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Liberian Faction Says It May Fight Peacekeepers

By THE NEW YORK TIMES

MONROVIA, Liberia, July 11 — In an effort to increase the pressure on President Charles Taylor to step aside, the rebel group that calls itself Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy threatened today to fight West African peacekeepers if they arrived before Mr. Taylor's departure.

"Any troops deployed before the departure of Taylor must be prepared for a firefight," the statement read.

The announcement comes as the Bush administration considers whether to send American soldiers to stabilize Liberia, or to restrict its efforts to financial and logistical support for the West African contingent. The Pentagon has dispatched a team of experts to assess how it can help.

The Economic Community of West African States, or Ecowas, has said it is prepared to send 1,000 soldiers here in two weeks.

Mr. Taylor, who remains under indictment by a war crimes tribunal in neighboring Sierra Leone, has insisted that he will not step down until after the arrival of peacekeepers, warning that otherwise the result would be chaos.