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Powell Backs U.S. Role to Aid Liberia

By THE NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON, July 23 — Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, who has been in daily contact with Kofi Annan, the United Nations secretary general, showed himself to be a strong advocate of interceding in Liberia in an interview published in today's Washington Times.

Mr. Powell stressed however that the administration would accept a mission of only limited "scope and duration."

The secretary acknowledged that American involvement would be primarily on a humanitarian basis, but he said action was necessary to avoid another catastrophe comparable to the carnage in Rwanda.

"In Liberia, if you ask the question, 'What is our strategic, vital interest?' it would be hard to define in that way," he told the newspaper. "But we do have an interest in making sure that West Africa doesn't simply come apart. We do have an interest in showing the people of Africa that we can support efforts to stabilize a tragic situation as we work with others to bring relief to people — people who are desperately in need."

The secretary expressed regret that the administration had failed to agree quickly on a strategy with Liberia's neighbors to stabilize the country.