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## U.S. culpable in African atrocities

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The United States is shamefully implicated in the terror that Charles Taylor, erstwhile leader of Liberia, inflicted on the people of West Africa.

Beginning in the 1980s, Taylor was an informant and collaborator with a number of U.S. intelligence agencies that included at least the Defense Intelligence Agency and the CIA, according to Freedom of Information documents obtained by the Boston Globe. While it is still unclear exactly what Taylor did for the United States, apparently it was at least worth a jailbreak.

On Sept.15, 1985, while languishing in a maximum-security penitentiary in Boston for embezzling nearly \$1 million when he was in the government of Liberian dictator President Samuel Doe, Taylor made a dramatic prison escape. He strolled into freedom through an open cell door. It's likely that someone in the U.S. security apparatus helped him slip away.

Four years later, Taylor launched a civil war in Liberia to overthrow the Doe regime. The war raged on for five years. He financed it by the illicit sale of blood diamonds, iron ore, timber and rubber, and by gang-pressing children into his National Patriotic Front of Liberia. This militia committed countless atrocities across the nation. He forced more than 15,000 children, some as young as six, to fight.

Taylor also played a huge and ugly part in the civil war in Sierra Leone. In both countries, he allegedly committed virtually every type of war crime possible, including using child soldiers, conducting and ordering massacres, gang rapes and torture, and generally terrorizing millions.

By 2003, he was forced out of the Liberian presidency. On the run, he ended up on Interpol's most-wanted list. Eventually captured and brought to justice, he currently sits in a prison in the Netherlands waiting for the verdict in his trial on charges of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The West has long lambasted the civil and ethnic wars in Africa and used them as an excuse for creating harsh conditions for aid. U.S. political leaders have demanded that nations in Africa stop tyrannizing their citizens and build democratic and transparent governments. Those arguments have become a lot more hypocritical and toothless with new revelations regarding Taylor and his reign of oppression.

That the CIA would employ an unsavory character may perhaps not be news. Taylor was, however, a particularly egregious case, with a personal pathological drive that went on for years.

Although the CIA claims that releasing more details about its relationship would jeopardize U.S. security, it is essential that the whole truth be told. Too many died and suffered at Taylor's hands for the entire story not to come out.