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U.S. Offers Resolution to Approve African Force for Liberia

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UNITED NATIONS, July 30 — The United States introduced a Security Council resolution today that would authorize the peacekeeping force being assembled by West African countries to enforce the shaky cease-fire in Liberia.

The draft resolution is likely to create new momentum for an intervention that has been stalled by political opposition in Washington and by calls from African participants for more financial and logistical aid. Council diplomats indicated today that the measure was likely to win approval late this week or early next week.

Nothing in the draft indicates that Washington plans to take a leading role in the multinational force. President Bush said in his news conference, "The conditions that I laid out for the Liberian rescue mission still exist: Charles Taylor must go, a cease-fire must be in place, and we will be there to help" the force assembled by the Economic Community of West African States

One factor stalling the deployment of two battalions — about 1,500 troops — already committed by the Nigerians has been financial. The State Department has signed a \$10 million contract with a California company to provide vehicles, tents, food and other logistical support, "which obviously the Nigerians have indicated is not enough," Kofi Annan, the United Nations secretary general, told reporters today.

In Liberia, fighting continued today in both Monrovia, the capital, and Buchanan, the second-largest city.

One resident told Reuters that "dozens of people" had been killed and that the dead were being carried off in wheelbarrows during lulls in the fighting.

Under the draft resolution, the multinational force would begin the job, then hand off to United Nations peacekeepers, who would be deployed by Oct. 1. Several Council diplomats said it was unrealistic to expect the United Nations force to be ready before late fall.

The draft resolution also allows the current United Nations peacekeeping force in nearby Sierra Leone to use its equipment to airlift to Monrovia the first battalion of Nigerian troops. The Sierra Leone mission is also authorized to support the multinational force in Liberia "for a limited period."

The plan, United States and United Nations officials have said, is for Mr. Taylor to depart upon the arrival of Nigerian troops. Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said today, "While waiting for the forces to arrive, we are also pressing hard for a cease-fire."

A West African military team arrived in Monrovia to assess the situation. Festus Okonkwo, a Nigerian general leading the team, told Agence France-Presse that, "The peacekeepers should be here within days."

Three ships carrying about 2,000 American marines are a few days from Monrovia. But President Bush made it clear that if American support included ground troops, "The troop strength will be limited, and the time frame will be limited."

The draft resolution also calls for Mr. Taylor's resignation, but makes no mention of the chief rebel group, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, which has violated numerous cease-fires in the past two weeks while lobbing mortar shells into civilian neighborhoods.

Council members questioned both that omission and the inclusion of language giving the peacekeepers immunity from prosecution under the International Criminal Court. But the German envoy, Gunter Pleuger, predicted that any disagreements would be quickly resolved so that the troops could move in to Monrovia "as soon as possible."