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Date Posted: 10 July 2000

Liberia: Gray Market Helicopter Will Aid Rebels in Sierra Leone ~~(S//NF)~~



~~(TS, 1.4(c) /NF)~~ Liberia's acquisition this month of a military helicopter and associated armaments will improve Liberia's ability to support Revolutionary United Front (RUF) operations against UN and Sierra Leonean Government forces. ^{1.4(c)}

^{1.4(c)} indicates that a Liberia-based arms broker worked with air transporter Victor Butt to buy an Mi-8T helicopter from unidentified suppliers, and imagery shows the helicopter arrived in Monrovia this week.

~~(TS, 1.4(c) /NF)~~ The Mi-8T has a larger capacity than the Mi-2s that Monrovia now is using to supply the RUF. President Taylor could use the Mi-8T to strike directly at Sierra Leonean forces that threaten his control of key diamond areas but would hesitate to deploy it against UN forces for fear of international condemnation. ^{1.4(c)} ^{1.4(c)} indicates the helicopter was to be accompanied by 100 "units" of unguided armaments, most likely 57-mm air-to-surface rockets, which could be for the Mi-8T or Liberia's three Mi-2 military helicopters.

~~(TS, 1.4(c) /NF)~~ This is Liberia's most significant gray-market acquisition since the UN imposed an arms embargo in 1992. The delivery route noted in ^{1.4(c)} and by a contact of the ^{1.4(c)} suggests that the helicopter originated in Kyrgyzstan, Russia, or Ukraine. ^{1.4(c)} Press, JFIC POC: ^{1.4(c)} 10 USC 424

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