbst 1996-97, 136-37). Statesmen wishing to protect their territorial integrity would thus have reasons to provide more public goods throughout the entirety of their designated territory, thus creating a "race to the top" between central and local governments.

Along the same lines, international institutions and non-governmental organizations could be more flexible in their relations with weak states. Rather than dealing primarily with state actors, international actors could deal more directly with those who exercise real authority on the ground. This approach would diminish the value of sovereignty and provide incentives for local and regional actors to consolidate order. The emergent governance structures would have access to the benefits of international resources and technical expertise for local "bottom-up" development (Herbst 1996-97, 140-42). In contrast to current "one size fits all" reform programs,

implementation would require greater reliance on area specialists whose expertise would help guide the administration of aid and resources in socially legitimate political structures. Although such reform would undermine Western ideas about the necessity of states for national and international order, and might even challenge popular notions of human rights, it would better correspond with indigenous authority structures and local realities.

A last resort when dealing with intractably failed states would be decertification. Decertification would strip sovereign recognition from states that continually make little attempt to perform designated state functions, such as the enforcement of their own laws. Decertification would do several things. First, it would undermine the local legitimacy of the state. Statesmen could no longer use the façade of sovereignty to bargain with domestic populations. Second, it would undermine the decertified states' international legitimacy and ability to gather international resources, such as a seat at the United Nations, and the ability to pursue foreign aid or deals with foreign firms, which currently allow rulers of failed states to perpetuate bad governance with little accountability to their domestic societies. Decertifying Somalia, for example, might eventually foster the natural spread of more orderly governance from Somaliland and Puntland toward Mogadishu. Together, the results of decertification would place the state in competition with societal actors for international recognition and its attendant perquisites. If the international community established the proper criteria for recognition, the competition to best meet those criteria should be expected to be self-reinforcing and durable.

In Sierra Leone, where there is little commercial agriculture and a weak formal economy, foreign contracts are among the main spoils of state sovereignty. Those with little to offer international investors are left to subsistence agriculture and sporadic patronage from local or state authorities. This leaves ordinary Sierra Leoneans with little opportunity for independent advancement and limits their ability to challenge to incumbent political structures that perpetuate elite privilege and corruption. If the international community -- which already has so much power over Sierra Leonean affairs -- would change its own rules about sovereignty, both Sierra Leoneans and powerful international states would stand to benefit. Sierra Leonean societies could compete with the state to provide order, which would increase the efficiency of goods provision and increase chances for local political autonomy and access to foreign aid.

Given the current rules of the game, however, the implication of these suggestions is that international community should prioritize shoring up sustainable order in weak states such as

Sierra Leone prior to political liberalization and integration into the global economy. Roland Paris has convincingly argued that peacebuilding missions which attempt to politically liberalize societies often promote renewed competition and violence because of the competitiveness inherent in liberalism (Paris 2004). He argues that a more efficacious peace-building strategy would involve the development of institutions that could maintain a stable social order. This would decrease the long-term costs of intervention for powerful states and also assuage concerns about non-state security threats that abscond to un-policed territories to regroup or mobilize followers. Moreover, sustained order would be economically beneficial. Few disagree that it is easier and more efficient to do business in well-governed, stable societies. Indeed, Douglass North and other theorists of the new institutional economics concur that protected property rights, rule of law, and free flows of information reduce transaction costs and increase investor confidence (North 1990; Williamson 1985). To be sure, today's prevailing international norms promote investment and liberalization, which I have subsumed to the concept of internationalization, but have yet to effect the institutional change necessary to allow such reforms to achieve their intended outcomes. Promoting security and provision of public goods sequentially prior to free markets should be the primary goals of the international community in weak states.

#### @ Notes

<sup>1</sup> Interviews with NGO personnel, 5 July 2004 and 7 July 2005.

<sup>2</sup> By invoking terms such as "shadow," "clandestine," or "parallel," I adopt the definition of Fleming, Roman and Farrell of "political or economic activity that lack institutional regulation and fall outside the purview of government structures" (2000, 387).

<sup>3</sup> According to one estimate, official diamond exports bottomed out in 1988 at US \$22 000, while diamond trade in the shadow economy was estimated to be worth some US \$250 million (Reno 1998, 120).

<sup>4</sup> Author interview, Freetown, 5 July 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Author interview, Freetown, 6 July 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Author interview, Freetown, 16 July 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Author interview, Kenema, 8 July 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Personal observation during research trips in the summers of 2004 and 2005. For a discussion

of allegations of CelTel tax evasion, see <http://www.sierra-leone.org/slnews0303.html>.

<sup>9</sup> According to a report in *The Economist*, Bio removed Strasser because he had selected another candidate, whom he believed he could control from behind the scenes, to run for the NDRC party in scheduled elections. When Strasser agreed to run in the election, Bio's coalition ousted Strasser. Like most reforms in Sierra Leone, elections had been agreed to because the British government offered Strasser a three million pound loan conditional on the holding of elections, which it believed would marginalize the RUF ("Sierra Leone: Little Brother," 43).

<sup>10</sup> Author interviews and general observations, Sierra Leone, Summer 2004.

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[first page footnote]

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Table 1 Sierra Leone Exports, 1991 and 1995 (\$ millions)

	1991	1995
<b>Agricultural Products</b>	\$10.4	\$2.7
Palm Kernels	\$0.05	0
Cocoa	\$2.3	\$0.006
Coffee	\$2.4	\$1.3
<b>Minerals</b>	\$134	\$0.9
Diamonds	\$20.6	\$0.8
Gold	\$0.5	\$0.013
Bauxite	\$26.0	0
Rutile	\$69.1	0

Source: Reno (1998, 127).