

## Sierra Leone: The State that Came Back from the Dead

British foreign secretary Jack Straw commenced a major foreign policy statement in March with a stinging rebuke against global indifference toward dysfunctional states and a warning of the threats posed by nonstate actors operating outside the limits of any formal governmental control.<sup>1</sup> Pointing to the increasing menace posed by failed states imploding from civil conflict, he admonished that, “when we allow governments to fail, warlords, drug barons, or terrorists fill the vacuum. ... Terrorists are strongest where states are weakest.” Hence, the urgent need exists to underwrite state reconstruction in Afghanistan and similarly failed states in Africa, Asia, the Balkans, and the Caucasus.

That same week, President George W. Bush addressed the United Nations (UN) International Conference on Financing Development in Monterrey, Mexico, pledging to double U.S. foreign aid by providing an additional \$10 billion in the next three years, as he asserts poverty can provide the setting under which countries become havens for terrorism. Bush emphasized that the most assured path out of mass poverty and for states to become less fickle in the developing world was the building of governmental institutions for “liberty, law, and opportunity” on the foundation of open, market-led economies tied firmly to global trade.

Yet, the relationship between poverty, internal conflict, the breakdown of governance institutions, and terrorism is by no means straightforward. Some of the most poverty-stricken and weakly governed states in Africa—Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Angola, and the Comoros—barely feature in the unfolding drama of international terrorist networks. Wealthier countries in the Middle East—Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi

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Arabia—have been prime recruitment grounds for terrorist masterminds. Because the margin of error in implementing the new policies linking institutional reconstruction in failed states to poverty alleviation and counterterrorism is very small, understanding the precise linkage between state failure and terrorist-free reconstruction with freedom and prosperity has become a vitally urgent task.

Examining in detail case studies of failed states with terror connections that have turned the corner toward peace and the rebuilding of functional governance institutions is one method of gaining this understanding. Although Sierra Leone is not yet definitively out of danger, its experience as a failed state that came back from the dead labels it a suitable candidate. Sierra Leone is a small state of 4.7 million people, with perhaps the lowest standard of living in the world. From 1991 to 2002, networks of warlords and shady external operators, some of them with links leading indirectly to Al Qaeda, underpinned generalized lawlessness in the country and one of the goriest civil wars in recent memory. Policy lessons relevant to the issues that were raised in London and Monterrey this year can be learned from Sierra Leone's unlikely transition from lurid anarchy to tentative institutional reconstruction.

### **From Mascot for State Failure to Tentative Recovery**

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Founded in 1789 as a British colony for freed African slaves yearning for a home after the abolition of the slave trade in Britain's far-flung Atlantic empire (hence "Freetown," its capital port city), Sierra Leone achieved independence from Great Britain in 1961. With Fourah Bay College established in Freetown in 1827, colonial Sierra Leone pioneered higher education in British-run West Africa for the first half of the last century. For most of its 180-year colonial phase, the fundamental political cleavage in Sierra Leone was between the freed immigrants and anglicized "Creoles" and the multiethnic, multireligious (Muslim, Christian, and traditionalist) inhabitants of the country's interior. Sierra Leone also had a small business community of Lebanese and Indians. Party political loyalties assume a loose ethnic divide between north (Temne) and south (Mende). Yet, Sierra Leone did not experience the ethnic fratricide that is often blamed for state collapse in Africa before or after independence. Even after mayhem broke out in 1991, Sierra Leone's craven governments and bloody warring factions apparently observed the policy of equal opportunity employment.

At the hands of an externally sponsored rebel group—the Revolutionary United Front (RUF)—disaster struck Sierra Leone in March 1991, knocking off-balance the barely functional government of President Joseph

Momoh. The neighboring failed state of Liberia was then in the throes of a grim civil war. Since 1990, the Momoh regime had provided its only airbase to the West African peacekeeping force (ECOMOG) in Liberia that intended to neutralize Liberia's top warlord at the time, Charles Taylor, now president of Liberia. Sponsoring the RUF invasion was Taylor's way of hitting back at Momoh. He enlisted mercenaries from Burkina Faso (Taylor's main ally in the region) and garnered material and ideological guidance from Libya's Mu'ammar Qadhafi—the political godfather to Taylor, the RUF, and sundry revolutionary groups in Africa promoting a confused mix of anti-Western and antiestablishment ideas. Led by the merciless Foday Sanko, a charismatic if cynical ex-corporal in the Sierra Leone military, the RUF was a collection of “unemployed and unemployable youths [with] ... one foot in the informal or underground economy ... [and] prone to criminal behavior, petty theft, drugs, drunkenness, and gross indiscipline.”<sup>2</sup>

**Sierra Leone did not experience the ethnic fratricide often blamed for state collapse.**

Rather than utilize guerrilla training, Sanko and his associates chose to exploit criminality, torture, drugs, plunder, and rape in battle. The RUF distinguished itself in war with forced conscription of adolescent boys; sexual enslavement of girls; shocking human mutilations; and wholesale destruction of settlements, schools, and government buildings. After years of neglect and short of funding, equipment, training, and discipline, the Sierra Leonean armed forces soon capitulated to the invading force. Some fought with the RUF part-time in return for booty, thus earning the appellation “sobels”—part soldier, part rebel. From 1992 onward, the international press transmitted to the world the shocking results of sobel and rebel in action against civilians. The RUF forces posed in drag with weird headgear and held the skulls or the hands of their dead victims, becoming the emblem of senseless carnage by hopeless, semieducated teens.

One of the most influential articles on the emerging global security agenda following the end of the Cold War portrayed the horrifying conditions in Sierra Leone's killing fields of 1994 as the prototype of the imminent strategic danger to Western civilization.<sup>3</sup> Disorder in the remotest corners of the earth, Robert Kaplan predicted, would shatter the placid political smugness of the West generated by the triumph of liberal democracy and capitalism over communism after 1989. The article, “The Coming Anarchy,” opened with graphic portraits, rendered in the most vivid prose, of the festering decay of rudderless West African societies cut loose from the

new global system by chronically dysfunctional governments that could barely maintain law and order outside the national capitals. In Kaplan's assessment, Sierra Leone's chaotic bloodletting was the archetype of the multiplying disorder in remote, lawless parts of the globe. It arose from failed states overwhelmed by "demographic, environmental, and social stress," in which criminal anarchy was the major preoccupation of restive multitudes of violent, drug-taking youths who gravitated in desperation to the fetid slums of desolate Third World capital cities to escape an impoverished countryside. Against that backdrop, he concluded, the apocalypse of "dis-

**Aid works best when borrowing governments faithfully implement institutional reforms.**

ease, overpopulation, unprovoked crime, scarcity of resources, refugee migrations, the increasing erosion of nation-states and international borders ... and international drug cartels" could already be seen "through a West African prism."<sup>4</sup>

From what we know today, the bloody, medieval-era warfare in Sierra Leone's interior between 1991 and 2002 was probably worse than Kaplan described. As of 1999, of the country's estimated population of 4.7 million people, more than half (2.6 million)

were either internally displaced or became refugees in neighboring states. Nobody knows with any certainty the total number of war casualties. A conservative estimate is 70,000, with hundreds of thousands of amputees and maimed people.

By early 2002, however, Sierra Leone was a vastly different place than Kaplan described, thanks largely to a small but highly efficient contingent of British peacekeepers and the 17,500-strong UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), the largest UN peacekeeping operation in the world in mid-2002. On January 14, 2002, the commander of UNAMSIL, Kenyan General Daniel Opande, declared the Sierra Leone war officially over after the surrender of some 45,000 demobilized rebels of the RUF, Kamajor militias, armed gangs called the "West Side Boys," and renegade sobels of what remained of the Sierra Leonean army. The fighters' weapons had been symbolically destroyed in various parts of the country in the previous six months. Great Britain was already training a new Sierra Leonean army. With international support, the Sierra Leonean government was itself training a new police force and preparing for a general election scheduled for May 14, 2002.

After 11 years of mayhem, order and peace had returned to most of Sierra Leone. Speaking on the situation in the country last January, veteran BBC

West Africa correspondent Mark Doyle reported street crossings in Freetown “with smartly dressed soldiers on point duty shepherding school-children across the road” with unusual gentleness. Deep amid the previously rebel-infested eastern districts of Bo and Kenema, Doyle was no longer concerned with his personal security “because the British and Sierra Leonean soldiers had extended the rule of law to a small part of this remote jungle.” Refugees were returning home from Guinea and Liberia. Lungi International Airport was undergoing a facelift and receiving foreign passenger flights.

Most African regional security experts are cautiously hopeful about the long-term prospects of sustaining peace and effective national governance in Sierra Leone. Some rebel groups reportedly cached weapons in the bush and seem truculent about Sankó’s impending trial on human rights violations. Much also depends on the actions of the region’s veteran meddlers—Qadhafi; Taylor; and Burkina Faso’s president, Blaise Campaore. Yet, whether the current positive trend proves sustainable in the long run, the chimera of the “coming anarchy” in Sierra Leone has surely suffered a significant reversal. This change must contain precious lessons for the many who are genuinely committed to the search for durable solutions to state collapse, domestic anarchy, and terrorism in Africa and elsewhere.

## **The Origins of State Failure**

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Simply stated, regional experts trace the origins of state failure in Sierra Leone to the slow-motion, self-destructive policies pursued by the government of President Siaka “Pa” Stevens (1968–1985). These trends rapidly accelerated under the venal incompetence of his chosen successor, Joseph Momoh, who led the country from 1985 to 1992. A former trade unionist and ex-mayor of Freetown, Stevens inherited a sound if poor economy based on diamond, iron ore, food, coffee, and cocoa production that was expanding at a reasonable annual rate of 4 percent between 1965 and 1973 against an annual population growth rate of 1.9 percent. Average personal incomes were steadily rising. Primary school enrollment doubled between 1961 and 1973, while life expectancy rose from 37 in 1961 to 47 in 1979. Functional, though increasingly corrupt, public institutions underpinned this improvement.

Sierra Leone’s misfortune was Stevens’s misunderstanding of the essential factors underlying the economic and governance structures he had inherited and yet his insistence on continuing in power for 17 years. Consumed with ambition and the desire to create a one-party state under his personal control, he gradually emasculated the once-vigorous parliament, finally banning opposition parties and dealing harshly with bona fide political opponents,

though never as brutally as did some of his contemporaries. In 1971, military conspirators staged the first of many coup attempts against Stevens. Sanko was among those implicated.

The most far-reaching institutional decay, however, arose from gross economic mismanagement. The 1973 global oil crisis coincided with a dip in diamond and iron ore prices, opening a deficit in external payments that should have been addressed by cuts in public spending, devaluation of the currency, and export diversification. Stevens's government did the exact opposite. In the 1980s, the state failed to agree with foreign corporations on deep-level shaft "kimberlite" diamond investment that would have lessened Sierra Leone's dependence on the alluvial mining that also fueled the RUF rebels in the

**Hired security forces provided a temporary, but not a lasting, solution.**

1990s. To finance the deficit, the government borrowed lavishly from its central bank (in effect, printing money) and from international commercial and official sources, while extending state ownership and control from the mining sector to food distribution. Inflation rose to 50 percent in the 1980s from 2.1 percent between 1965 and 1973. Growth dipped to a 0.7 percent average between 1980 and 1987. The government reneged on many agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to stabilize the economy and promote growth. Wages and rural incomes increasingly meant little. For the youths educated with hope in the good years and for those in school, unemployment and a dim future were now a reality.

Economists like to measure the opportunities lost by failure to adopt reforms in monetary terms. The incalculable long-term damage inflicted on public institutions and political legitimacy by misguided policies is of greater national consequence. With swiftly declining real wages, Sierra Leone's public servants, including the security forces, turned to graft and pilferage of government supplies. Public equipment went unserviced. While Stevens spent millions of dollars to host an African summit in 1980, infrastructure fell apart in the tropical sun. State economic control worsened the deterioration. Against the backdrop of a highly overvalued domestic currency, trading at an 80 percent discount against the U.S. dollar in the black market, state licensing of private diamond exports created a lucrative payoff system between those well connected to the Stevens government and the cliques of Lebanese and Indian traders who sold the stones overseas, earning hard currency. The government addressed the increasing scarcity of foreign currency by the import licensing of rice (the food staple) and other consumer goods, creating food lines and yet another wide route for kickbacks. By the time

Stevens handed the reins in 1985 to Momoh, a former military officer even less skilled in statecraft than Stevens, public institutions were already a hollow ineffective sham compared to what they had been in the 1960s. In the public's eye, the state lacked legitimacy. Corruption and illegality became the source of livelihood, as public educational and health services vanished. The Momoh government sold mineral prospecting rights under the table, with proceeds going to its chosen favorites. Disoriented young people turned to fantasy, reggae protest music, drugs, Rambo films, inchoate antisystem ideas, and recreational violence with real deaths. In the wings, political opportunists in Liberia, Libya, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Russia, Lebanon, and Afghanistan were waiting to exploit these youths for higher and lethal ends, about which the would-be rebels cared little, if they understood them at all.

With no effective army, police, administration, or judicial system, Sierra Leone was a sitting target for local and external predators. In the waning years of the Lebanese civil war, agents from rival factions—not least among them, Hamas and Hizballah—competed in bribery within Freetown for prospecting rights in the alluvial diamond districts in the southeast to finance the war effort in Lebanon. Dangerous and tedious, riverbed mining was fee-based self-employment by otherwise unemployed youths—not, as is sometimes assumed, a business initiative by the RUF rebels, whose inclination for alcohol and hashish made them poor candidates for such a task. According to a detailed UN investigative report on the subject, Lebanese purchasing agents enjoyed the protection of the RUF, the Taylor government, and Burkina Faso. They purchased the rough diamonds in informal markets in local townships for onward transmission, principally through Monrovia, to international markets.<sup>5</sup> They laundered the easy proceeds toward financing weapons for the West African wars and the Middle East and, as has become evident, Afghanistan.

Yet, as John Hirsch, the U.S. ambassador to Sierra Leone between 1995 and 1998, observes, “Neither the United States nor the United Kingdom devoted any intelligence assets to tracking the trail of money, arms, and diamonds in the West African region.”<sup>6</sup> Taylor's actions as a kingpin to help link the diamonds of Sierra Leone (and those of the Congo and Angola), sanctions-busting arms trafficking, and international terrorism are now known. Traveling with a Liberian diplomatic passport and an alias, Sanjivan Ruprah, a notorious Kenyan weapons dealer and Taylor confidant (now under arrest in Belgium for arms smuggling), was a business associate of the

**E**stablishing an effective army, police force, and security services must be top priority.

Russian master racketeer Victor Bout, who ran “the biggest weapons trafficking network in the world, responsible for supplying the Taliban, terrorist groups from Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, Abu Sayaff in the Philippines, as well as rebel forces in Africa.”<sup>7</sup> In these transactions, “conflict diamonds” (stones produced in African rebel-held areas) became the currency of choice.

This knowledge in turn sparked an international humanitarian movement to boycott conflict diamonds and thereby deny sustenance to the inhuman RUF rebels. For Sierra Leone, however, the tainted diamonds, international crime, and terrorism had moved into a power vacuum created by state failure—a self-induced affliction by debauched ruling cliques. The links to international terror sprang from institutional decay to a restive youth that became the cannon fodder of ill-intentioned operators with a global reach. Effective policy responses to the illegal diamond trade and to the need to create peace in Sierra Leone had to take stock of that chain of events.

## **The Policy Response**

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In *The Prince*, Niccolò Machiavelli argues strongly against hiring mercenary troops in the building of a state. In the long run, he wrote, a prince is better off losing battles with his own army than winning them with hired guns because, even though skilled in warfare, mercenaries “are anxious to advance their own greatness, either by coercing you ... or by coercing others against your wishes.”<sup>8</sup> In postindependence Africa—and to the overwhelming disapproval of African states—only the Mobutu government in the Congo could use mercenaries to destroy rebellions in the 1960s and emerge unscathed. As the dangers posed by state failure increase, however, discussion among policymakers and academics on the use of “private security companies” to restore law and order in anarchical states in Africa has renewed.<sup>9</sup> In 2002 the Labour government in Great Britain published a discussion paper intended to regulate companies offering military service to weak but legitimate governments abroad. Machiavelli’s dilemma had come to life in an African setting.

Sierra Leone’s experience between 1995 and 2002 shed some light on the wisdom, or lack thereof, of hired military groups in failed states. In 1995 the Valentine Strasser military government (which had overthrown Momoh in April 1992) invited Executive Outcomes, a private, South African military outfit, to engage the RUF for a multimillion-dollar fee. By mid-1997 the company had routed the rebels and the sobels, to the popular acclaim of villagers, and forced them to the negotiation table in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire,



with President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah's government, which had been elected in 1996. In Abidjan, the RUF demanded the withdrawal of foreign troops as a condition for the ceasefire, and with the IMF insisting on a cut in Sierra Leone's spending on defense, Kabbah acquiesced. With Executive Outcomes gone, the RUF slid into its old ways, this time allied with the crooked national army. Under the mercurial Mayor Johnny Paul Koromah, they staged a coup in April 1998 ousting Kabbah and perpetrated massacres on civilians, especially in the capital. Another private military group, Great Britain's Sandlines, was needed to restore Kabbah to power in 1998 with the clandestine support of the Labour government and a contingent of Nigerian armed forces. With the capital secured, after a false start in 2000 the UN peacekeeping force disarmed the rebels in the interior and restored order. Hired forces then provided a temporary, rather than a lasting, solution to Sierra Leone's problem.

If the definition of the state as an organization that holds a monopoly in the legitimate use of force in a given territory is true, then establishing an effective army, police force, and security service must be the top priority in a failed state such as Sierra Leone. British forces secured Freetown from an imminent rebel occupation in early 2000. The Blair administration then initiated action toward realizing that priority as soon as UNAMSIL began stabilizing the military situation. Between June 2000 and September 2001, 600 British officers trained 8,500 members of the new Sierra Leone Army; 350 British officers have since remained in advisory roles. In collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat and UNAMSIL, Great Britain is funding and training the new police force. After UNAMSIL departs, the country's sustained, long-term stability will depend on the efficiency and professional integrity of the armed forces. Machiavelli may have been right.

Great Britain has contributed some \$120 million toward the reconstruction of Sierra Leone's security institutions and justice system. At its peak in 2001, the UN peacekeeping force of 17,500 had a budget of \$744 million. Considering the billions of dollars in Western government and multilateral development aid that had gone to waste in Sierra Leone over the years, partly directed toward building civil society and promoting free and fair elections as a reconciliation and peacemaking tool, noting the highly positive impact of a much smaller amount of carefully targeted military aid is important. Decisionmakers should also give priority to establishing profes-

**F**ull-blown state failure requires opportunistic intervention by external actors.

sional armed forces. In 1997 and then again in 1999, Sierra Leone's elected president of 1996, Kabbah, fled the national capital under attack from his own unruly army. The public image and legitimacy of a president so dependent on outside security forces is a poor basis of national reconstruction in any state, let alone a failed one. As Rwanda after the 1994 genocide demonstrates, failure to bring to justice the perpetrators of the mayhem and bloodshed that accompanies governmental collapse makes state legitimacy problematic.

**Bringing violators of the law to justice during reconstruction deters future abuse.**

The best social function of the law is serving as a deterrent. Contemporary methods of promoting deterrence in postconflict societies include courts, international tribunals, and truth commissions. In 2000 the UN Security Council adopted a resolution

establishing a special court, using Sierra Leonean and international judges and prosecutors, to bring those culpable in the worst killings since 1996 to justice. Voluntary contributions by UN members would provide the funding. Despite repeated pleas from human rights organizations outraged by RUF's mutilations and liberal use of child soldiers, however, the court's \$56 million budget was still short by \$43 million. The United States has pledged \$15 million to the court over three years, the largest single contribution of any government. The full funding of this tribunal should be an urgent priority of all UN members who wish to deter violence in failed states.

Piecing together and rebuilding the panoply of government institutions and infrastructure across the land will obviously require more time. In September 2001, the IMF set the process in motion by approving a \$164 million Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility and disbursing some \$12 million in March. External donors including the IMF must pay heed, however, to the mistakes they made in engaging the Stevens and Momoh regimes as "development partners" even as the calamity was brewing. Foreign "technical assistance" advisers to the Sierra Leonean government were taking a third of all aid in fees, totaling millions of dollars in the 1980s with precious little to show now for their efforts. Official development assistance to Sierra Leone increased from \$18 million in 1975 to \$100 million in 1989, effectively rewarding the making of a disaster as the government habitually reneged on implementing any significant reforms. At Monterrey, the leading institutions in the aid industry—the World Bank, the IMF, the UN Development Program, and the regional development banks—claimed to have learned their lesson: aid works best when the borrowing governments abjure corruption and faithfully implement institutional reforms, which were the very condi-

tions Sierra Leone had dodged on its path to ruin. After years of “development partnership” with the baleful Stevens and Momoh regimes, Sierra Leone’s recovery program could well be Monterrey’s first test. So far, the official aid agencies have not revealed any new road map toward institution-building in that blighted land.

## Lessons Learned

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From the experiences of Sierra Leone and other failed African countries, one could suggest that the first clear marker of progress toward state failure is institutional decay in the security forces first and foremost, followed closely by self-induced economic collapse and a floating, discontented young population prone to recreational violence in a vacuum devoid of law and order. Institutional collapse, however, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the anarchical conditions found in Sierra Leone between 1991 and 2001 to flourish. Full-blown state failure and its correlates of armed rival groups and terror requires opportunistic intervention by neighboring and distant actors exploiting the situation for their own ends—Libya, Liberia, and Burkina Faso in the case of Sierra Leone; Pakistan, Iran, and Al Qaeda in Taliban Afghanistan. Connections to international terrorism arise from this second order of intervention. As Somalia since 1991 demonstrates, as regrettable as state failure is, it need not breed terrorism without powerful and ill-intentioned external actors.

Tracing the origins of the Sierra Leonean war to demographic pressure and the depletion of natural resources would be a mistake. Between 1965 and 1973, Sierra Leone’s population grew 1.9 percent, rising to 2.5 percent in the following decade. Land pressure and deforestation was not a major national problem. Neither should commentators attribute the state’s collapse to globalization and World Bank/IMF pressure to downsize the state in favor of free markets. Under systematic corruption in a shrinking economy, public institutional capability had withered before the mid-1980s, when these organizations began funding their luckless economic liberalization programs in Sierra Leone. In the late 1990s, Paul Collier and his associates at the World Bank propagated the theory that African civil wars originated from greed by “loot-seeking rebels” rather than grievance-driven dissent, primarily in poor countries dependent on one export and exhibiting little economic diversification or market orientation.<sup>10</sup> By this yardstick, Somalia’s record-breaking tenure as a failed state ought to be hugely resource-based; yet other than camels and goats, that country has no major natural resources worthy of major conflict. In Sierra Leone, the RUF moved into a vacuum of state power, collecting a “tax” for what would have been, under regulated conditions, a poverty-eliminating

small-scale program to mine diamonds. Indications warrant careful monitoring of irresponsible, institution-destroying autocracies, such as Zimbabwe, Kenya, Burundi, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Côte d'Ivoire, that generate popular cynicism among long-suffering citizens. Together with democratic Nigeria, all these dictatorships exhibit the early symptoms of state failure—a condition congenial to foreign predators.

Once state failure establishes itself and security forces resort to foraging the land and preying on the population, hiring private security agencies is a

**Rebuilding the justice system is one of the safest ways to restore public confidence.**

stopgap measure at best, as the case of Executive Outcomes and Sandlines in Sierra Leone demonstrates. Reconstruction of the police and the national army has no long-term substitute. Since the fall of communism, Western governments, multilateral development agencies, and private foundations have expended large amounts of aid to promote democratic elections, good governance, civil society,

and the rule of law. That list must now include professional military and police institutions under accountable, democratically elected governments. Toward that objective, bringing violators of human rights and the law to justice during the period of reconstruction, as the UN is doing in Sierra Leone, deters future abuse. As the world contemplates the effects of September 11, the pitiful political conditions in Sierra Leone's neighbor, Liberia, offer a good example of the dangers of tyrannical warlordism left unpunished and rewarded with power. Aside from the rehabilitation of the security-maintenance arms of the state, rebuilding the justice system and ensuring that justice (not retribution) is done is one of the safest ways to restore public confidence in governments emerging from failure.

Lenders should fund reconstruction of the wider panoply of public institutions such as public utilities, roads, telecommunications, local authorities, and educational and health services with the lessons of the Stevens and Momoh eras in mind. The pressure from external donors on Sierra Leone to take out loans was so great that an IMF official spent the night outside the uncaring finance minister's home to get his almighty signature.<sup>11</sup> Despite the window-dressing rhetoric of "local ownership," "participation," and "institutional capacity-building," the UN, IMF, and World Bank have changed very little about the way they do business in Africa. For the pledge these institutions made at Monterrey to have any consequence in averting mass poverty and governmental collapse, they must urgently rethink their operations in the manner recommended by the Allan

Meltzer report of 2000 to the U.S. Congress on restructuring the Bretton Woods institutions—the leading donors to Sierra Leone and the poorest states in Africa.

The events of last September have made further U.S. government neglect of the security risks posed by collapsed, far-off governments impossible. For humanitarian reasons alone, civic organizations in industrial democracies will continue to seek international action on the social disasters that follow in the wake of unraveling governments and nasty little civil wars, even in what were once considered remote, nonstrategic parts of the Third World. Averting governmental failure and addressing its consequences once it occurs is likely to engage the United States and other countries, including those that neighbor anarchical states, for some time to come. There should be room for collaboration between the United States and African states at risk from neighboring failed states.

As with many other political and social problems, prevention is easier than curing. The case of Sierra Leone demonstrates at least that the root cause of the problem lay in the systematic ruin of state institutions by a succession of corrupt and inept dictatorships, indulged by external donors and a network of pirate businessmen. As economic and institutional decay set in, the regimes lost all legitimacy in the eyes of the people they claimed to govern. Then, as public institutions led by the organizations of law and order imploded, the stage was set for anomie as alienated youths hired themselves to rebel leaders and international criminals with a broader agenda.

Africa is a region with many potential candidates for state failure. Policy statements made earlier in the year by Great Britain and the United States indicate the seriousness with which they consider the problem of failing states. Preventing governments from pursuing self-destructive policies requires first and foremost generating an internal capacity to monitor and contain the damage—which is primarily an African responsibility. Free and fair elections are an ingredient, but a continuing system of accountability, and restitution where necessary, will keep public institutions in good repair. As the reaction to the March 2002 rigged presidential elections in Zimbabwe demonstrate, not all leaders in Africa have proved tolerant of those conditions. As in Sierra Leone, external donors who indulge those leaders may be pushing those states toward a catastrophe that could ultimately hurt the donor nations themselves.

## Notes

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