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“Terrorists Prefer Diamonds”

**How Predation, State Collapse and Insurgence Have
Fashioned The International Exploitation Of Sierra
Leone’s War Economy**

Greg Mitchell

March 2005



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Executive Summary

Between 1991 and 2000, Sierra Leone experienced massive state and economic decline amidst a brutal civil war. In a country that is minerally wealthy, but ruled by a corrupt and predatory government, a 'revolutionary' movement known as the RUF emerged, terrorising the civilian population and profiting from the unsecured diamond industry.

The classic causes given for Sierra Leone's state collapse and consequent civil war have in large centred around the adverse effects of colonialism, civil unrest due to rampant governmental kleptocracy, and regional conflict spillover. However, the multiplicity of actors in Sierra Leone and the complexity of the environment demonstrate that the ten year civil war revolved predominantly around the country's highly lucrative diamonds.

Indoctrinated in Qadafi's Libya and trained by Taylor's NPFL rebels in Liberia, the RUF insurgency created links through Charles Taylor to international criminals such as weapon's dealer Victor Bout, and international terrorists including al Qaeda. In just a few years Sierra Leone attained the dubious distinction of being one of the most globalised informal and illegal economies in the world.

To the backdrop of Sierra Leone's collapsed state, economic vacuum and brutal civil war, and within the context of contemporary economic globalisation and an international 'War on Terror', this paper discusses the local, regional and international levels of economic exploitation throughout the wartime period, and highlights how informal economies are inherently prone to large scale criminal predation.

The Author

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The following comprises part of an extended piece of research into the international exploitation of Sierra Leone's diamond industry. This paper discusses the local, regional and international levels of exploitation, under the backdrop of Sierra Leone's collapsed state, economic vacuum and brutal civil war; and within the context of contemporary economic globalisation and the U.S.-led 'War on Terror'.

1. Introduction

Chaos is the norm and war is a way of life. Insofar as there is a government, it operates in a similar way to an organised crime syndicate. The pre-modern state may be too weak even to secure its home territory, let alone pose a threat internationally, but it can provide a base for non-state actors who may represent a danger to the post-modern world... notably drug, crime and terrorist syndicates.¹

Sierra Leone is located on the West coast of Africa between Liberia and Guinea. A small country of approximately five million people in an area roughly the size of Ireland, Sierra Leone's history since the discovery of diamonds in the 1930s has been characterised by massive governmental failures, internal crises, and regional insecurity.

The modern state was created in 1961 with the integration of the British colony of former slaves in the coastal regions, and the tribal Africans in the hinterlands. From this time the country was marked with tribal and class tensions between the more educated 'Krios'¹ in the cities and coastal areas, the southern tribes (predominantly Mende), and the northern tribes (Temne, Limba and Susu). The All People's Congress (APC) drew its support from the northern districts and dominated Sierra Leone politics from 1968-1992 under Siaka Stevens and Joseph Momoh before a coup, led by army Captain Valentine Strasser², overthrew his government.²

The government of Stevens was a loose alliance of loyalties, deriving and securing power from cronies and strongmen in order to generate both legal and illicit profit from the country's lucrative diamond industry. As the country degenerated through the 1970s due to the government's rampant pilfering, only the Lebanese community, which held considerable influence over the government in return for formal support, continued to profit. Lebanese businesses were the mainstay of the country's industrial and service economies, predominating the diamond industry, with one family (Mackie) still controlling up to forty percent of diamond revenues.³

Elsewhere, disenfranchised youths from the cities, along with illicit miners in Tongo and Bo, saw rebellion as the answer to the blatant kleptocracy of the government. Aided by insurgent training in Libya and initial financing from Charles Taylor, the protagonist of the Liberian conflict, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) invaded Sierra Leone in 1991, sparking ten years of atrocities and pillaging.

¹ Krio is a variant of Creole; a people and culture influenced by the early Portuguese presence, British colonial control and neighbouring French-speaking Guinea.

² At the time of the coup, Valentine Strasser was 27 and a national 'Disco' Champion.

Sierra Leone has been completely crippled by the political and economic activities of a select few individuals and groups- both government and rebels.⁴ Consequently, as witnessed first hand, it is now a country in which the medicines to combat malaria cost less than a cup of coffee in central London but still are not affordable for the average citizen, where malnourished chickens and goats ride on public buses and where even pick-pockets lack the necessary skills to make a living.³

Robert Kaplan (1994) described Sierra Leone as, “a microcosm of what is occurring... throughout West Africa and much of the underdeveloped world: the withering away of central governments, the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, and the growing pervasiveness of war”.⁵ Kaplan described the street youths around Africa who scrambled to carry his bags for money as, “loose molecules in a very unstable fluid, a fluid that was very clearly on the verge of igniting”.⁶ What I saw in the same situation in Freetown were not loose molecules about to explode, but underprivileged citizens who have been subject to exclusion for the greater part of their lives while their leaders have ‘made a killing’.

Although real infrastructure is a derelict memory⁴, post-war Sierra Leone is much different from the place it was during the early 1990s. Health and education services are beginning to take some shape, control of the diamond mines is gradually becoming more secure and, for the first time, a sense of accountability is starting to creep into central government.

Kaplan’s pessimistic portrayal of sub-Saharan Africa lends itself more to a post-apocalyptic novel than to reality. We must not forget, however, the conditions within which Kaplan’s imagery was able to take shape; rampant corruption within a patrimonially-inclined ‘shadow state’,⁷ educated youths marginalised and forced into exile in Guinea, the alienated unemployed finding purpose only in illegal mining activities ‘upcountry’, and a stagnant economy which sunk Sierra Leone to the bottom of UNDP’s Human Development Index (HDI).⁸

The average life expectancy in 2004 is still only 40.23 years for men and 45.21 for women; 56 percent of the population have an average income below the so-called ‘poverty line’ (below US\$1 per day); 46 percent are malnourished; and the child mortality rate is 316 for every 1000 births.⁹

³ Journalist Greg Campbell referred to Sierra Leone as a ‘country,’ “only as a matter of geographical convenience”. He adds that it was “a vacuum of violence, poverty, warlords and misery, a tiny corner of West Africa where the wheels have fallen completely off and left no one in charge except whoever happens to be best armed at the moment... The government has suffered so many coups, counter-coups, rigged elections, political assassinations, and fractious political fights that it has been rendered almost completely ineffectual” (Campbell, 2004:prologue).

⁴ Traffic lights that once worked now sport bullet holes and vines, and stand at odd angles; roads (both dirt and paved) are littered with potholes; streets are lined with burnt-out and bullet-ridden buildings; and chaotic roads are filled with poorly serviced derelict cars that would constitute a health risk outside of Africa.

The saddest irony is that West Africa is naturally rich in four key natural resources: oil, minerals⁵, gems (diamonds, sapphires, etc.) and timber^{6,10}. The colonisation of Africa was largely driven by the accumulation of wealth through these resources. Now they are not only fought over internally and regionally, but also internationally.

Reno (2000) argues that the war in Sierra Leone constituted not so much the breakdown and collapse of one system (that of the state and its formal networks), but rather the creation of a new system that benefited certain actors- corrupt officials, wartime traders, combatants, and international opportunists.¹¹ The West African natural resources market was during the 1990s one of the most globalised criminal markets in the world, and as such must be analysed within the contemporary context of economic globalisation.

This paper discusses the globalisation and regionalisation of the Sierra Leone war economy, highlighting specifically the way in which state failure and international neglect have shaped Sierra Leone into a fundraising 'Mecca' for international predatory networks, organised crime, and networks such as al Qaeda.

1.1. The Complexity of Sierra Leone's State Collapse and Civil Conflict

State collapse arguably fostered the Sierra Leonean war- itself the result of successive predatory regimes emerging out of a rapid decolonisation. State collapse has many features, but essentially it means that the basic functions of the state are no longer performed.¹² As state institutions become increasingly dysfunctional and turn inwards on themselves rather than outwards towards society, the state grows increasingly irrelevant for the populace. Laws and policies are no longer made or enforced, and a central sovereign body no longer secures territory with a monopoly over legitimate coercion and force. To paraphrase Zartman (1995), 'the state pulls into itself and implodes, becoming a black hole of power'.¹³

Because the destruction of formal institutions has generally come from the hands of partisan ruling elites, collapse occurs simultaneously with a breakdown in societal cohesion, which helps create the stimulus for wars and armed conflict, and also the creation of alternative illicit financial and economic networks, with international implications. With no taxable revenues for constructing a state budget and little national cohesiveness, the process of state reconstruction and the restoration of a legitimate authority is even more difficult.

The predominant causes of this breakdown seem most prevalent either where there are distinct and competing ethnic groups, or where there are large quantities of primary and valuable resources. Although we must be wary of drastically reducing highly complex social situations, state collapse and civil conflict are demonstrative of a unique combination of greed/rapacity and grievance/paucity.

⁵ Bauxite, cobalt, copper, gold, platinum, titanium, uranium etc.

The conflict in Sierra Leone is indicative of the interface between long-held grievances resulting from the predatory and patrimonial ruling regimes (political marginalisation), and the desire for control over the strategic natural minerals- gold and diamonds- in the region (economic exclusion). The conflict is also indicative of the interplay between international, regional and local incentives/motivations to create and maintain a civil war.

The following diagram offers a general illustration of the complexity and multiplicity of problems faced by post-colonial states in Africa, and that have offered the perfect backdrop to illicit activities in Sierra Leone. The security/power vacuum left in the wake of the state's collapse was filled by a war economy that transformed the conflict from one of paucity and grievance, to one of international rapacity.

⁶ The second largest expanse of tropical rain forest after the Amazon.

Conditions for the Criminalisation of Weak States

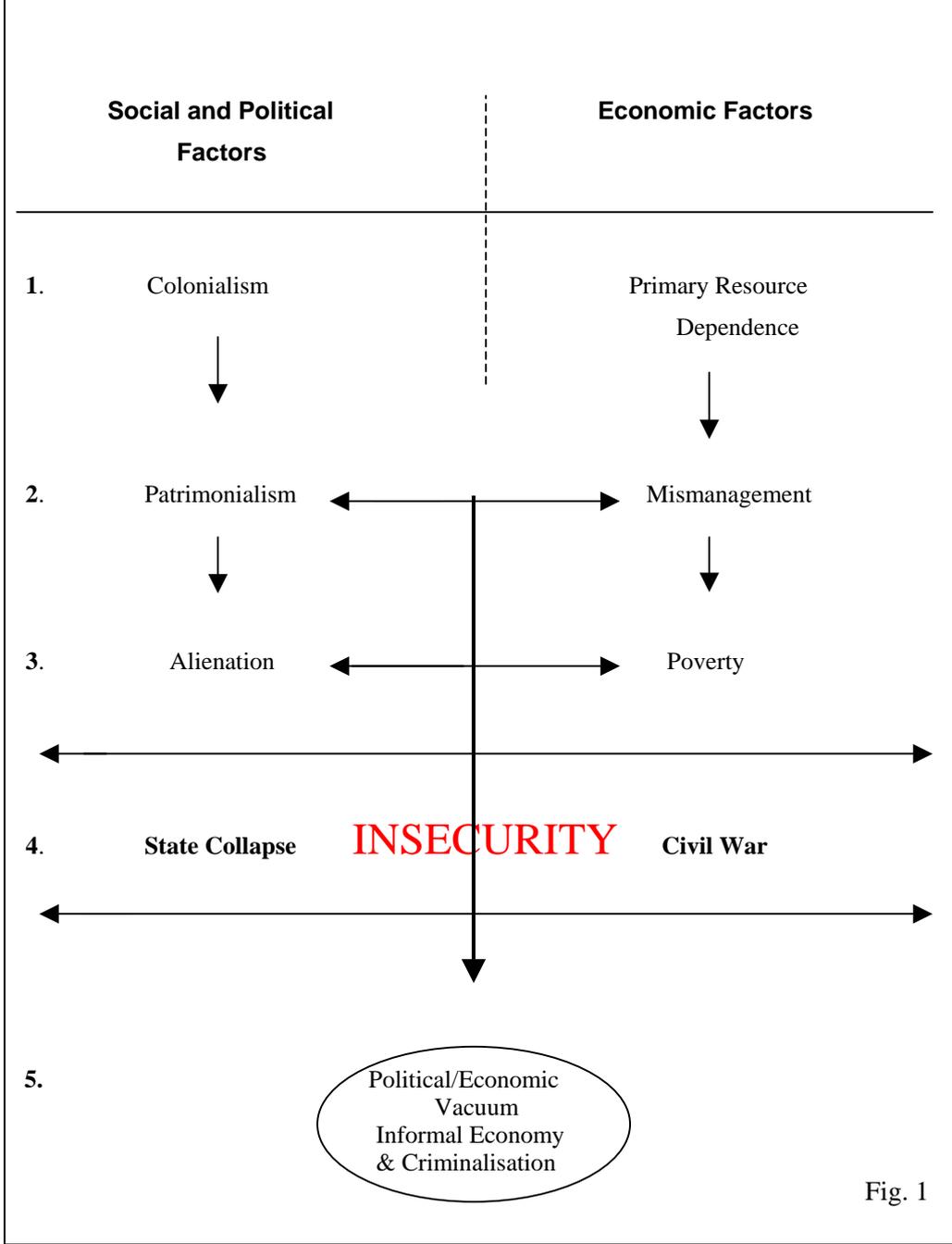


Fig. 1

2. The West African Political Economy of War

*Conflict diamonds have forged an unusual criminal network of warlords, drug and arms traffickers, gangsters, government officials, regional leaders and international firms, all of whom strive on the opportunities of globalisation.*¹⁴

Many commentators now remark on the relationship between internal crises in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and globalisation. The Sierra Leone conflict witnessed multiple actors operating at different levels of exploitation, from the local (insurgent and government), to the regional (dictatorial and hegemonic), to international (international business, military and criminal).

This section will examine the characteristics of informal/parallel/illicit markets, and how they have contributed to the criminalisation of the state.¹⁵ This will in turn provide economic context for the insurgent activities of the RUF and Charles Taylor, and their plundering of Sierra Leone's natural resources.

2.1 'La Politique Du Ventre'⁷

The debate over 'war economies' has focused on a key assumption- that the objective of defeating an enemy has become secondary to economic interests and "the institutionalisation of violence at what is for some clearly a profitable level of intensity".¹⁶

As in the case of Sierra Leone, even where political and social objectives appear to justify the use of violence or the outbreak of civil war, conflicts are still likely to be influenced, at many levels, by economic motives and opportunities.

The 'Criminalisation' of the State

According to Reno (2000), some see civil wars and state breakdown as, "the empowerment of private armies, security firms, and international drug cartels"¹⁷, not to mention regional rebels and international terrorists. In Sierra Leone, a multitude of actors perverted the corrupt pre-war economy to a criminal wartime economy, through smuggling, arms deals, money laundering, sanctions breaking, human trafficking and a host of other illicit and illegal activities.¹⁸ For decades leading up to the war and during it, smuggling was a major feature of the Sierra Leone economy, due to its profitability and the ease of access to extractable resources.

Criminalisation emerges in state collapse and armed rebellion, where actors engage in the international black market to fund further illicit activities and armed combat. What most African countries exhibit is a particular relation between armed conflict and illicit economic activities, particularly smuggling. There are a variety of reasons for this- most prominently to gain access to

⁷ 'La Politique Du Ventre' means literally 'politics of the stomach'. It is used to denote the 'criminal underbelly' of the state.

hard currency, to buy weapons and to launder money. These activities have been made possible by state collapse, the informal economy and the empowerment of local and international profiteers. We can thus partition an analysis of the criminalisation of Sierra Leone into:

- **Governmental;**
- **Insurgent;** and
- **International** categories,

each comprising different actors and constituting different degrees of criminalisation.

The governmental aspect is well documented, and characterised predominantly by corruption. Explicit criminal activity, such as drugs trafficking and the private use of the army, is and was not overtly present. However, the misuse of diamond profits and the lack of regulation of the industry as a whole, saw the resource-dependant economy stagnate and the state collapse.

This environment was further exploited by the RUF insurgency, *category two*, who illegally mined diamonds and smuggled them through Liberia, Guinea and Burkina Faso to exchange for weapons, US\$ or commodities. In addition we can include corrupt police officers, the infamous ‘sobels’⁸ of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces (SLAF) and, even some UNAMSIL peacekeepers.⁹

Category three, International actors, came in the form of not only the ‘grand master’ of West Africa, Charles Taylor, but also Russian money launderers, Lebanese smugglers and arms dealers of various nationalities, who dealt with the RUF to supply weapons and use cheaply acquired diamonds for their own purposes.¹⁰ They also demonstrate links with Russian and Ukrainian Mafias, Hizbullah, and al Qaeda.

We must also recognise international firms, acting well outside the realms of moral business practice and, in many cases, outside the law. Throughout the war in Sierra Leone the government and the RUF sought financial support from outsiders, usually diamond mining firms, to act as investors.¹⁹ Companies expected ‘economic returns’ for their support of the parties to the conflict in the form of major mining concessions, long-term contracts and unhindered access.¹¹ These associations

⁸ ‘Soldiers by day, rebels by night’.

⁹ A group of Ukrainian peacekeepers with the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) were reportedly caught transporting heavy mining equipment from Lungi airport to a disused mine in Kono district. (Interview with Abdullah Mustapha, CISU)

¹⁰ Through these associations we see direct links between the Sierra Leone conflict and the Russian and Ukrainian Mafias (<http://www.publicintegrity.org/bow/report.aspx?aid=156>), Libyan and Lebanese arms dealers (Smillie et al. 2000; Global Witness 2003), and al Qaeda (Farah 2004; Campbell 2004; Global Witness).

¹¹ Examples include a deal between the Kabbah government and Branch Energy, the mining affiliate of Executive Outcomes, to mine exclusively certain areas around Kono and Kenema. Meanwhile, Sankoh’s RUF established contracts with several foreign firms, most notably three US-based mining firms; BECA Company

represented formal contracts, but operated outside the territory of legal and ethical work practice. Companies were exempt from paying taxes, free from moral obligations and were not subject to scrutiny over working conditions or human rights abuses of RUF captives.²⁰

Private Military Companies (PMCs) have been equally conspicuous in the economic domain, and demonstrate further the role of foreign predation in post-cold war conflict.¹² The most prominent, Executive Outcomes (EO), was hired by Strasser's NPRC in 1995 to force the RUF out of diamond areas. In their contract, EO "leveraged the insecurity of the state in order to obtain mining concessions below market rate for resource extraction firms within its corporate network", such as British firm Branch Mining, a subsidiary of Branch Energy.²¹

What we have seen over the past 20 years in Sierra Leone is a transformation of criminalisation, from a government that privatised the economy for their own greed, to the rebels and warring factions who captured the source of income, to the entry of international actors attracted to profitable enterprise. These categories constitute 'la politique du ventre' - the criminal underbelly of wartime Sierra Leone.

The Informal Economy

The informal nature of African economies makes measurement of the criminalisation very difficult. In the wake of state collapse it is widely recognised that a power vacuum may occur, whereby many competing actors, often subversive, will vie for control of the state in an environment of insecurity and instability.²² What has not been clearly elucidated is the presence of a parallel 'economic vacuum' which exists where all state mechanisms to provide for its citizens breaks down, where the social contract fails, and where people are left to wallow in what becomes an economy of survival. Within this context, a new system emerges which is regulated by none but the participants themselves. Citizens must meet their own basic needs by collaborating with anyone and selling anything. For this reason the economy of survival in weak and collapsed states may be referred to as criminal or illicit.¹³

In a poverty and conflict-stricken society, the illicit must be viewed as distinct from the illegal. This definition should include the sale of stolen and/or counterfeit goods, smuggling, service provision,

(Michel Desaedeleer), Lazare Kaplan International (Maurice Templesman) and Integrated Mining (Chudi Izebu) (U.N. Panel of Experts, 2000:4-5).

¹² For a comprehensive analysis of PMCs in Sierra Leone, see Abdel-Fatau Musah & J. Kayode Fayemi (2000) *Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma*. London: Pluto.

¹³ It is estimated that the informal economy constitutes nearly 85 percent of the total financial activity in Sierra Leone, meaning the government has very little taxable income (besides direct mining activities), and consequently very little influence on the lives of its people. During the war especially, what little income was derived through industry was directed either into the fighting forces, private security firms or syphoned off privately. Both the NPRC under Strasser, then the AFRC under Karoma were thought to have embezzled massive fortunes in the same way that the government under Stevens had done during the 1970s and 1980s.

bartering, and the conditions under which people must operate¹⁴. For the general populace these activities are necessary for survival.

States impose a coercive control apparatus- as rents, taxes, exemptions, protections, customs duties, tax farms and prohibition- that creates opportunities for illicit entrepreneurs. Through smuggling, counterfeiting and bootlegging, these outlaws are not merely rational individuals responding to illicit opportunity, but are, more broadly actors reconciling arbitrary state policy with economic rationality.²³

Lacking any real mechanisms to regulate the economic actions of individuals and companies, Sierra Leone devolved from an organised economy; to a predatory economy; to a failing economy. Economic collapse accompanied state collapse, which led to an informal economy of survival and the renewal of predation- this time by insurgents and outsiders.

The 'Lootability' of Diamonds

Collier (2000) cites one of the key reasons for the criminal exploitation of natural resources as their being part of what is called an 'enclave' economy²⁴, where the source of income is territorially located and easily used for rent-seeking purposes¹⁵. As was demonstrated in Sierra Leone by the RUF, the potential economic benefits of mining outweighed the costs of marginalizing and killing the people in the mining areas.

Resources such as diamonds are also easily incorporated within informal economies; they are highly profitable and easy to smuggle. Michael Ross (2003) has offered seven hypotheses to explain the role of such resources in civil conflict. The central theme of the hypotheses revolves around the 'lootability' of a resource- that is, "the ease with which it can be extracted and transported by individuals or small teams of unskilled workers".²⁵

¹⁴ In a city such as Freetown, where the government still has very little control and the police are only slowly rebuilding the trust they lost during the war, the informal economy is still booming. With the exception of a few small to medium businesses such as supermarkets and restaurants, few rents are paid and almost anything a consumer might want can be located, for the right price. Exchange rates vary from street corner to street corner, and from day to day, but like everything else from food to sandals, it can be negotiated.

¹⁵ Collier (2000) shows that primary resources are most frequently 'lootable' due to their ability to be very highly taxed, and because they do not require the same complex and delicate networks of information and transactions, as does manufacturing.

The Lootability of Conflict

1. The more lootable a resource is, the more likely it is to benefit local peoples and the poor;
2. The more un-lootable a resources is, the more likely it will lead to separatist conflicts;
3. The more lootable a resource is, the more likely it is to benefit a rebel group; the more un-lootable it is, the more likely it is to benefit the government;
4. The more lootable the resource, the more likely it is to create discipline problems within the army that controls it;
5. The more lootable a resource, the more likely it is to prolong non-separatist conflicts;
6. If a resource is 'obstructable', it is more likely to increase the duration and intensity of conflicts;
7. If the resource is illegal, it is more likely to benefit the rebels- unless the government is willing to endure international sanctions.

Lootable resources include drugs, alluvial gemstones¹⁶, agricultural products and timber; all of which have been central to the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and are easily transportable. Non-lootable resources, or those that require larger-scale production and transportation facilities, include oil, gas and deep-shaft minerals.²⁶ An institutionalised government is much better equipped to handle the latter breed of resources.

¹⁶ Diamonds are derived from two main sources. Primary deposits are those that occur in basic volcanic rock, known as kimberlite. Secondary deposits are those that occur in alluvial deposits of weathered kimberlite. Although kimberlite is found worldwide, little is diamondiferous.

The mining of kimberlite pipes is an expensive and capital-intensive operation, involving tunnelling underground for hundreds of feet in order to extract diamonds. Where there are large and productive kimberlite pipes, one will usually find large companies with extensive investment funding. Although there are many kimberlite pipes in the world, a large proportion of diamonds are still recovered from alluvial deposits. Alluvial diamond fields are created by the disintegration of volcanic rock (kimberlite) over a long period of time. The product of the disintegration, including diamonds, can be carried away by river systems and deposited over widely scattered areas, including the seabed. Alluvial mining involves the separating of rough diamonds from earth and gravel. A single person working with a sieve and shovel can do this, or alternatively it can be done using large dredges to remove tons of earth and gravel quickly (<http://www.sierra-leone.org/heartmatter.html>).

According to one source (a prospective London miner in Kono), for every ten tons of gravel extracted and sorted, only US\$100 worth of diamonds will be extracted. For international operators, therefore, this requires very large-scale production facilities so as to account for costs.

Ross attempts to empirically assess resources and conflict to derive universally applicable norms, something that is very difficult to apply in Africa's local and regional contexts. His analysis is, nevertheless, useful for an assessment of the illicit nature of the Sierra Leone economy. The lootability of Sierra Leone's diamonds was, in large part, cause and consequence of the war and the activities of the RUF. It also explains the presence of many different local and international actors, profiting from easily accessible gemstones.

3.1: The Heart of the Matter

*The Jewels of 'Salone'*¹⁷

In 1930, J. D. Pollett discovered several small diamonds on the bank of the Gbobora River. He estimated that the field he had discovered covered nearly three thousand square miles in the Eastern Province¹⁸ and extended into Liberia. Over the next forty years these areas produced more than fifty million carats of diamonds and attracted some of the world's most exploitative and enterprising companies- both criminal and 'legitimate'.²⁷

The history of who controlled the diamond mines illustrates the nature of the government's mismanagement of resources and its international nature. From 1935 to 1955 De Beers¹⁹ held exclusive mining rights over the entire country in return for income taxes on profits and small development funds for rural areas.²⁸ De Beers continued operations in Yengema and Tongo Field, while indigenous miners elsewhere were granted licences by the Alluvial Mining Scheme to ensure a Sierra Leonean monopoly. However, by 1956 there were an estimated 75,000 illicit miners in Kono District, profiting from lax mining and tax regulations.²⁹

Seeing a boom in the industry in Monrovia, legitimate diamond merchants (based in Antwerp and Tel Aviv) established offices in Liberia and Freetown, quickly gaining market control as the government, led by Siaka Stevens, sought to quash illegal mining. The Lebanese influence became most apparent from 1971 onwards when Stevens appointed Jamil Mohammed, a Lebanese businessman, as adviser

¹⁷ 'Salone': Sierra Leone in the local dialect of Krio.

¹⁸ Tongo field in the Kenema District, Yengema, Njaima Sewafe, Njaima Nimikoro, Tumbudu, Sefadu, and Koidu in the Kono district.

¹⁹ De Beers is an Antwerp-based diamond distributor. Holding the world monopoly on diamonds, De Beers infamously continued to operate large-scale diamond distribution throughout the 1990s when very large amounts of 'conflict diamonds' were flowing out of Sierra Leone through Liberia and Guinea, and from Angola and the DRC. The prices of diamonds, which are artificially controlled by De Beers and their massive stockpiles of uncut stones, went up in the mid-1990s, giving extra incentive for rebels and international networks to extract and export. De Beers was blamed by some for giving incentive for diamonds to be used by fighting forces.

to the newly formed National Diamond Mining Company (NDMC), and many Sierra Leone-born Lebanese were given preference for mining and dealer licences. In 1984 Jamil's Precious Metals Mining Company (PMMC), established itself as the premier mining company in Sierra Leone; however most of its economic activity had moved from legitimate exports to illicit trading through Monrovia, as Jamil provided major concessions to key figures of the Stevens administration.³⁰

In 1985, under the new president, Joseph Momoh, the Government Gold and Diamond Office (GGDO) was established to both regulate the industry and to value and export the country's gold and diamonds. By the time war broke out, the GGDO had collapsed due to corrupt leaders and Jamil's underlying influence.

At its peak, during the 1960s, Sierra Leone produced an average of just less than two million carats of diamonds, of a total worldwide production of 250 million. Although this accounted for less than two percent of the world's total, the quality of Sierra Leone diamonds has been particularly sought after. From a high of over two million carats in 1970, legitimate diamond exports dropped to 595,000 carats in 1980 and then to 48,000 in 1988. Legitimate exports reached their lowest levels during the war; between 1997 and 1999 only 36,384 carats were mined. "Because the bulk of the country's higher-value diamonds were being smuggled out, the official per carat value of exported diamonds was less than estimates of actual exports".³¹

'Blood Diamonds'

Estimates of the amount of 'conflict diamonds' circulating on the world market vary from between four percent, as stated by De Beers, and six percent as claimed by independent analysts (1999 figures).³² However, with the inadequacies of monitoring the flow of diamonds from Africa to the world's markets, a more precise figure is difficult to ascertain. Even with the most conservative estimate, of a global diamond production of nearly US\$7 billion in 1999, 'conflict diamond' exports would constitute nearly US\$300 million; many large companies in Antwerp, London and Tel Aviv have knowingly profited from this criminal trade.³³

During ten years of conflict in Sierra Leone, many definitions have been given as to what constitutes 'conflict (or blood) diamonds'. De Beers (the world's largest diamond distributor and blamed by some for giving incentive for diamonds to be used by rebel forces²⁰), defines conflict diamonds as "diamonds which originate from areas in Africa controlled by forces fighting the legitimate and internationally recognised government of the relevant country".³⁴

²⁰ Holding the world monopoly on diamonds, De Beers continued to operate large-scale diamond distribution throughout the 1990s when very large amounts of gems were flowing out of Sierra Leone through Liberia and Guinea, from Angola and from the DRC. The prices of diamonds, which are artificially controlled by De Beers

This definition is extremely limited, both in terms of geographical location and actors.²¹ Global Witness, the NGO that has spearheaded the global campaign against conflict diamonds, expanded their definition; “diamonds that originate from areas under the control of forces that are in opposition to elected and internationally recognised governments, or are in any way connected to those groups, shall be considered conflict diamonds”.³⁵

The greatest failure of these definitions is that they neglect to acknowledge the role of governments and international companies that export illegally acquired diamonds. In the DRC, for example, illicit diamond extraction was carried out by both the various rebel groups backed by Rwanda and Uganda, and the government of Laurent Kabilla, backed by the South African Development Community (SADC). In Sierra Leone the RUF/AFRC junta engaged in joint abuses of civilian populations so as to control diamond regions.³⁶ Companies such as De Beers continued buying diamonds from UNITA during the conflict in Angola²² and received illicit gems from Sierra Leone through various intermediaries. Smaller companies, such as Lazare Kaplan International, actually secured mining contracts in rebel-held areas in exchange for rents and taxes. Despite the presence of international regulations for certifying ‘clean’ diamonds’, these companies have played no small role in the globalisation of many war economies, their presence highlights the problems inherent to ascribing responsibility for the continued trade in ‘conflict diamonds’.

Channelling Conflict Diamonds

How conflict diamonds reach the international market is determined by how easily they can be taken out of one country and into the next, without detection. In Sierra Leone, it is the ‘dogma of the preservation of colonially inherited boundaries’³⁷ that has been exploited by criminal networks and worldwide illegal and illegitimate markets. State boundaries that cut across the ethnic landscape in West Africa are so porous and isolated that smugglers, migrants and traders are able to easily cross multiple borders to take their smuggled goods to market.

For every ten official border crossings between Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, there are between 60-80 unguarded crossings through dense bush, across rivers and through mountain ranges.³⁸ Literally thousands of miles of land border are unguarded and vulnerable to large-scale smuggling.

and their massive stockpiles of uncut stones, went up in the mid-1990s, giving extra incentive for rebels and international networks to extract and export.

²¹ This limited definition has served the purpose of allowing continued business with warlords and criminals in charge of the state, for example Taylor and Kabilla, providing they have some kind of international recognition. The manner in which the diamonds were extracted, or that the profits are flowing directly into the private coffers of the individual, does not enter the equation. Other definitions have been issued from the Kimberly Process, the UN general Assembly (2000, 2002), and the UN Security Council (2003).

²² Prior to the fall of Mobutu in 1997, De Beers admittedly purchased large amount of diamonds originating from Angola. The claim is that they never directly purchased diamonds from the rebels themselves, but as Global Witness points out “there is a complete abdication of corporate responsibility, and it further raises the question of whom exactly the De Beers staff, who were based in the DRC along the Angolan border, thought they were paying for the diamonds” (Bourne, 2001:6).

Richards (1996) highlights that in a country as sparsely populated and densely forested as Sierra Leone, “any opportunist with a few boxes of guns... willing to make a virtue of isolation and poor communications, can hold a weak state like Sierra Leone to ransom”.³⁹

The illicit flow of diamonds out of West Africa is difficult to trace²³, which explains in part why the international community has been reluctant to ascribe blame for smuggling beyond local and regional actors. It is believed, however, that a very high proportion of the diamonds exported from other countries and regions that have no substantial mineral resource base of their own, such as Gambia, originate in Sierra Leone. In 1999, Liberia’s diamond exports were only 8,500 carats (US\$900,000), whereas the amount leaving the country was closer to 80,000 carats.⁴⁰ Smillie et al. (2000) noted that, “the astoundingly high levels of [Liberia’s] diamond exports bear no relationship to its own limited resource base”.⁴¹

Historically, Liberia has been the primary route for smugglers because the U.S. dollar is its official currency. In Guinea, diamonds are traded by locals for rice and other foodstuffs.⁴² From these locations diamonds can be sold easily and with little monitoring to Tel Aviv and Antwerp.⁴³ This demonstrates the nexus between the local, regional and international stages of smuggling.²⁴

Abdullah Mustapha of the Office for National Security (ONS) indicates that Gambians were (and are) the main smugglers of rough diamonds from Sierra Leone.⁴⁴ Gambia, with no diamond mines of its own, exported upwards of US\$100 million between 1996-1999.⁴⁵ De Beers and others are aware that Gambia does not possess its own diamonds; they are obtained illegally from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola and the DRC. This demonstrates how governments and companies renounce all responsibility for the global trade of ‘conflict diamonds’.⁴⁶

3.1. From Freetown to Monrovia- An Axis of Regional Predation

There is a tendency by many analysts, particularly economists, to highlight only the economic agendas behind civil wars. Rebel activities in civil wars can be described as “large scale predation of productive economies”.⁴⁷ While the same can be said of the respective governments of Sierra Leone prior to the RUF incursion, some analysts, such as Herschel Grossman (1999), likened the RUF and other insurgents to ‘bandits and pirates’.⁴⁸ Certainly the manner with which the RUF mined and sold diamonds was indicative of a distinct lack of discipline and direction. Diamond dealing became a means for ‘getting rich’ and war was the conduit that allowed this to happen.

Collier (2001) states that the “feasibility of predation” that mitigates the risk of going to war with a government. No matter what the initial motivation may be- perceived injustices, political marginalisation or economic exclusion- without significant and sustained external support, a rebellion will not be successful without its ability to self-finance (especially post-Cold War).

²³ Unlike other precious gems, diamonds are not geographically distinguishable. Particular mining sites, such as those in Angola, will give diamonds with a particular yellow tint, however this characteristic can be disguised through the polishing process.

²⁴ Diamonds can be smuggled in a variety of ways- inserted in clothing, or anywhere on the body. They are totally un-detectable. I was shown a high quality uncut diamond of 16 carats by the director of the GGDO. To my untrained eye it was merely a slightly shiny stone the size of a small pebble. Quite unremarkable except for its price- US\$40,000 approx.- but very easily concealable.

*'Diamonds in the RUF'*⁴⁹

During the initial stages of the war, from 1991 to 1995, diamond extraction was done on a sporadic, individual basis. Rebels either mined themselves or used slave labour. The RUF ultimately controlled the entirety of inland Sierra Leone, with a few minor exceptions, though they did not know the worth of the stones to which they had access. Liberian and Lebanese traders benefited by paying well below market value with cash, weapons or day-to-day items such as clothing, before making a handsome profit internationally. It did not matter to the rebels; "a soldier with \$10,000 is a king".⁵⁰

By 1995 this changed as the RUF began to realise the full potential of diamonds for the cause and for profit. The Kono region, the source of most of Sierra Leone's diamonds, became the military focus of the RUF. From this time the economic opportunities that presented themselves to the rebels, firstly through the recruitment of the *sansan* boys²⁵ and latterly (from 1996-2000) through large deals with US companies, Russian money launderers, and Lebanese arms dealers,⁵¹ became the driving force in what became a criminalised war economy.

By 1998 the RUF established formal links with various companies experienced in Kimberlite mining, thus increasing the RUF's profitability many times over.²⁶ The massive quantities of diamonds they now had access to made their way (directly and indirectly) to major traders such as De Beers. The RUF earned approximately US\$70 million in 1999 (250,000 carats).⁵²

Most of the diamonds extracted by RUF slave labour, were traded through Liberia. Links between the RUF leadership and diamond buyers alternated predominantly between three main players, although some diamond deals were conducted on an 'ad hoc' basis. In the latter half of the war, Ibrahim Bah (a former Senegalese rebel who had received insurgency training in Libya) was the RUF's principal diamond dealer and had very strong links with Foday Sankoh (the leader of the RUF). Bah facilitated the sale of extracted diamonds, which he received through Sam ('Mosquito') Bockarie or Issa Sessay (RUF leader after Sankoh's appointment as Vice President in 1998), to prospective buyers in Monrovia. Dennis 'Superman' Mingo was in charge of the diamonds leaving Kono to Bah in Monrovia.⁵³ From 1998 onwards, Bah took parcels of diamonds to meetings in Monrovia with "a business associate of Foday Sankoh"²⁷, which were traded for very large shipments of weapons to the RUF.⁵⁴

²⁵ The 'sansan' boys operated predominantly in the least accessible diamond mining area of 'upcountry' Sierra Leone. They were exiled unemployed youths from the city who had found a new calling- illicitly mining diamonds and smuggling them to Liberia and Guinea. Their knowledge of border crossings and the bush surround diamond areas was vital for the RUF in their hit-and-run operations against local villagers (Clapham, 1998:Chpt.11).

²⁶ Firms such as Integrated Mining were able to access the most remote locations and extract diamonds that the RUF could not do with shovels alone. Especially post-Lomé Accord, many of the larger companies coming in were also able to diversify for the RUF, moving in to other mining areas such as rutile and bauxite (Perez-Katz, 2001).

²⁷ Possibly Victor Bout, Aziz Nassour, or Samih Ossaily (Global Witness, 2003). As this paper will highlight, Bah, Nassour and their associates are thought to be some of the main points of contact for al Qaeda in West Africa.

In 1999 Bockarie appointed Mohamed Hijazi, a long-time diamond dealer of Lebanese descent, as the RUF's agent "to negotiate with any person or company within or outside Sierra Leone for the prospecting, mining, buying and selling of diamonds".⁵⁵ It is unclear whether Hijazi and Bah continued to liaise with the RUF and its associates in Liberia, but it appears there were no strict guidelines concerning how diamonds were traded. Other top RUF rebels Eddie Koneh, Sessay and Bockarie, all had a hand in Liberian deals; even Sankoh's wife Fatou (an American citizen) was known to have travelled to New York in 1999, with "perhaps hundreds" of diamonds, for a meeting with Michel Desaedeleer of the US-based BECA Company.⁵⁶

From 1997-1999, during the AFRC/RUF junta, this chaotic and multi-directional approach created problems within the groups; Dennis Mingo (a.k.a. 'Col. Superman') was said to have sold a large diamond to a Lebanese businessman and embezzled the RUF's share of the profit (nine million Leones)⁵⁷; and in 1998, AFRC Chairman Johnny Paul Karoma was believed to have kept a parcel of diamonds to facilitate his possible escape to Ghana.⁵⁸

The 1996-1999 period was the most lucrative time for the RUF and the AFRC. They extracted up to 250,000 carats,⁵⁹ and deals with American companies allowed them to exploit Kimberlite deposits. That none of the profits, save weaponry, reached the soldiers, indicates that the reasons for war had changed from initial revolutionary ideals²⁸, to 'profitable crime under the cover of warfare'.⁶⁰

In response to grumbling in the ranks over low pay, the RUF/AFRC instituted 'Operation Pay Yourself'⁶¹. Underpaid soldiers robbed entire communities of crops, vehicles and personal possessions, and engaged in the illicit trading of the country's mineral wealth. In so doing, their actions made them indistinguishable from the rebels. Even their violence began to resemble the horrific acts of the pre-junta RUF- looting everything from huts to local hospitals, even turning out seriously injured patients. In early 1998 as ECOMOG forced the junta out of their strongholds, looting reached epidemic proportions.^{29 62}

The most revealing event, regarding Foday Sankoh's motivations, came in 2000, shortly after the commencement of renewed fighting. Under the 1999 Lomé Peace agreement RUF forces were to be integrated into the national armed forces, while Sankoh was appointed vice president of Sierra Leone and Chairman of the Strategic Resources Commission. His vice presidency and control over the

²⁸ Although these ideals are purported to have only been held by a few key players at the head of the RUF, and for only a relatively short period at the beginning of the incursion; ordinary soldiers were by-in-large unaware of these ideals.

²⁹ However, looting was not merely small-scale. The chairman of the Lebanese Chamber of Commerce in Makeni told a BBC interviewer in February 1998 how he was forced at gunpoint to open a safe containing US\$1 million in cash and diamonds. He was lucky- many others in his position had their stomachs ripped open in a search for concealed diamonds (Voeten, 2000:101).

dispensation of the country's natural resources, was seen by the population as a 'necessary evil' - the price for peace. However, indicative of his appetite for continued unrestricted access to the diamond fields, the RUF was newly armed and equipped through the continued international channelling of diamonds, and went on a new offensive to recapture the countryside from an unprepared UNAMSIL force.⁶³

During the RUF advance toward Freetown, pro-government forces searched Sankoh's house and seized documents highlighting his involvement in the illicit diamond trade. The story (later broken by *The New York Times*) detailed Sankoh's supervision of the export of diamonds from Kono and Tongo fields (rebel strongholds) to European markets, via Liberia and Guinea. During the six months prior to the Lomé agreement, Sankoh personally handled over two thousand uncut diamonds, sent from his field commanders.⁶⁴

According to Smillie et al. (2000), many of Sankoh's other dealings were outside his capacity as the leader of the RUF. His dealings in South Africa related to his position as Chairman of the Strategic Resources Commission as he sought to secure large-scale mining contracts,³⁰ unbeknown to both the AFRC and the RUF. Sankoh wanted control of diamonds in the hands of other RUF field commanders and, those destined for Charles Taylor. He had become a carbon copy of his 'legitimate' predecessors, a "double-dealing leader, clutching at financial opportunities for personal and political gain, outside of the governmental framework in which he was ostensibly working".⁶⁵

Conclusions

What lies behind Sierra Leone's exploitation and collapse, and other notable state failures, is the absence of strong regulatory bodies, stable central government, a functioning judicial system and mechanisms for dispute resolution- the principal components of the developed world. In developing societies such as Sierra Leone, the economy and governance are ungoverned and conflict is correspondingly more frequent,⁶⁶ as is criminal exploitation of the political and economic vacuum left in the wake of civil war and state collapse.

The external activities and alliances of the RUF suggest that the group was more of an organised 'crime racket', than a revolutionary force. This criminalisation is symptomatic of decades of African politics. Leaders such as Sessay, Bockarie and Bah dealt illicit diamonds with arms dealers from Europe and the Middle East in Monrovia. They established contracts with multinational firms, to secure a monopoly over the diamond industry they had become so dependant upon. The RUF even attempted to establish an office in Brussels, claiming a desire to work in 'the capital of Europe'. "The

³⁰ Raymond Kramer, a powerful South African Businessman, sponsored Sankoh's visits to South Africa. Sankoh was in contravention of a UN travel ban however, so he was forced to return to Sierra Leone before any major deals were constructed.

group rejected claims that the choice of location was related to its proximity to Antwerp's major diamond markets".⁶⁷ This certainly suggests a distinct detour from the path of 'revolution'.

The RUF represented predation on a more sinister level than that of the government prior to the conflict. The RUF's motives for initiating the war were lost amidst the diamond fields of Kono and Tongo. The profits the RUF derived from the networks they created locally, regionally and internationally (with Charles Taylor, international firms and the world's criminal community- to be discussed) became their *raison d'être*: for maintaining control of the diamond fields, and terrorising the civilian population. Next we will expand the net of predation even further to draw in the international criminal networks, orchestrated most prominently, by Charles Taylor and al Qaeda.

4. 'Terrorists Prefer Diamonds': Opportunities for International Criminal Networks

West Africa is viewed as 'the helpless corner' of Africa. Afro-pessimism of the type espoused by Kaplan (1994) is not helpful for elucidating the regional and international contexts of criminalisation and profiteering, however it does elicit an understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of the region and its globalised war economy. With the collapse of the state came predation of weak infrastructure and informal economics; a breakdown of state and society, coupled with international neglect and opportunism. While this phenomenon is in no way unique, its consequences within a new framework of economic globalisation and the international fight against terrorism need to be analysed.

There have been many causes given for Sierra Leone's war and just as many consequences. To fully understand these, the economy of war must be seen within national, regional and international contexts.⁶⁸ The criminal networks operating in Sierra Leone, which facilitated the looting of the country's diamond resources, were in fact longstanding in the country- i.e. the regional smugglers from Gambia, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Liberia, and elements of the Lebanese Diaspora funding the Lebanese civil war. This can also be expanded to encompass organised crime and al Qaeda. It is in fact dangerous, according to Prosecutor for the Special Court in Sierra Leone, David Crane, to look at the crisis in Sierra Leone as merely a war between the RUF and the interim government forces; the situation was much too international and complex,³¹ and was in great part a long-running international "conflict by criminals, for criminal purposes".⁶⁹

4.1. West Africa: The Nexus of Dark Networks

³¹ "When you think of Sierra Leone, don't just think of Sierra Leone. This is a fatal flaw. If you don't look at the broad picture, you will miss something. The major players weren't even in Africa" (Meeting with Special Court Prosecutor David Crane, 7 July 2004, Freetown, Sierra Leone).

The Taylor Connection

Much of the RUF's invasion of Sierra Leone and subsequent atrocities were 'covertly'³² created, sponsored and supported by Charles Taylor of Liberia, Col. Mu'ammarr al-Qadafhi of Libya, and Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso.⁷⁰

Qadafhi supported several insurgencies in West Africa, especially those that claimed to be fighting against 'neo-imperialism' in Africa.⁷¹ His support extends from the NRA in Uganda, to the NPFL in Liberia and the RUF in Sierra Leone, but the extent to which Libyan support caused or prolonged the wars in these countries is less clear than that of Charles Taylor. Qadafhi's Green Book provided the impetus for the indoctrination and training of thousands of guerrillas who went on to fight throughout Africa, in Lebanon and in Afghanistan.³³

During the 1980s, on the recommendation of Compaore (later the President of Burkina Faso), Taylor trained under Ibrahim Bah. During this training Taylor formed the links that were to aid his criminal takeover of Liberia- with Bah, Compaore and Sankoh. While his initial funding came out of Libya, there is no other hard evidence linking Qadafhi to the diamonds of Sierra Leone. Nevertheless, Libya received a great deal of attention during the initial stages of the Sierra Leone Special Court's investigation into crimes committed during the war.³⁴

As to Charles Taylor's involvement, the drive for resources in Liberia and Sierra Leone was as much a drive for personal wealth as it was for revolutionary financing; many of the stones routed through Liberia found their way into Taylor's private coffers; the NPFL was actively engaged in logging and mining. The continuation of these practices throughout the war was mitigated by the same simple fact that had influenced the RUF; the war's end would end all profit-making exercises. "For [the NPFL] to talk of opening the roads or uniting with the Monrovia-based government only remained an illusion, because their business was at stake if that happened".⁷²

³² Although not so covertly supported that the international community did not know the dynamics behind the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Charles Taylor's support has been widely recognised; as of late 2003 he was the first indictee of the Special Court of Sierra Leone, as one of the leading protagonists in the war, to be charged for War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity.

³³ Qadafhi's Green Book is an ideological narrative that explores the problems of governance, the contradictions of democracy and the merits of socialism. In itself the Green Book does not overtly espouse violent revolution, but it has inspired many of the disenfranchised students who participated in militia training. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Libya was the predominant world terrorist-training centre. Qadafhi was interested in indoctrinating and training a group of African revolutionaries to spread his ideologies and secure Libya's position on the continent. Thus Libya ran a "nondenominational version of the al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, where the IRA, Basque separatists and many others received military and organisational training" (Raab & Milward, 2003). Some of the graduates of Libya's training regime, including Ibrahim Bah, joined the 'mujahidin' fighting against the Soviets in Afghanistan and Hizbullah in Lebanon, before also fighting with the RUF in Sierra Leone and the NPFL in Liberia. After Taylor and Sankoh left Libya, they began their rebellions against the governments of Liberia and Sierra Leone respectively, and for much of the 1990s these three men, aided by Bah, used the diamonds that the RUF controlled to buy weapons and supplies for the continued instability of Sierra Leone, and to grow rich on the proceeds of these deals (Raab & Milward, 2003).

Perez-Katz (2002) and Smillie et al. (2000) highlight the nature of neo-patrimonial politics in Africa, showing how very little trade, whether formal or informal, could take place inside Liberia without the direct knowledge and participation of top-level government officials. Taylor, after seizing power from those he had branded ‘corrupt’, replicated pre-war political corruption. Liberia’s Minister of Lands, Mines and Energy, estimated that the official diamond exports in 1999 of 8500 carats (US\$900,000) represented only around twenty percent of exports; the Minister of Revenues claims that this may be as low as ten percent. “In a country where most diamond traders are foreigners and where the movements of foreigners, money and supplies is very carefully watched, as in the case of Liberia, it is not conceivable that so much of Liberia’s own diamond production could avoid the detection of government”.⁷³ Taylor not only knew of the illicit networks, but also actively fostered them for his own benefit- just as Stevens had in Sierra Leone between 1968 and 1985.

Taylor’s exploitation and derailing of the Liberian economy is illustrated by the Liberian Gross National Product (GNP), which is reported to have fallen from US\$1.1 billion in 1989, the year Taylor invaded, to US\$250,000 in 1993.⁷⁴ While this is a huge drop, it does not represent actual economic activity, which (like Sierra Leone) was almost entirely informal. It has been estimated that between 1992 and 1996, Charles Taylor personally embezzled more than US\$400 million from the Liberian war economy.⁷⁵ This includes revenues from timber, gold and other minerals, as well as Sierra Leonean diamonds.

Prior to the RUF’s incursion, official Liberian diamond exports reached a high of 295,000 carats in 1987, with a quality value of US\$37 per carat- far less than the more sought after stones of Sierra Leone. By 1998 official exports had fallen to only 8000 carats, worth around US\$800,000, however in the same year twenty-six companies imported ‘Liberian’ diamonds in the vicinity of 2.5 million carats, and worth an estimated US\$217 million.⁷⁶ One company was reported to have imported 75,000 carats at US\$516 per carat. By 1999 the total number of diamonds exported fell substantially, however the average per-carat value had nearly doubled to US\$760,⁷⁷ marking the period in which the RUF brokered deals with international companies and gained access to the more profitable Kimberlite mines.

Dozens of companies in Belgium have been implicated in importing diamonds from Liberia, and several with exporting from Monrovia. Extensive research by Smillie et al. (2000) and Global Witness (2003) have shown that the majority of exporting companies either do not have physical presence in Monrovia, or they exist in name only, for the sake of forging fake ‘certificates of origin’ and dealer licences.⁷⁸ Additionally, since individual company exports far exceeded total country exports during the late 1990s, it is reasonable to assume that few, if any, of these companies actually had licences at all, and relied primarily on the collaboration of the Taylor government. As we will now see, this collaboration extended to include less legitimate bodies as well.

The Role of Organised Crime

³⁴ Said David Crane, “trust me, we have given Qadafhi the message!” (Meeting with Special Court Prosecutor David Crane, 7 July 2004, Freetown, Sierra Leone).

The direct criminal links that Taylor maintained, especially those associated with international terrorism, have attracted much international attention over the past few years and, according to the Sierra Leone Government, came in the form of “two Lebanese businessmen”.³⁵ The most likely suspects, claim Global Witness, include the Lebanese diamond and weapons dealer Aziz Nassour, or RUF liaison Ibrahim Bah.

The role of the Lebanese Diaspora is less important in the illicit trading of diamonds and drug smuggling than has often been supposed.⁷⁹ In Sierra Leone the Lebanese community dominate the diamond industry³⁶ (with as many as twenty dealerships in the centre of Bo alone), and many local industries; it is therefore very easy to blame them for criminal activity. Certainly there have been some dubious characters involved, including Nassour, Ossaily, and members of Hizbullah, however the majority Lebanese population operate legitimate, often service-orientated, businesses.

What is notable (though not unique or surprising) about crime in Sierra Leone- specifically money laundering, drugs smuggling, weapons trading and diamond smuggling- is that with the exception of the RUF, most crime has been perpetrated by non-indigenous groups. While money laundering was not conducted through Sierra Leone, but rather through Monrovia, it is also evident that Russian and Ukrainian syndicates⁸⁰ have been operating ‘shell’ companies in mining regions such as Kono and Makeni.³⁷ Far more pertinent for this analysis, however, are the massive shipments of weapons, originating from poorly secured ex-Soviet weapons stockpiles, that found their way to West Africa in exchange for diamonds.

One prominent weapons courier, with ties to the Odessa Mafia in the Ukraine, is Leonid Minin, an Israeli businessman originally from the Ukraine, and heavily involved with arms dealing to Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote D’Ivoire. On June 20, 2001, he was charged with weapons trafficking, and for delivering over one hundred tons of weapons, ammunition and explosives to the RUF. Minin was charged with using false end-user certificates, which he had obtained from Burkina Faso and Côte D’Ivoire, and for delivering 68 tons of weaponry from Eastern Europe supposedly destined for Burkina Faso, and 113 tons marked for the Ivory Coast, to Liberia and Sierra Leone.⁸¹ The consignment of weapons included five million rounds of AK-47 ammunition, 50 M-93 30mm

³⁵ This statement was based on an interview with Abdullah Mustapha of the ONS (1 July 2004). However, Mr Mustapha preferred to keep the focus of the illicit trade in diamonds on the criminal activities of the RUF during the war, rather than complicating the issue with what he saw as a ‘probable but unconfirmed al Qaeda link’.

³⁶ Five families in particular dominate the trade, with the Mackie family (Hisham Mackie) controlling an estimated forty percent of all diamonds- that is 40 percent of 12.2million per month (Interview with Mr. Laurence Ndola Meyers, Director of the GGDO, 7 July 2004, Freetown, Sierra Leone).

³⁷ A British-born man who is setting up a new mining company with locals in the Kono region told me of his experiences with a fully-equipped Russian firm that is in an area known to have no diamonds. They nevertheless circulate anywhere between US\$1-10 million per month in a very well set up laundering business. Each week anything up to US\$1 million may be circulating in Freetown, having freshly arrived at Lungi airport from various European and African locations.

grenade launchers, 10,000 munitions for the launchers, and heavy weapons such as surface-to-air missiles and anti-tank weapons.³⁸ These were all delivered to Liberia in Minin's personal BAC-111 aircraft sometime in the middle of 2000, shortly before his arrest.⁸²

Involved on many levels, in just as many wars was Tajik-born Victor Bout, an ex-K.G.B. linguist with a personal fleet of ex-Soviet aircraft. Bout has been connected to Taylor, Sankoh, al Qaeda, Jonas Savimbi, Mobutu Sese Seko³⁹, Mu'ammarr Qadhafi, Jean-Pierre Bemba, the leader of the Congo Liberation Front and the former leaders of Congo-Brazzaville, among others.⁴⁰ He has been the major arms supplier to combatants in Africa and Afghanistan- frequently in violation of international embargoes. Bout had the capacity to arrange and deliver not only small arms (AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenade launchers etc.), but also major weapons systems (anti-aircraft missiles, anti-tank mortars etc.), and deliver them almost anywhere in the world.⁸³

Dubbed "the merchant of death" by a British government official, Bout started out in the illegal weapon's trading business in Afghanistan when his air force regiment was disbanded during the break-up of the former Soviet Union. From 1992-1995 he armed the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan; he was the most reliable source of equipment since the CIA during the Soviet occupation, but with 'less strings attached'.⁸⁴ With the Taliban firmly entrenched in Kabul, Bout switched sides and began arming the fundamentalist government. According to a 1998 Belgian Intelligence report, Bout made in excess of US\$50 million in Afghanistan.⁸⁵

Obtaining false end-user certificates from Togo, Bout shipped weapons into Liberia through KAS Engineering.⁴¹ In part payment for the shipments, Taylor granted Bout ownership of several Liberian Diamond mines, as well as several million dollars in Sierra Leone diamonds.⁸⁶

According to Peter Hain⁴², the British Foreign Office Minister for Europe, the mayhem and destruction caused by the RUF in Sierra Leone and other groups throughout Africa, "would not have been as terrible without Bout's operations".⁸⁷ Victor Bout is a product of the globalised nature of

³⁸ Full details of Minin's weapons deals are available at:

<http://www.publicintegrity.org/bow/report.aspx?aid=156> and
<http://www.trackingthethreat.com/content/entities/ent1714.htm>.

³⁹ Chichakli, a Syrian-born American who worked for several companies owned by Bout, said Mobutu was just one of many clients. He claimed, "we do not support specific dictators, presidents and so on. We're a transport company. If you buy a ticket from A to B, we will carry" ('Making a Killing', at: <http://www.publicintegrity.org/bow/report.aspx?aid=157>).

⁴⁰ Bout's companies shipped various food commodities from South Africa to Europe, transported United Nations Peacekeepers from Pakistan to East Timor, and even assisted the logistics of 'Operation Restore Hope', the US-led military famine relief effort in Somalia in 1993. In the DRC he explored investment opportunities in agriculture and telecommunications and expressed interest in promoting conservation of the country's national parks. A former associate of Bout said, "that was the staple stuff. The dodgy flights were all extras". ('Making a Killing', at: <http://www.publicintegrity.org/bow/report.aspx?aid=157>)

⁴¹ Bout had very close links with Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed bin Saqr al Nayhan, a member of UAE's ruling family, operating various airlines through his Air Cess (based in Liberia) and Vial companies. One airline, Flying Dolphin, was also registered in Liberia and operated out of Dubai. Flying Dolphin and Air Cess are the most likely couriers of weapons to Liberia and Sierra Leone (Farah, 2004:41). Many of Bout's other ventures have been based in Sharjah, UAE, because of lax controls over the Emirate's free trade zone.

wartime economies, especially since the end of the Cold War. He demonstrates that, in the spirit of Clausewitz, war has become “economics by other means”.⁸⁸

4.2. Fundraising for Terror

*I am aware there is a connection. That connection is specific. They [al Qaeda] are moving diamonds as a commodity to launder their funds.*⁸⁹

Since 2001, evidence has emerged of a close connection between al Qaeda and the key actors- insurgents and government officials- in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Burkina Faso. These connections are based on al Qaeda’s need to exchange cash for diamonds, and are a consequence of pressure from the United States and Western Europe to end al Qaeda’s use of legitimate banks for international monetary transactions. Diamonds provide a ready currency for al Qaeda, and the failed states of the region have provided safe havens for al Qaeda operatives.⁹⁰

Since September 11, U.S. armed forces have deployed around the world in an attempt to eradicate terrorists who pose a threat to American interests globally. This includes the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the implementation of draconian “homeland security” measures and the encouragement of a pervasive public fear of terrorism- all under the rubric of an international ‘War on Terror’. The U.S. government is quick to claim the successes of this ‘war’, including the eviction of the Taliban regime from Afghanistan (depriving al Qaeda of its key training camps and operational headquarters); detaining or arresting more than one-third of al Qaeda’s leadership⁴³; establishing cooperative relationships with over 100 countries, where some 3,000 individuals have been detained or arrested; blocking over \$150 million in Al Qaeda funds.⁹¹

Much of this progress has been superficial, inappropriate and ineffective, with little reduction in terrorist activity. Rogers (2003) highlights that since September 11 there has been a dramatic increase in the frequency and severity of terrorist attacks around the world.⁹² This demonstrates massive failings in both the global efforts to control international terrorism, and in the way the international community responds to terrorist attacks.

While East Africa is still the principal focus of the U.S. anti-terrorism campaign on the African continent, officials suggest that West Africa is next on Washington’s ‘to do’ list. “In coastal west Africa, what we see is the opportunity for terrorist groups to take advantage of exploitable resources”.⁹³ An FBI investigation team this year found “pretty definite” evidence of a link between al Qaeda operatives and the smuggling of Sierra Leonean diamonds. Remarkably however, the report of the 9/11 Commission denies any *definite* evidence of an al Qaeda link. The 9/11 Commission

⁴² Hain has been at the forefront of the international effort to expose criminal networks behind Africa’s trade in small arms and the ‘conflict diamonds’ that fund such purchases.

⁴³ And retrieving large amounts of information, including instructional manuals, videos, diaries, CD ROMS, and hard drives from suspected terrorists.

Report⁴⁴ took nearly three years to be completed and released, by which time the U.S. military fought two wars, costing billions of dollars and claiming tens of thousands of lives. The report stated that:

“...we have seen no persuasive evidence that al Qaeda funded itself by trading in African conflict diamonds.”⁹⁴

Frank Wolf, chairman of the House Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary appropriations subcommittee, expressed “surprise” at the September 11 committee’s scepticism about the link and said he would check that they had access to FBI reports on the issue. An FBI investigation earlier established that al Qaeda and Hizbullah operatives visited Liberia to buy diamonds. “I can tell you that, to my satisfaction, there *is* a connection to al Qaeda. Now the question is how much, how extensively, is it still going on?”⁹⁵

The presence of foreign terrorist organisations in West Africa is not a new phenomenon. AMAL (‘Afwajj al Maqqwamah al Lubnaniyyah’- Lebanese Resistance Detachment) and its offshoot Hizbullah (‘Party of God’) are two radical Lebanese militia groups that were engaged in the civil war. While both were Shia, and dedicated to establishing an Islamic state modelled on Iran, ideological and financial differences created a large divide between the two. During the war in Lebanon AMAL and Hizbullah used various tactics to obtain the support of the Lebanese Diaspora around the world, including appealing to religious convictions, Lebanese identities, or using threats and violence.⁹⁶

In Sierra Leone the majority of Lebanese are Shia from South Lebanon, and Lebanese businessmen control much of the commerce in the main towns of Sierra Leone, including building materials, fabrics, foodstuffs and especially diamonds. In the 1980s diamond licences held by Lebanese rose from 15 to 78 percent⁹⁷; correspondingly, the proportion of legal diamond exports decreased (from 797,000 carats in 1978 to 11,000 in 1988).⁹⁸ According to a Shi’ite Lebanese dealer in Kenema, when AMAL came calling for funds, “everyone I knew was happy to help- it was for our people back in Lebanon and we all wanted them looked after. I just used to send parcels of rough diamonds, what happened to them I don’t know- either they were sold for cash in Antwerp or Lebanon or Israel or whatever, it wasn’t my problem- I knew that the matter was in good hands”.⁹⁹

⁴⁴ A complete copy of the 9/11 Commission Report is available online at: <http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf>. The report also doubts many other al Qaeda funding sources such as bin Laden’s business interests in Sudan. Instead the report cites private donations from up to 300 corrupt charities, wealthy businessmen and several unknown individuals as the main contributions to al Qaeda’s terrorism finances.

Al Qaeda: Diamonds for Jihad

Al Qaeda⁴⁵ was originally the brainchild of Jordanian Abdullah Azzam.⁴⁶ It morphed from an organisation that would “channel the energies of the mujahidin into fighting on behalf of oppressed Muslims worldwide”, to one dedicated to “destroying America and Israel and re-establishing the Caliphate by means of a worldwide jihad”.¹⁰⁰ From the early 1990s al Qaeda, under the leadership of Osama bin Laden, engaged in increasingly severe terrorist attacks against the U.S. and their interests abroad.

In the wake of the 1993 attempt to destroy the World Trade Centre in New York, the destruction of the Khobar Towers military complex in 1996, the 1998 Embassy bombings in Africa and the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000, the international community began to see al Qaeda as a major potential threat to world security.¹⁰¹ Despite this, little action was taken to destroy al Qaeda bases in Sudan and Afghanistan, to locate key members, to cut off financial sources, to sanction those who harboured al Qaeda operatives, or to address the deeply engrained political and ideological reasons behind these terrorist acts.

Only following September 11 was a massive campaign launched, under the banner of a ‘war on terror’, to destroy al Qaeda infrastructure worldwide. Emphasis was given to identifying and dismantling all forms of terrorist financing and money laundering networks pursuant to UNSCR 1373. Almost immediately after the 2001 attacks, details emerged of “al Qaeda’s global financial architecture”, including their extensive trade in rough diamonds and high value gemstones from Kenya and Tanzania.¹⁰²

In November of 2001, Douglas Farah of the Washington Post uncovered evidence that the same al Qaeda members involved in East Africa had begun a massive diamond buying operation in Sierra Leone and Liberia, yet there was reluctance by many governments and intelligence agencies to take this information seriously.¹⁰³

The ‘war on terror’ has proved itself to be a failure in diminishing or containing terrorist threats worldwide, including the reining-in of terrorist finances.¹⁰⁴ Although more than 165 countries have

⁴⁵ Trying to define al Qaeda as an organisation is an extremely difficult task. As a group of Islamic Fundamentalists al Qaeda has brought together an unlikely alliance of worshippers dedicated in their cause to wage *jihad* against non-Muslims. A U.S. official in Washington said in 1998 “we talk about the bin Laden organization, but it is really a bin Laden alliance. It is unusual to find Palestinians and Yemenis, Sudanese and East Asians in the same alliance. He is the glue between groups that have little in common with each other, for instance the Kashmiris and Egypt’s Islamic Jihad” (Bergen, 2002:199). *The al Qaeda network is a product of, and reaction to modern globalisation.*

⁴⁶ Azzam devised the al Qaeda organization between 1987 and 1989, while joint head of the MAK (‘Maktab al Khidmat Lil Mujahidin al-Arab’/Afghan Service Bureau) with Osama bin Laden. Disagreements between the two over the future direction of al Qaeda led to Azzam’s assassination by a car bomb in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1999. Bin Laden took over the leadership of the organization and radicalised it to be “an unflinchingly hostile global terrorist force” (Global Witness, 2003:10).

frozen approximately \$150 million of al Qaeda assets worldwide over the past three years, progress has slowed lately due to the maneuverings of al Qaeda financiers. The group has learned to circumvent the legitimate banking system by surreptitiously moving finances in the form of diamonds, gems, gold and narcotics.¹⁰⁵

U.N., European and independent investigators looking into a connection between al Qaeda and Charles Taylor determined that terrorists were active in the West African region for up to two months before Sept. 11. Investigators asserted that three highly placed al Qaeda operatives moved about in Liberia and nearby Burkina Faso, buying diamonds that were later used to fund terrorist activities.

In 2002, a European investigation and a report by the Washington Post found evidence that both Liberia and Guinea harbored senior Al Qaeda operatives for at least two months after September 11 in exchange for US\$1 million (paid to Charles Taylor).¹⁰⁶ In July of 2001, an al Qaeda leader flew to Burkina Faso with the US\$1 million- according to the report from European investigators, the money was to pay Taylor “to hide the two al Qaeda operatives in Camp Gbatala”, a military facility near a farm owed by Taylor.¹⁰⁷

Al Qaeda operatives first began buying diamonds in West Africa after the U.S. government froze the group’s American assets in September 1998, following the bombing of the two U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. On the 22nd of the same month, the first al Qaeda operative arrived in Monrovia to set up a diamonds-for-arms deal meeting with Charles Taylor and senior RUF commanders.¹⁰⁸

Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah, suspected by the FBI of being the mastermind behind the Kenyan and Tanzanian Embassy bombings in 1998, was introduced to Taylor through Ibrahim Bah, with whom he had trained in Libya during the 1980s. At one meeting Abdullah paid US\$100,000 to Sam Bockarie of the RUF in exchange for a small parcel of diamonds, which was intended more as a goodwill exchange than a business transaction. Later Abdullah flew to Foya (a small town on the Sierra Leone border) to meet with senior RUF members, including Issa Sessay, to discuss the practicalities and logistics of a continuing supply of diamonds. In exchange for which the RUF would receive large consignments of supplies and weapons.¹⁰⁹

In March 1999 Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani and Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, both from Tanzanian and Kenyan cells of al Qaeda, arrived in Liberia to finalise the deal. They bypassed all immigration procedures and were taken directly to Taylor to arrange payment. Unlike Abdullah, both men had extensive experience in diamond dealing from working with Bin Laden’s ‘materials procurement official’, Wadih El Hage.^{47 110} El Hage had set up several mining companies in Tanzania and Kenya

⁴⁷ Wadih El Hage, considered to be one of al Qaeda’s top operatives, was born to Christian parents in Lebanon in 1960. After mujahidin training in Pakistan, El Hage moved to the United States where he became a citizen in 1989. In 1991 he and his family moved to Sudan where he was personally chosen by Bin Laden to be in

as a means of fundraising for al Qaeda operations in Africa- Ghailani and Mohammed worked as ‘go-betweens’ for El Hage’s companies and other mines in Angola, the Central African Republic and the Congo.¹¹¹

That Abdullah, one of al Qaeda’s most senior operatives, was the first on the scene in Liberia demonstrates how seriously the network took the prospects of buying West African diamonds. That Ghailani and Mohammed were led directly to Taylor indicates the status accorded them by the Liberian leadership. This was an arrangement that would be of great mutual benefit. The first deal, however, fell through when al Qaeda was unable to deliver what they had promised.¹¹²

Taylor, Bah and other RUF members were forced to look elsewhere for weapons sourcing and diamond exporting from 1999 to late 2000. Much of their business during this time flowed through Victor Bout and Leonid Minin, with Bah being the central figure in these dealings.

Bah has been a key figure in terrorism circles in both West Africa and the Middle East⁴⁸. He fought with the mujahidin against the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan and with Hizbullah in southern Lebanon, before travelling to Libya at the end of the 1980s to train African revolutionaries.¹¹³ Bah’s core responsibility alongside Taylor was to act as the middleman in the trade between top RUF officers and international buyers. The United Nations estimates that the diamonds which left Liberia in 1999 were worth about \$75 million on the open market. Taylor received a commission on each transaction, and Bah and other brokers shared the rest.¹¹⁴

Alongside Ibrahim Bah, Mohamed Hijazi was also appointed in 1999 by Sam Bockarie to “negotiate with any person or company within or outside Sierra Leone for the prospecting, mining, buying and selling of diamonds”.¹¹⁵ Hijazi and Bah established contact with Aziz Nassour, a Sierra Leone-born Lebanese businessman, in 2000 in Antwerp. Nassour was involved with many illicit trading activities around Africa including diamond and weapons trading in Congo-Brazzaville, the DRC and Liberia, and has associated with various insurgent groups and individuals from the DRC to Belgium.¹¹⁶

Nassour reportedly had strong links with AMAL. In 2000, after being identified as having dealt diamonds and weapons for the RUF, the UN Panel of Experts placed him under the first UN travel ban of its kind⁴⁹ Until 2003 when his passports were forcibly removed by Lebanese authorities in Beirut, his travel ban mattered little due to the governmental-criminal contacts he had amassed.

charge of procurements- due in large part to having an American passport and having great international freedom of movement (Global Witness, 2003:34).

⁴⁸ Remarkably, after September 11 American Investigators and members of the CIA met several times with Bah in Ouagadougou to question him over his links with Sierra Leone diamonds and Osama bin Laden. Afterwards he was allowed to travel in breach of a U.N. travel ban. Farah (2004), in his chapter ‘the CIA drops the ball’, indicates that in fact the CIA had attempted several times to recruit Bah, offering as much as US\$1 million. Bah had other dealings with many intelligence organizations and avoided prosecution by offering just enough information. Considered to be only an intermediary, Bah now lives in Ouagadougou living off the fortune he has amassed through diamonds and weapons (Farah, 2004:96-100).

⁴⁹ Later travel bans were also extended to Foday Sankoh, Sam Bockarie and Dennis Mingo of the RUF, Ibrahim Bah, Victor Bout, Talal El-Ndine and Samih Ossaily- a ‘who’s who’ of West African crime (Campbell, 2004:183).

In late 2000 with the RUF keen to offload as many diamonds as possible after Sankoh's arrest, Bah used Nassour as a courier for rough diamonds to reach the European markets. Introduced through Yousef Ouedrago, Bah's business partner in Ouagadougou, Nassour arranged meetings in Liberia and Sierra Leone with al Qaeda operatives Ghailani and Mohammed and Nassour's cousin Samih Ossaily. Unlike al Qaeda's first meeting with the RUF, this time they were in the company of very experienced diamond traders, ensuring the process ran smoothly.¹¹⁷

On the 26th of December 2000, one year after 'Operation No Living Thing' in Sierra Leone, all the men drove from Monrovia to Kono, via Foya, where they met with Issa Sessay. In the following months, Nassour employed couriers to exchange US\$300,000 for diamonds *every week* between December 2000 and September 2001.⁵⁰

During this period certain buyers, allegedly Ghailani and Mohammed, were prepared to pay a far greater price for diamonds than at any other stage during the war- between 15 and 30 percent over market value. Despite this possibility, they still bought diamonds at below-market rates and resold them in Europe for millions in profit⁵¹. In 2001 al Qaeda stepped up these activities in Liberia just before the September 11 attacks, in what was a large-scale laundering operation.¹¹⁸

A truism of the network approach is that, at some level, everything is connected to everything else. This is no less true of dark networks.¹¹⁹

After Taylor became president, Liberia became a nexus for the 'dark networks' of ex-Soviet weapons dealers and international terrorists. Taylor enticed various criminal elements to the area through the offer of free movement, the absence of monitoring, and high return on business deals. His compatriots Ibrahim Bah and Talal El-Ndine acted as liaisons between the RUF and Monrovia. Their links ensured a consistent flow of diamonds out of Sierra Leone and an equal flow of weapons in. Bout and Minin supplied guns and ammunition to the RUF in return for rough diamonds and mining rights.

⁵⁰ The couriers later revealed in interviews with European intelligence agencies that they took weekly flights from Antwerp on Sabena Airlines (no longer operational) to Abidjan. There they hired light planes from the Weswua Airline to fly to Monrovia, and from there went on to meet rebel RUF commanders in Sierra Leone.

⁵¹ All the couriers and dealers admit to being involved in the diamond business in Sierra Leone and Congo but deny any ties to al Qaeda- many simply did not know whom they were dealing with. Belgian intelligence sources have suggested that Nassour and his family were influential in the trade of diamonds with UNITA and are suspected to have links with the Amal Shiite militia and Lebanese leader Nabih Berri. Nassour also has an extensive history in the DRC (then Zaire) and Rwanda (<http://www.trackingthethreat.com/content/entities/ent1716.htm>).

Bah was instrumental in introducing al Qaeda operatives into the fray, including Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah, Fazul Abdullah Mohammed and Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani. These operatives dealt primarily through Aziz Nassour and his cousin Samih Ossaily, both Sierra Leone-born Lebanese. Despite their claims of innocence, the evidence shows Abdullah et al.'s role and purpose in West Africa.

While the trade in diamonds and weapons with al Qaeda, etc., is not unique to Sierra Leone, it is an issue that the international community was not prepared to address within the new global environment. This paper has detailed the nature of the contemporary context in Sierra Leone, outlining the complex links that existed inside Sierra Leone and Liberia, allowing individuals to profit from the war and the absence of state authority. All of this took place amidst RUF atrocities inside Sierra Leone that further blinded authorities to what was happening in the region.

The international community- and especially the Western world- has not redefined its perspective on the nature, causes, and consequences of contemporary conflicts. Many analyses are still based in pre-Cold War ideology of conflict being localised purely *between* countries. After September 11, this stance is unacceptable, and lends itself to inadequate peace-building, development and security initiatives around the world.

5. Conclusions

While some of the causes of the civil war in Sierra Leone have been partly attributed to colonialism, the situation in West Africa is too complex for such a simple, vague explanation. The long-held collective view of Sierra Leone's citizens that their government was a predatory kleptocracy is the most common explanation given for the emergence of the RUF insurgency. Trained and indoctrinated by Mu'ammar al-Qadafhi in Libya, the less educated among them mobilised and, with the support of Charles Taylor, led a bloody ten-year insurgency in rural Sierra Leone, with two offensives in the capital, Freetown ('97 and '99).

The war was however, unquestionably influenced by diamonds. Throughout the war, Sierra Leone attracted the RUF rebels, poorly trained government soldiers, corrupt officials, Lebanese traders, regional leaders, international weapons dealers, and a host of other international profiteers. Sierra Leone's ambassador to the U.N., Ibrahim Kamara, said in July 2000, "we have always maintained that the conflict is not about ideology, tribal or regional difference... The root of the conflict is diamonds, diamonds and diamonds".¹²⁰ This was confirmed by David Crane: "the central thread was the movement of commodities for personal gain. The central thread is blood diamonds. This kept the whole operation together".¹²¹

The war economy of Sierra Leone, because it did centre on diamonds, became a segment of the archetypal global economy. Warfare there could accurately be classified as the 'instrument of enterprise', and violence as the 'mode of accumulation'.¹²² In saying this, exploitation of war

economies is not new or unique to Sierra Leone; the chaos and complexity of the wartime environment followed the same economic trajectory as post-independence governments had. Sierra Leone should therefore not be viewed as a newly formed “dark corner” of the world, as espoused by many international actors.¹²³ The symptoms of economic predation it exhibited have been mimicked throughout the world.

What is unique to West Africa is the current context within which we analyse it- that of economic globalisation and international terrorism. Regional and international linkages have attained a new importance in the wake of a worldwide effort to combat terrorism, and consequently coping mechanisms must adapt to this.

Remarkably, aside from a recent global campaign to stop the trade in ‘conflict diamonds’ (the Kimberley Process⁵²), little attention has been given to al Qaeda’s involvement in Sierra Leone. Since September 11, President Bush has repeatedly said that ‘choking off the funding for terrorist organisations’ was one of his priorities in the ‘war on terror’. Now, U.S. and European officials say that tracing and disrupting profitable terrorist enterprises in African countries with virtually no functioning governments will be an important component of the next phase in that fight. This occurs, in West Africa, too late to make a difference.⁵³ The dynamic linkages between civil wars, the global political economy and international events, must be part and parcel of the same analysis. However as highlighted by Michael Pugh (2004), these connections have been overlooked by academics and policymakers.¹²⁴

The failings of the ‘war on terror’ have implications wider than continued al Qaeda attacks, or criminal enterprises. Further resource-based civil conflicts and pervasive underdevelopment

⁵² In late 2000, four intergovernmental meetings were held in Kimberley, South Africa, to address a standardised global certifications scheme. On December 1, 2000, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution (A/RES/55/56) expressing “the need to give urgent and careful consideration to... the creation and implementation of a simple and workable international certification scheme for rough diamonds” (‘Report Of The Panel Of Experts’, U.N. (2000) op cit., p.5).

While the scheme to have a standardised global certification and monitoring system put in place has been welcomed and endorsed by many, including the U.N. Panel of Experts, it features major inadequacies that have not yet been addressed- many countries still do not adhere to the protocols; large companies such as De Beers still trade in illegal diamonds; and counterfeit certificates may be easily purchased in Togo or Côte D’Ivoire. U.S. expert Wayne Madsen said, “certificates are only a feel-good factor to make people forget that the diamond industry stinks. They will only benefit large diamond companies, because these are the only ones who can supply ‘clean’ diamonds” (Gilbert Roos, “How Clean is my Diamond?” From Interview with Johan Peleman, *De Standaard*, Antwerp, 5th January 2002).

⁵³ According to Farah, many officials said they had vastly underestimated the amount of money al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations controlled, and that they were investigating terrorist links to the Congo diamond, gold and uranium trades, as well as Tanzania’s diamond and tanzanite trade. “We are beginning to understand how easy it is to move money through commodities like diamonds, which can’t be traced and can be easily stored,” said one U.S. official. “One thing we are learning is not to ignore the obvious” (Farah, 2001b). From 1998 to 2001 Sierra Leone was seemingly ‘the obvious’- yet this made little difference.

continue around the world and may be manipulated to benefit the same networks discussed in this paper. Without focused and specific programs for development, state strengthening, economic stabilisation and regional security, al Qaeda and international criminal groups will have opportunities for further international predation.

Despite the rhetoric, failed states such as Sierra Leone do not seem to be an issue of concern to the international community- they are black holes on the world map. However, there is as much international activity going on in Sierra Leone as there is in the western world; intelligence services, spies, international traffickers, and mafias of various nationalities are 'stepping on each other's toes'.¹²⁵ There state failure merely transfers economic activity from the formal into the informal. According to Peleman, Sierra Leone is "a fascinating snake nest"¹²⁶ that must be addressed in its entirety in order to prevent future civil war, illicit trading in conflict resources, regional exploitation and international insecurity. A neglected war in a neglected region on a neglected continent still has international repercussions. In a globalised economy, with globalised organised crime and globalised insurgents such as al Qaeda, no corner of the world can be ignored as Sierra Leone was.

End Notes:

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- ⁶ *ibid.*, p.5.
- ⁷ William Reno (1999) *Warlord Politics and African States*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
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- ¹⁸ Refer to Berdal & Malone (2000); Richards (1996); Bayart et al. (1999); Francis (2001); and Karen Ballentine & Jake Sherman (Eds.) (2003) *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict. Beyond Greed and Grievance*. Boulder/London: Lynne Rienner.
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- ²² Zartman (1995) op cit.
- ²³ McCoy, Alfred W. McCoy "Requiem for a Drug Lord: State and Commodity in the Career of Khun Sa", in Josiah Heyman (Ed.) (1999) *States and Illegal Practices*. New York: Berg, p.160.
- ²⁴ William Reno, in Berdal & Malone, (2000), op cit., p.56.

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- ⁷⁴ Clapham (1996) op cit., p.231.
- ⁷⁵ Bernal & Malone (2000) op cit., p.5.
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