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Sierra Leone: Prospects for the Momoh Regime



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An Intelligence Assessment

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*ALA 86-10032
July 1986*

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Sierra Leone: Prospects for the Momoh Regime

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by
Office of African and Latin American Analysis, with
a contribution from Office of
Leadership Analysis. It was coordinated with the
Directorate of Operations,

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be
directed to the Chief, Africa Division, ALA,

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**Sierra Leone: Prospects
for the Momoh Regime**

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Key Judgments*Information available
as of 27 June 1986
was used in this report.*

After less than a year in power, there are increasing signs that President Joseph Momoh's government is in serious trouble, and we expect that he probably will be overthrown in the next 12 months. Despite the local optimism that existed when he first came into office, Momoh has been unable to cope with the legacy left him by the 17-year rule of Siaka Stevens. He is rapidly losing the support of the Army and the public for failing to stem economic decline and for associating himself with corrupt Stevens-era politicians and wealthy Lebanese businessmen. As public frustration with Sierra Leone's grim economic situation grows, we believe Iran and Libya will be tempted to exploit the country's large Muslim community—about 60 percent of the population—to further their influence. Even if foreign meddling can be avoided, the risk of instability and unrest in Sierra Leone adds more uncertainty in an already troubled West Africa.

Domestically, Momoh has been handicapped by two problems. First, he has been unsuccessful so far in establishing his presidential authority in a country whose politics are dominated by longstanding personal ties. Second, Momoh has been unable to stop Sierra Leone's economic decline, let alone turn it around. US Embassy reporting indicates that the economy is in shambles, with inflation over 100 percent, a foreign debt of \$650 million, a debt service ratio of nearly 50 percent, a domestic debt of \$1 billion, and endemic smuggling of two key exports—gold and diamonds. The country also is unable to feed itself and must increasingly rely on the West for food.

The US Embassy reports that economically based public discontent with Momoh is growing, and we believe that over the next six months violent protests are likely by unemployed youth and by workers whose salaries have been delayed. According to US Embassy reporting, an increasing number of Sierra Leoneans blame Momoh's ineptitude and indecisiveness for deteriorating living conditions, and regard him as a pawn of former President Stevens and his cronies.

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Economic problems are having a negative effect on the 3,200-man Army, which initially welcomed Momoh's accession to power in the belief that he would institute long-overdue reform.

[redacted] last year that they expected him to initiate massive political and economic change if they were to remain loyal. Junior officers and enlisted men also are increasingly frustrated with the continuing economic domination of the country by the Lebanese business community and the strong political influence of corrupt Stevens-era politicians. Moreover, US Embassy and [redacted]

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[redacted] not only has failed to nurture close contacts with influential officers, but also has neglected the Army's request for better equipment and improved living standards.

Despite growing economic difficulties, we believe that Momoh—lacking any attractive options—will probably respond to critics with only marginal economic reforms and calls for greater public patience. Notwithstanding his pledge to introduce stiff IMF-suggested austerity measures, including the politically sensitive removal of rice subsidies, we believe Momoh lacks the will and political backing to do so.

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[redacted] Momoh's failure to limit the illicit activities of the wealthy Lebanese businessmen will almost certainly fuel further economic decline, popular discontent, and a coup attempt by disgruntled military elements.

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The greatest threat to Momoh is probably the senior officer corps. He is certainly aware that Stevens finally stepped down from power because of the military's threat to intervene. Lacking a power base, Momoh is even more vulnerable. In our view, Army Commander Tarawallie and Lt. Col. Turay—two senior officers who are aware of the pressing need for reform—are likely to oust Momoh within a year. Under these senior officers, we believe Freetown's traditionally pro-Western foreign policy would continue, as well as its dependence on Western financial and food aid. Either man would probably attempt to impose some economic reforms, arrest corrupt officials, and seal the porous borders to reduce smuggling. Nevertheless, they would find it difficult to convince an already hard-pressed public that tough economic austerity measures are necessary to alleviate endemic corruption and to stem economic decline.

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Momoh is also vulnerable to a move by the junior officer ranks—a development with strong precedent in West Africa. If the junior officers staged a successful coup, we believe they would probably try to emulate the populist regimes in Burkina or Ghana. A takeover by junior officers could be easily marked by chaotic and bloody infighting, with radical and moderate factions competing for power. This instability would further encourage foreign meddling, possibly attracting the attention of the now disinterested Soviets. If Tehran and Tripoli are able to consolidate their local influence—possibly assisted by expatriate Lebanese radicals—there would be a risk that Freetown could become a transit point for arms smuggling and a base of operations against other moderate neighboring states.



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Sierra Leone



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Sierra Leone: Prospects for the Momoh Regime



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Introduction

President Joseph Momoh's pro-Western regime faces chronic and growing political and economic problems, which, we believe, if unchecked, risk sparking a military coup during the next year. Politically, Momoh remains vulnerable to pressures from former President Stevens and his cronies, who control the sole ruling party and the government bureaucracy. Economically, he has failed to move on long-overdue—albeit, politically sensitive—reforms to halt Sierra Leone's economic decline. Against this backdrop, the military poses a growing threat, as both senior officers and the rank and file become increasingly disenchanted with Momoh's [redacted] performance. This paper assesses the pressures on Momoh, the implications of a move by the military, and the potential for Iranian and Libyan gains¹ in the short and medium terms.

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We believe that the turnaround in public opinion has been due largely to Momoh's inability to take charge. Rather than break free of the legacy of the Stevens regime, Momoh found himself quickly entangled in the personality politics that have dominated Sierra Leone for years. According to Embassy reporting, Momoh failed to distance himself from the Old Guard—the cronies of the popularly despised Stevens regime—who he claims are still indispensable to help run the government. In particular, Momoh has not fired First Vice President Minah, an ambitious politician who served in the Stevens regime and is regarded as one of Freetown's most ruthless and corrupt officials.

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There are also indications that Momoh remains vulnerable to pressure from former President Stevens.

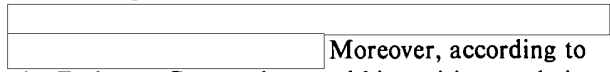
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Leadership

Joseph Momoh, the handpicked successor of Siaka Stevens, was enthusiastically welcomed by most Sierra Leoneans when he entered office last November. [redacted] a widespread belief that Momoh would end the corruption and mismanagement characteristic of the former regime and return the country to a healthy economy. Despite the apparent groundswell of local optimism, we agree with the US Embassy that Momoh squandered his "honeymoon" period, and that most Sierra Leoneans now appear disillusioned with him. Even Sierra Leone's semi-independent press—a rough barometer of public opinion—has become increasingly critical of Momoh's inertia. [redacted]



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Moreover, according to the Embassy, Stevens has used his position as chairman of the country's only legitimate party to keep his friends in office. While the 86-year-old Stevens probably does not want to regain the presidency, it appears that he has been able to maintain his influence as a behind-the-scenes power broker. [redacted]

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Domestic Woes

While Momoh has been unable to free himself from the discredited Stevens crowd, we believe his major domestic liability has been the country's crumbling economic system. According to US Embassy reporting, Sierra Leone is nearing bankruptcy because of rampant corruption and smuggling, both of which are particularly prevalent in the country's influential Lebanese community. Shortages of consumer goods, food,

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President Joseph Momoh



According to the US Embassy, Joseph Momoh, 49, owes his present position to two men: former President Stevens, who handpicked him and initiated a series of constitutional and party changes last summer to legitimize his political accession, and to a powerful Lebanese businessman, Jamil Muhammed, who heavily contributed to Momoh's presidential campaign. Momoh also holds the positions of Minister of State Enterprises and Minister of Defense; he officially resigned as military commander when he became President. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] Embassy sources note that he avoids tough decisions, is devoid of charisma, lacks almost any knowledge of economics, and has a "child-like" understanding of politics. The US Embassy reports that he spends most of his day making public appearances and attending State House meetings with people who seek favors. He has yet to formulate a political agenda, and rarely solicits advice. [redacted]

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A career military officer, Momoh was promoted to Commander of the Armed Forces and named Minister of Defense in the early 1970s for his role in thwarting a coup attempt against Stevens, and in 1983 he was promoted to major general. According to the US Embassy, Stevens also appointed Momoh to Army Commander because of his passive and unambitious nature. As commanding general, Momoh did not maintain close contacts with junior officers, tolerated corruption in the higher ranks, and practiced favoritism in the promotion of officers, according to defense attache reporting. Momoh is a member of the Limba tribe, which comprises 8 percent of the population. He is a Methodist in a country that primarily adheres to Islam and indigenous animist religions. [redacted]

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and fuel, delayed salary payments, and rising inflation have intensified public frustration and, in the process, generated a climate conducive to serious unrest. More important, the military—the ultimate source of power in most Third World countries—is losing confidence in Momoh’s ability to stem the economic decline and protect their corporate interests. [redacted]

In his inaugural speech in January 1986, Momoh vowed to revive the ailing economy, but so far has not introduced any major initiatives. US Embassy reporting indicates that Momoh has resisted a freeze on government hiring, probably fearing that unemployed high school and university graduates would take to the streets in protest. Momoh publicly announced in March that he would seek an IMF accord, but we believe it unlikely that he will implement long-overdue austerity measures for fear of the political consequences. To date, Momoh has not moved on his pledge to end petroleum and rice subsidies, to liberalize trade, or to increase agricultural producer prices.

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Economic Disintegration

President Momoh inherited a treasury bankrupted by his predecessor’s uncontrolled deficit spending, spiraling inflation, and rampant smuggling of domestically unprofitable basic commodities. US Embassy reporting indicates that last year inflation was nearly 70 percent, the foreign debt totaled more than \$650 million, and the debt service ratio was nearly 50 percent. [redacted]

[redacted]

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Sierra Leone’s foreign reserves totaled only \$279,000 last November. At a more personal level, international economists report that some 65 percent of the population lives at the subsistence level, and that limited resources will be strained further by a rapidly growing population—about 2.6 percent per year. At the same time, the United Nations reports that Sierra Leone has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world, that only 3 percent of the population has access to potable water, and that the average life expectancy is only 36. [redacted]

For the near term, Freetown will probably look to the West for the financial assistance it needs to keep afloat economically. The US Embassy reports that West Germany—Freetown’s largest donor—provided some \$10 million last year, but that Bonn may tie future aid commitments to Sierra Leone’s adherence to IMF guidelines. A variety of open source reporting indicates that, although Sierra Leone is interested in attracting foreign investment, only a few Western companies have begun operations in recent years, partly because Freetown has no foreign investment code. [redacted]

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Sierra Leone also faces serious agricultural problems, according to US Embassy reporting. A net exporter of rice in the 1970s, the country imported about one-third of its consumption last year, and the Embassy predicts even greater shortfalls for at least the next two years. The Embassy adds that substantial quantities of rice are smuggled abroad because of low producer prices at home. Production of key cash crops—cocoa, coffee, and palm kernels—also continues to decline because of low producer prices and large-scale smuggling into neighboring Liberia and Guinea. [redacted]

Mounting Public Discontent

[redacted] rising public frustration with the country’s economic decline has set the stage for civil unrest. [redacted]

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[redacted] Students mounted demonstrations in March 1985 to protest the previous regime’s mismanagement and looted Freetown shops in January 1984 over shortages of cooking oil and gasoline. [redacted]

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Sierra Leone's Troubled History

Sierra Leone gained its independence from Britain in 1961, and enjoyed six years of multiparty democracy. The first Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai, died in April 1964 and was succeeded by his half brother, Sir Albert Margai. According to academic studies, the Margai government became increasingly unpopular because of perceived tribal favoritism. In the March 1967 general elections, Siaka Stevens's opposition party, the All People's Congress, gained a majority. As the results came in, the head of the Army, General Lansana—a Margai supporter—staged a coup to prevent Stevens from taking over. Two days later, his own officers repudiated him and seized power. Seven officers—calling themselves the National Reformation Council under the chairmanship of Colonel Juxon-Smith—pledged to end corruption and return the country to civilian rule. Gradually, popular and military support withered, and in April 1968 enlisted men and noncommissioned officers mutinied and turned power over to Stevens. [redacted]

A scanning of Embassy and open source reporting indicates that Stevens ruled the country with an iron hand. Academics note that Stevens survived at least two assassination attempts by disgruntled soldiers and an Army coup attempt in 1971. In 1974 he publicly executed eight alleged coup plotters. In 1978, he imposed a one-party state, supposedly to

prevent Sierra Leone's disintegration into tribal factions. In the last years of his rule, Stevens became blatantly corrupt and greedy, enriching himself and his cronies, and Embassy sources estimate that he is a multimillionaire. Moreover, he often co-opted potential opposition by allowing them to participate in lucrative kickback schemes and permitting them to benefit from diamond and gold smuggling. Stevens finally decided to end his rule last year as junior and senior officers became increasingly restless with his rule, and threatened to intervene if he did not step down by the time his term expired in December. [redacted]

After Sierra Leone gained independence, most observers believed the country would have a bright economic future because of its mineral wealth, but a variety of Embassy and open sources report that its potential has been largely squandered. Although Sierra Leone has suffered from fluctuating international demand and low prices for its main exports—diamonds, gold, cocoa, coffee, rutile, and bauxite—economic analysts agree that the stagnant economy is largely the result of massive corruption and mismanagement. Moreover, endemic smuggling has eroded government revenue collection—in 1983 the US Embassy reported that some 83 percent of that year's diamond production was smuggled abroad. [redacted]

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Sierra Leone's trade unions also are likely to protest [redacted] police, university lecturers, and some civil servants in Freetown have threatened to strike because of inadequate pay and poor transportation. [redacted] small strikes erupted in April in southern Sierra Leone over poor working conditions and delayed salary payments. Unless the government starts to pay its employees on a fairly regular basis, the 50,000-strong trade union confederation—the Sierra Leone Labor Congress—will probably call a strike. According to academic studies and press reports, the Congress paralyzed the country for two months in 1981 following then President Stevens's refusal to cut food prices and improve housing and transportation.

Pressures Building in the Military

While Momoh will certainly have to deal with popular discontent, his most concrete problem is growing disaffection within the armed forces. The US Embassy reports that the generally pro-Western, 3,200-man military, which initially welcomed Momoh's presidency in the hope that he would improve its poor living conditions, is now demoralized. Momoh has ignored the military's longstanding unhappiness with outdated weapons, and has not—as most had expected—provided funding for the construction of new barracks at Wilberforce, the key garrison in Freetown.

[redacted] are frustrated with the absence of meaningful reform and dim economic prospects. Moreover, Momoh, as in the past, has failed to maintain close ties to these officers.

Within the military, we believe the most direct pressure will come from the senior Army officer ranks. In particular, we believe that two key officers—Army Commander Tarawallie and Lt. Col. Turay—may demand that the President either turn the economy around and move against corrupt businessmen and the Old Guard or be toppled.

[redacted] who participated in Army revolts in 1967 and 1968, is frustrated by the

expatriate Lebanese stranglehold on the economy and opposes First Vice President Minah's presence in the administration. Turay, a close friend of Tarawallie, commands the 700-man First Battalion at Wilberforce (probably the country's most effective military unit), and believes that martial law is necessary to halt smuggling.

[redacted] they would have the support of other garrisons and unit commanders around the capital and could easily disarm the ill-equipped and poorly trained 1,200-man Special Security Detachment, which shares responsibility for the President's security with a small Army unit.

[redacted] US Embassy has reported that enlisted men are grumbling privately about Momoh's lack of direction—for example, last March sergeants told their superiors that they believe Momoh does not grasp the country's serious economic problems and that the Old Guard must be removed. We note that, although enlisted men and noncommissioned officers were passive in the 1970s, they played a key role in the Army mutinies in 1967 and 1968.

The Lebanese Connection

While the issues of leadership and economic decay are at the core of Momoh's problems, he also has to deal with an aggressive Lebanese community that has considerable economic and political clout. The Lebanese connection not only affects the internal dynamics within Sierra Leone, but also provides a potential conduit for outside Muslim interests—specifically, Iran and Libya—to make inroads into the country.

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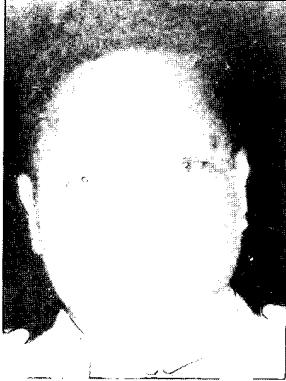
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Key Military Officers



Brigadier Mohamed Sheku Tarawallie

Army Commander Tarawallie is, in our view, the most likely candidate to lead a coup against Momoh's regime. [redacted]

[redacted]

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but he recently displayed a strong interest in the details of last year's failed coup attempt in neighboring Liberia. [redacted]

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[redacted] well respected by his troops, although some officers believe he is overly ambitious and bent on self-aggrandizement. [redacted]

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[redacted] but we suspect only so long as the President maintains some popular support. [redacted]

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The 45-year-old Tarawallie joined the Army in 1960 and received extensive military training in England, Israel, and Nigeria. In 1967 he was arrested and temporarily imprisoned for participating in the overthrow of the Albert Margai government. In 1983 he was assigned as Army Chief of Staff and promoted to general. He received his current position last November, when Momoh resigned from the military. [redacted] *as pro-Western, and he visited the United States in 1983.* [redacted]

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Lieutenant Colonel Lansana Turay

As Commander of the First Battalion, Lt. Col. Turay controls the key military unit in Freetown. [redacted] *that he is a highly capable officer who commands the respect of his men and maintains regular contact with them. Turay is loyal to Tarawallie—they have been friends for some 20 years—and would probably support him in a coup attempt. The US Embassy reports that Tarawallie was responsible for Turay's promotion to his present position in 1984.* [redacted]

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[redacted] Turay, 39, joined the Army in the mid-1960s, and received his military training in England and Canada. [redacted]

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Momoh's links to the Lebanese business community cause much of the frustration and anger many Sierra Leoneans have with the new regime, according to the US Embassy. Local dislike of the Lebanese—who total approximately 35,000 in a population of 4 million—centers not only on their disproportionate role in the country's economy but also on their perceived involvement in illicit activities. [redacted]

[redacted]

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Economically, the Lebanese play a critical role in Sierra Leone. The US Embassy reports that a handful of Lebanese have illegally acquired vast fortunes, provide the government with money to purchase rice imports, and fund most of the government's domestic debt of about \$1 billion. [redacted]

We believe that, even if Momoh wanted to reduce Jamil's preeminent position, he probably lacks the [redacted] resources to do so. According to US Embassy reporting, Momoh—[redacted]

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[redacted] these businessmen, who hold the government's treasury bills and stock certificates, can demand immediate repayment and thus have a stranglehold on the state treasury. Although no public pressure for their mass expulsion or expropriation of property has surfaced yet, US Embassy reporting indicates that some Sierra Leoneans hold the Lebanese responsible for the country's poverty. [redacted]

[redacted] believes that Jamil can be convinced to reduce his control of the economy, but Momoh has not really tried to curtail Jamil's influence for fear that oil imports would be cut off. The US Embassy reports that Momoh has not received financial kickbacks from Jamil, and most Sierra Leoneans do not believe that the President is corrupt. Even if Momoh seeks to distance himself from Jamil, we believe corrupt government officials—including First Vice President Minah and Finance Ministry bureaucrats—would work behind the scenes to assist Jamil's various schemes. [redacted]

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Perhaps the best exemplar of Lebanese clout is Jamil Muhammad. US Embassy reporting indicates that Jamil controls Sierra Leone's sale of diamonds and gold through the state enterprises he manages and funds, and that he nets at least \$25 million annually from illegal diamond sales. Foreign observers report that Jamil is Sierra Leone's "bank of last resort"—the foreign exchange reserves of the Bank of Sierra Leone usually are low—and that he brokers the country's oil imports. [redacted]

The importance of both the Lebanese community and individual power brokers is not limited to the economic arena. Their role also extends to their foreign connections. From a commercial standpoint, Lebanese merchants have been critical in establishing trade links to Middle Eastern countries. At the same time, their Muslim heritage has allowed cultural links to be established. Taken together, these factors have opened doors for foreign inroads in the country. [redacted]

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Iranian Presence and Influence

The US Embassy also reports that Jamil maintains close personal and commercial ties to Middle Eastern countries, in addition to business interests in Morocco and Jordan. Embassy sources indicate that he maintains links to the Iranian Embassy in Freetown and probably briefs its officers on local political developments. According to the US Embassy, Jamil is a close friend of influential Lebanese cabinet minister Nabbih Barri and collects \$50,000 in contributions every month from Sierra Leone's Lebanese for Barri's Amal faction, one of the Muslim organizations participating in the Lebanese Government. [redacted]

The most extensive links to foreign Islamic interests are with Iran. The US Embassy reports that, since the establishment of relations in 1983, Tehran has forged fairly close ties to Freetown, and, largely as a result of Jamil's influence, provides at least half of Sierra Leone's oil supplies. Although Momoh has sought to diversify oil suppliers—in March, Algeria agreed to provide 60,000 metric tons of oil in the coming months—Sierra Leone lacks the hard currency to secure long-term supply from most petroleum

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Communist Bloc Presence and Activities

[redacted] a number of Communist countries have established links in Sierra Leone. [redacted]

China. The US Embassy reports that the Chinese, who maintain a low profile, are well regarded by the Freetown government and the local population. China forged close ties first with the Stevens administration, and the US Embassy in Beijing reports that Sierra Leone is regarded as one of China's closest allies in Africa, due, in part, to Freetown's relatively early—in 1971—recognition of the People's Republic. China is one of Sierra Leone's largest economic aid donors, and since the early 1980s has provided some \$65 million in loans, as well as technical assistance for various agricultural projects. In March, Momoh visited China and secured a \$16 million loan, [redacted]

[redacted] Since the delivery of some small arms in the early 1970s, China has not provided the Sierra Leonean Army with new hardware. [redacted]

Cuba. Havana and Freetown have maintained fairly warm relations since diplomatic ties were established in 1972. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] We believe, however, that Momoh is unlikely to pursue closer ties to Cuba for fear of jeopardizing badly needed Western economic aid. Although Cuba presently provides no military or paramilitary training, US Embassy and press reporting indicates that from the early 1970s until 1982 Cuba trained the Special Security Detachment. Havana provides neither economic nor technical assistance, according to the Embassy, but it has formed several joint ventures with Lebanese businessmen in Sierra Leone. The US Embassy reports that some 60 Sierra Leoneans presently study in Cuba. [redacted]

The Soviet Union. According to the US Embassy, the Soviet Union has negligible influence in Sierra Leone.

[redacted] and the Embassy detects no pro-Soviet orientation among most Sierra Leoneans. Moscow currently provides no economic or military aid, but the Soviets claim that some 500 Sierra Leoneans have been educated in Moscow and that 20 are enrolled there. Nevertheless, the Embassy reports that most students—including Momoh's daughter—return disillusioned and embittered by Soviet racism. The Soviet presence is limited to a small Embassy staff and a 10-man trade mission, which probably manages the Soviet fishing fleet off Sierra Leone's coast. [redacted]

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producers, and has to depend on Jamil's financial "largess" to pay for its imports from Tehran. According to the US Embassy, in 1984 Freetown sponsored, Iran funded, and local clerics helped to organize an Islamic Unity Conference of the Hajj, attended by delegates from some 90 countries. The Embassy also reports that in May 1985 then Sierra Leonean Foreign Minister Kanu condemned Iraqi "aggression" during his five-day official visit to Tehran. [redacted]

We believe Iran is likely to step up its propaganda efforts in Sierra Leone and provide financial support to the Muslim community in an attempt to increase its influence. Embassy and press reporting indicates that in the past two years Tehran has funded the construction of an Islamic school and mosque, has offered local clerics free trips to Iran, and has placed full-page advertisements in newspapers explaining the Islamic revolution. The Iranians are likely to proselytize through the Sierra Leone-Iran Friendship Society, established in 1984, and through the local Lebanese Shiite leader, Sheikh Chadade, who receives financial assistance from Tehran, according to the US Embassy. [redacted]

In the next year, Iran almost certainly will step up its activities in Sierra Leone, and focus on proselytizing within the growing Muslim community. According to US Embassy and academic reporting, the Muslim population has swelled from some 30 percent of the population in the early 1970s to nearly 60 percent this year. We believe Sierra Leone would prove fertile ground for Islamic fundamentalism, especially if the country's economic decline continues and Momoh is unable to create jobs for the growing number of unemployed high school and university graduates. Moreover, so long as Sierra Leone is dependent on Iranian oil, Freetown is unlikely to challenge Tehran's activities. [redacted]

Libya's Role

While Libya's role has been much less visible, the Muslim connection appears a tempting target. We believe, on the basis of its activities elsewhere, that Tripoli is likely to attempt to exploit Freetown's economic decline to recruit disenchanting students unable to find employment. In this regard, Tripoli may look for sympathizers through the Sierra Leone-Libya Brotherhood Society and the "Green Book" study group, both of which operate at Fourah Bay College in Freetown. As it is, the Embassy reports that a small number of university lecturers are pro-Libya and have traveled to Tripoli in recent years. Embassy reporting indicates that, even though Freetown has refused to allow Tripoli to open a People's Bureau, Libya has been able to cultivate already a small number of supporters and sympathizers—probably under 100—who demonstrated against Washington's policies in front of the US Embassy last January. [redacted]

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Although Sierra Leone is a low-priority target for Tripoli in West Africa, Libya is likely to step up its low-cost operations—such as scholarships or press placements—in the next 12 months. US Embassy and [redacted] that, although Momoh is aware of the Libyan threat to the region, his security apparatus is not well equipped or trained to carefully monitor their activities. Tripoli almost certainly will focus on expanding its presence in the country and reopening a People's Bureau. Moreover, Tripoli may exploit Freetown's chronic petroleum shortages by offering token supplies to ingratiate itself with the regime. However, only in the unlikely event that Sierra Leone considers joining other African states in reestablishing relations with Israel would Tripoli devote additional resources to subverting Freetown. [redacted]

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US-Sierra Leonean Linkages

We believe that Freetown's dependence on US food aid, the importance of US markets for Sierra Leone's exports, and Washington's influence with the international lending community are factors that will encourage Momoh or a successor regime to try to prevent a deterioration of relations with the United States. The United States provided some \$6.4 million in economic aid in 1984—the last year for which figures are available—including PL-480 food aid. US private investment in Sierra Leone totals some \$70 million, mainly in the rutile (titanium ore) mining industry, and last year the United States imported about 38 percent of Sierra Leone's diamond production. Moreover, since 1982 the United States has provided training for a small number of Sierra Leonean officers, and the

Sierra Leone also hosts the third-largest Peace Corps program in Sub-Saharan Africa.

We believe a military coup is likely in the next six months to a year. It probably would be spearheaded by Tarawallie and Turay, who would most likely enact some reforms, tighten up on corruption, and attempt to seal the borders to reduce smuggling. However, a new government would face the same intractable economic problems—smuggling, low world prices and demand for Sierra Leone's commodity exports, a rapidly growing population, shortages of foreign reserves, and difficulty in financing fuel and food imports. Any new leadership would find it difficult to meet public expectations for an improvement in their living standards and would probably have to contend with outbreaks of public unrest. A new government, particularly if headed by Tarawallie or Turay, probably would maintain Sierra Leone's generally pro-Western orientation and traditional distance from the Soviet Union.

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We judge that Moscow is unlikely to make a serious effort to cultivate Sierra Leone unless it loses its access to neighboring Guinea. According to US Embassy reporting, Moscow uses Conakry as a transit stop for military transport flights to Angola, and Conakry is the only West African port routinely used by the Soviet, Luanda-based West African naval patrol. In our view, however, Moscow would probably first look to Guinea-Bissau or Benin—where US Embassy reporting indicates that pro-Soviet factions wield some influence—rather than Sierra Leone as alternative sites should Guinea no longer be available. Moreover, on the basis of a review of patterns of Soviet aid elsewhere in West Africa, Moscow almost certainly would be reluctant to provide the economic resources necessary to help shore up the stagnant Sierra Leonean economy in an effort to ingratiate itself with Freetown.

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Outlook and Implications for the United States

If, as we expect, Momoh fails to address Sierra Leone's political and economic problems, the potential for civilian unrest is all but certain to grow. On the basis of a survey of US Embassy and [redacted] [redacted] may attempt to placate disgruntled military officers by arresting a few corrupt businessmen and pleading for more time to implement reform. Public patience, however, is likely to evaporate within the next six to 12 months—and possibly sooner—if Momoh continues to coddle the corrupt Old Guard and Lebanese business elite. As a result, we believe strikes, student demonstrations, and potentially violent incidents may occur. Moreover, although the Lebanese and Sierra Leonean communities have lived in relative harmony since independence, we believe that Sierra Leoneans, who are increasingly frustrated with the economic decline and Momoh's reluctance to stem Lebanese profiteering, could lash out violently at the Lebanese community.

In our judgment, US interests in Sierra Leone would suffer little damage, at least initially, if Momoh were replaced by senior Army officers. The US Embassy assesses that the likely military successors would probably continue Momoh's pro-Western policies and seek aid first from Western donors. We note that Sierra Leone has frequently supported US positions on key international issues such as Afghanistan and Nicaragua. The US Embassy reports that during the Falklands war Freetown allowed British forces to use its port and airfield.

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In our view, junior officers or enlisted men may launch a coup within the next year if Momoh or a new regime led by senior officers fails to initiate reform. A review of US Embassy and [redacted]

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[redacted] who reportedly is popular with enlisted men; Captain Nelson-Williams, First Battalion adjutant, who bitterly opposes the rampant corruption; or Captain Dumbuya, the Army's provost marshal. In our view, on the basis of a variety of US Embassy reporting, junior officers—perhaps modeling themselves on populist leaders Jerry Rawlings in Ghana or Thomas Sankara in Burkina—would probably initiate an anticorruption drive to improve the economic climate, execute corrupt officials, and launch Sierra Leone on a more nonaligned foreign policy course, while at the same time privately professing close ties to the West to avoid jeopardizing economic assistance.

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We believe that over the longer term a new government led by lower-ranking military personnel would probably usher in a period of instability and prove considerably more difficult for the West to deal with. New, less experienced leaders would probably seek initially to distance themselves, at least publicly, from the United States in an effort to establish their nonaligned credentials and their image as "reformers." They also might attempt to ingratiate themselves to Libya in the hope that Tripoli would lend financial or military support as it did initially to Ghanaian leader Rawlings or Burkinabe strongman Sankara. We also suspect that Tehran and Tripoli—assisted by the few radicals among the expatriate Lebanese—could use Sierra Leone as a transit point for arms smuggling and regional subversion. [redacted]

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We believe neighboring West African leaders would view a coup by junior officers or enlisted men as a potential threat to them and, therefore, to US and other Western interests. In particular, the pro-Western Liberian Government probably would fear that a radical regime would either tolerate or encourage antiregime dissidents to use Sierra Leone as a base of operations and launch a coup attempt. Monrovia, along with the relatively moderate regime in Guinea, would probably press for increased US economic and military assistance to bolster their regimes. [redacted]

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