



SMALL WARS JOURNAL

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SWJ Magazine -- INTERIM New! & Improved? ☺ (BETA)

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The article, its author, and its audience deserve better editing and formatting than we have provided at the moment, i.e. none. It is being released in this format because the Small Wars Community of Interest needs this material, and this is the way we can get it out without further delay (which, in some cases, has already been substantial).

The throughput of our publishing has not kept pace with the enthusiasm of our audience and the productivity of our contributing authors. We're working on that, but the author's ideas are ready now. So this article is provided "as is" for the moment. Revised versions of this article for edits, format, and presentation will be posted when they are available and as site improvements are made.

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New Thinking on a 'New Deal' for Post-Conflict Countries?

Greg Mills & Terence McNamee

Two weeks after Sierra Leone's people went to the polls this September to choose a new president, the opposition leader Ernest Bai Koroma was sworn in as the country's new leader. He won 54.6% of the final vote against Vice-President Solomon Berewa's 45.4% in a tense run-off.

Five years after its devastating civil war came to an end, the country's largely peaceful and fair election marks an important step forward in its democratic development. But this election occurred against an alarming backdrop – extreme unemployment, declining health and education services, and infrastructure as decrepit as anywhere in Africa. Understanding what's gone wrong, why peace and stability has done nothing to alleviate crushing poverty, is important not just for Sierra Leone's new President.

There are critical lessons for the international community, too, which go beyond Sierra Leone to other post-conflict states in Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere.

The election was, after all, much more than a referendum on the government's performance in this small, six-million-strong West African state. It goes to the heart of a dilemma that confounds aid activists and generals alike, from Afghanistan to Burma, Iraq to Zimbabwe: How to (re)build fragile states. The simple answer, at least from Sierra Leone, is: It's not easy. But a new approach – a 'New Deal' – towards reconstruction in post-conflict states, even those in the midst of insurgencies, could help to provide the social 'glue' for political stability and economic prosperity.

Sierra Leone's Post-Conflict Reconstruction Experience

Over the past five years Sierra Leone has frequently been cited as an exemplar of what could be achieved by focused, single lead-nation intervention and embedded support by foreign experts. Indeed most things done by the government and its international partners during this period conform to 'best practice' in post-conflict peace-building. The international assistance operation, underway on a grand scale since 2000, is led by Britain. Some 18,000 United Nations troops kept the peace there from October 1999 to December 2005 at a cost of US\$2.3 billion.

Former combatants have been disarmed and rehabilitated. The 10,000-strong army has been reformed, trained and equipped by a skilled British-led International Military Assistance and Training Team (IMATT), and a 9,000-person police force established. The UN-backed war crimes court is now trying those responsible for the extreme brutality of the war, which left 50,000 dead and countless maimed. (A trademark of the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was to hack off of their victims' limbs.) Extraordinary work has also been done by a host of NGOs in helping demobilized child soldiers recover and reintegrate into their communities.

The international community has been generous, too, in embedding expertise within various key government ministries. There was a time this practice was so widespread the

former British territory was said, for all intents and purposes, to have been recolonised by its former master.

Sierra Leone's diamond industry, which for years helped fuel rebel activities, has cleaned up its act through the Kimberley Process. Gem revenues should bring in US\$175 million in foreign exchange in 2007, US\$50 million up from last year, reflecting both higher production and much lower, illicit smuggling levels. The tapping of other rich mineral reserves – notably gold, bauxite and rutile (a titanium sand used for paint pigments and welding rods) – have also helped to stimulate the economy, which has been growing at near seven percent for the past few years. With foreign assistance, twenty-four parastatals have been earmarked for privatization and new measures to promote investment and tackle corruption and money laundering drafted. The National Electoral Commission is a model institution, rightly praised for its organization of this year's vote.

That highly-competitive elections could go ahead without any significant violence is testament to how far Sierra Leone has come since the dark days of the 1990s. But the acute social and economic crisis which the country now finds itself is testament to the challenge of getting weak and failed states to deliver public goods. As it was for this reason that Sierra Leone failed in the first place and conflict erupted, devising new mechanisms and policies is more than an academic matter.

The civil war in Sierra Leone began in 1991, when former army corporal Foday Sankoh's RUF began a military campaign against the government capturing towns on the Liberian border and moving from there in on the capital Freetown. The country did not suffer from any intense social (ethnic or religious) divisions. It possessed a high number of well-qualified professionals, reasonable communications and a small and manageable territory.

But gradually the state was undermined by poor leadership, pervasive corruption, the crumbling of professionalism in the Sierra Leone armed forces, and an increasingly alienated youth population. As a result government could no longer provide public goods.

Outgoing President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah is credited with bringing stability to Sierra Leone. He could not have done so without the help of a British intervention force and subsequently UN troops, and lost of foreign aid, but in the main he deserves that legacy. But otherwise his record is poor.

In spite of dollops of development assistance, there is almost no provision of electricity, water or sanitation. Infant and maternal mortality rates are among the very highest in the world. By some estimates unemployment hovers around 90 percent. The country produces few exports and possesses little manufacturing. Perceptions of elite mismanagement, corruption and enrichment abound.

The Weakness of Post-Conflict Planning

It would be wrong to blame Kabbah for all the country's ills. Some of it is down to the way in the international community has responded, piecemeal and making-it-up-as-you-go-along, which is sadly characteristic of many international assistance missions. Donors admit that they made a big error in not focusing their activities on the building of basic

infrastructure – especially roads and energy – during the past decade. But no single country or international agency is to blame in this respect. The British, for example, were not to know that they would, in 2000, be the lead nation for the best part of the next decade.

In post-conflict situations, it is essential to plan comprehensively for economic recovery prior (or immediately following) international intervention. This is complicated, undoubtedly, by the ‘swarm’ of largely uncoordinated international involvement in the immediate surge of post-conflict activity and interest. This plan must be geared towards quick growth and employment creation, and include widespread and ambitious public works components. One of the most effective antidotes to future unrest or even insurgency, whether in Sierra Leone or Afghanistan and Iraq, is jobs.

The Missing Post-Conflict Piece: The Economy

Even though some post-conflict countries have exhibited high rates of economic growth (including Afghanistan, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique), this has mainly been a reflection of high levels of donor inflows and a very low starting point. But overall the news from a range of post-conflict experiences is good: Policy, vision and leadership counts in creating the conditions for growth.

Post-conflict countries – but including those in the midst of an insurgency such as Iraq and Afghanistan – face the overall challenge of providing a satisfactory long-term policy and governance framework while in the interim ensuring that there is sufficient visible change and economic opportunities to maintain stability. Local patience is limited. To date economic initiatives and programmes in post-conflict countries share four main weaknesses aside from the challenge of delivering growth in an unstable political/security climate: they are externally-driven (even if internally-shared and even devised); they have given insufficient direction on priorities; they have inevitably focused on ‘what’ countries should do, rather than the more difficult question ‘how’ to do it; and they have relied on overly-complex policy prescriptions that do not match on-the-ground reality fraught with complex, to say the least, dynamics.

The overall development post-conflict peacebuilding challenge is thus to sustain a virtuous cycle in which economic recovery and political stability are mutually reinforcing. Indeed, economic recovery has a number of political jobs to do: in the short run, it needs to placate or neutralize political opposition (from insurgents and militia to legislators); build support for government in both the rural and urban areas and the capital; and in the short run and beyond, signal a return of confidence and change for the better.

In post-conflict countries the recovery process thus has an explicit economic dimension. It must, firstly, return per capita GDP to pre-war levels (adjusted for population growth and changed commodity prices). This is best done by restoring the traditional engines of economic activity – oil in Iraq, for example, farming in Afghanistan, mining and agriculture in Sierra Leone – to full production. Secondly, it must build the revenue base of the government to levels that allow public investment and service delivery to normalize. Thirdly, it must increase labour absorption to promote political and social stability and reduce poverty. Lastly, it must build the infrastructure base for a modern

economy, which requires, the short-term, focusing on power, roads, airports, customs facilities, and ports; and in the longer-term, skills.

Thus the logical steps to be followed to develop a strategy to generate higher rates of growth in post-conflict environments would be to thus to:

- Identify the pre-requisite tenets for growth.
- Survey the key binding constraints on the economy.
- Identify growth opportunities.
- Offer a number of catalysts – or multipliers – for economic expansion.
- Identify the mechanics for the above.

How might the development of such a strategy proceed in reality?

The answer, in many cases, would seem to suggest the need to establish employment-creating public works programmes aimed foremost at dealing with infrastructure constraints. This would have to be carefully planned and sequenced, but does not need rocket science. Such a programme would have to come in behind any security calm created by democratic change and/or security force stabilization action. It would have to be clearly articulated as a part of an international partnership and vision and thus understandable to the man and woman in the street. Thus domestic and international branding is key, as is the method and substance of private sector engagement. Careful thought has also to be given to the ‘expeditor’ of this process, as was considered in Afghanistan through the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2006 with its Policy Action Group. Essentially what is required is a top-level, government-led committee – a Stabilisation Action Team (SAT) – working as a development ‘war cabinet’ in co-ordinating governance, development and security actions and the relationship between donors and other foreign actors (including NGOs and private security companies) on the one hand with the local government authority on the other.

A Post-Conflict ‘New Deal’?

What might this mean in the case of Sierra Leone?

Such a ‘New Deal’, to help President Koroma lift his country out of the mire, would need to include a widespread infrastructure rehabilitation programme, based around physical labour and aimed at key targets such as potable water delivery and electricity provision. And roads. In most places in Sierra Leone roads are barely passable. The country cannot develop unless people and goods can move.

The huge potential for tourism in Sierra Leone is nothing new. For years investors have drooled over the country’s beautiful beaches, stunning landscape and – critically – relatively short flight times from the European market. But visitors will never come so long as Lungi Airport remains so decrepit and the unnerving helicopter transfer to Freetown is a thing of the past.

Sierra Leone’s New Deal must engage greater numbers of its farmers in export crop production. The present ration of two-thirds involved in subsistence agriculture is an impediment to growth. Today Sierra Leone imports food but was once the largest rice exporter in the region. At the micro-level, this ‘New Deal’ strategy would establish

recycling plants for rubbish and scrap collection, and any other employment generating activity including the restoration of Freetown's clapper-board houses, the setting of Graham Greene's *Heart of the Matter*. Short-term growth and employment also deals with the conundrum besetting reforming and recovery states, how to match the promise of long-term growth and the necessary policies of fiscal rectitude with reducing the vulnerability to political unrest.

A big economic push requires a detailed external plan and a local partner capable of responding. The former should, in theory, be relatively easy to achieve given the high degree of extant donor co-ordination, but is vulnerable to donor fatigue and competing, new priorities and conflicts. Ensuring the necessary government capacity is much more difficult, however, given the widespread paucity of skills. A lot also depends on whether the new President has the necessary vision and commitment to economic reform.

Sierra Leoneans are entitled to expect more from peace and democracy. They have chosen ballots over bullets. To ensure it stays that way, Sierra Leone now needs a New Deal to stimulate recovery, growth and prosperity. In so doing it could provide a model beyond its borders, to Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Mills heads the Johannesburg-based Brenthurst Foundation, was a special adviser with ISAF in 2006, is the author inter alia of 'From Africa to Afghanistan: With Richards and Nato to Kabul' (Wits University Press: 2007) and will be on secondment to the government of Rwanda as the strategic adviser to the President in 2008; McNamee is an analyst with the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) in London. Both have recently spent time in Sierra Leone.