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## **Powell Sees Decision Soon on Sending G.I.'s to Liberia**

By RICHARD W. STEVENSON

PRETORIA, South Africa, July 10 — Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said tonight that he expected President Bush to make a decision within days on sending peacekeeping troops to Liberia. He suggested that the administration's preference was to limit military participation to technical and logistical support.

Mr. Powell said the president would meet on Monday at the White House with Kofi Annan, the secretary general of the United Nations, to discuss Liberia. By then, Mr. Powell said, Mr. Bush will have in hand the assessment of a Pentagon team that is in Liberia and possibly a report from another American military delegation that is to meet this weekend in Ghana with counterparts from the Economic Community of West African States, the umbrella group for governments in the region.

The West African governments, which include Nigeria and Ghana, have said that they would send at least 1,000 troops to Liberia to help quell a civil war there and oversee the departure of President Charles Taylor, who has promised to leave the country once peacekeepers arrive. Mr. Bush has been calling for Mr. Taylor, who faces war crime charges from a United Nations-backed court, to leave the country.

At a news conference here at the end of the third day of Mr. Bush's trip to Africa, Mr. Powell said tonight that the United States was happy to see the West African group, known as Ecomog, play the primary role in dealing with Liberia. Any military involvement by the United States, he said, would be "very limited in duration and scope."

Mr. Powell said the preference of the United States was for the West African peacekeeping troops to enter Liberia at about the same time that Mr. Taylor leaves, and to have American forces play a limited supporting role.

American troops have not played a peacekeeping role in Africa since 18 were killed in Somalia in 1993, and as a presidential candidate in 2000, Mr. Bush expressed skepticism about sending the military into Africa for building political and economic stability.

Mr. Powell said the president had not made a decision about Liberia, but he signaled that the president would not wait long after returning to Washington from Africa late Saturday to make up his mind.

Mr. Bush's last stop on the trip is Nigeria, which has played a major role in negotiating Mr. Taylor's departure and is his most likely destination if he steps aside.

"I expect that over the next several days as we finish the assessment in Monrovia and get that report and the military assessment team working with Ecomog over the weekend, the president will be in a position to make a decision," Mr. Powell said.

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