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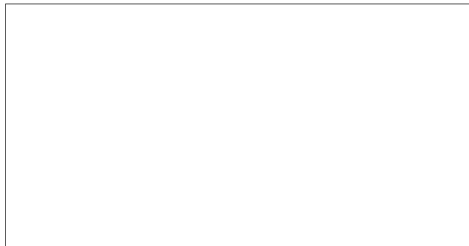
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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

15 February 1990

Liberia: Doe Grapples with Dissident Incursion [redacted]

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Summary

Liberian President Doe's hapless Army remains unable to suppress a seven week-old tribally-based insurrection in Nimba County in northern Liberia, the effects of which could further weaken his regime. The insurrection was spearheaded by a group of about 100 to 150 dissidents who--with some support from Libya and Burkina--infiltrated through Ivory Coast late last year intending to mount a coup. Although government troops captured plotters found in Monrovia, the rebels have gained the support of some 200 fellow tribesmen in Nimba. Military indiscipline and tactical and logistic problems have severely hampered government efforts to counter the rebels' hit and run attacks. Meanwhile, Army and rebel atrocities so far have driven an estimated 40 percent of the county's population into neighboring Ivory Coast and Guinea. [redacted]

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Although the fighting has not threatened the President's immediate hold on power, northern Liberia probably will remain unstable and without security for at least the next several months, aggravating ethnic animosities, regional tensions, and US-Liberian

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This typescript was prepared by [redacted] Africa Division, Office of African and Latin American Analysis, with contributions from [redacted]

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[redacted] Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Africa Division, ALA, [redacted]

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relations. The brutality and ethnic character of many of the Army's atrocities are likely to deepen domestic opposition to Doe's regime--especially as more inexperienced troops are sent to the area--and encourage more Nimba residents to flee or join the dissidents. The Army's ineffectiveness probably will enable the dissidents to continue to harass government forces and civilians for as long as their will and supplies hold out. Doe may try to deflect domestic and international criticism by blaming Washington for not offering lethal military assistance

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The Recent Incursion and Dissident Challenge

In late December, from 100 to 150 Liberian dissidents--members of one of several anti-Doe exile groups--entered Liberia from Ivory Coast intending to mount a coup against the Doe government. The plotters--apparently the recipients of modest Libyan training and funding--passed through Ivory Coast undetected from their safehaven in Burkina. Their scheme was ill-planned and executed, however, and they were poorly armed; some apparently hoped to rendezvous in Monrovia and seize weapons from a government armory. The dissidents include many former Liberian military officers and were organized by Charles Taylor, a former Liberian official and a fugitive from US justice, under the banner of his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL).¹

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Although government troops quickly captured the few plotters who reached Monrovia, fighting in northern Liberia's Nimba County--home of the dissidents' fellow Gio tribesmen--has picked up steam over the past 6 weeks. [Redacted] at least 200 hundred local residents probably have joined their rebel kin. Estimates of civilian casualties have ranged from 200 to 500, although precise figures are unlikely to become available. The rebels probably have lost a large number of men, but they still are able to launch hit-and-run attacks, inflicting casualties, capturing government weapons and ammunition, and keeping the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) on the defensive. The military has brought in reinforcements--there are now between 400 and 500 troops in Nimba--and evacuated border villages in an

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¹ See Appendix 1 for information on Charles Taylor and the NPFL.

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effort to isolate rebel forces, but [redacted] it could take up to 60 days to clear the border areas of dissidents. [redacted]

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The AFL's Poor Performance

Military Indiscipline. [redacted] the inability--or unwillingness--of AFL commanders to control their troops has contributed to the military's operational ineffectiveness and to atrocities against local tribesmen. Unable to distinguish among the dissidents, their civilian allies, and innocent civilians, the army has killed many innocent people [redacted]

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[redacted] Soldiers have refused to obey orders and generally have been more interested in personal gain than in fighting the rebels. They reportedly have commandeered everything from food to vehicles, and have made arrests primarily to extract bribes.

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Ethnic Tensions. AFL atrocities have fanned deep hostilities between local Gio tribesmen and members of Doe's Krahn tribe who dominate the military. [redacted] the dissidents may have killed Krahns and Mandingos in a deliberate attempt to stir up tribal animosities. Neighboring Guinea and Ivory Coast blame the atrocities for the flood of refugees into their countries. Reports of random killings have diminished in recent weeks since the AFL evacuated most of the towns along the Nimba-Ivory Coast border and declared a dusk-to-dawn curfew for the entire region. Still, the mostly Gio refugees say they are unwilling to return home because they fear more military violence as well as further ethnic score-settling by civilians [redacted]

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Tactical and Logistic Difficulties. The rebels' ability to conduct ambushes in Nimba's thickly forested areas has confounded and demoralized AFL troops--who are almost entirely lacking in counterinsurgency training--and given the rebels a clear tactical advantage. The military's strategy of retaking towns only to abandon them to the insurgents at nightfall has enabled relatively small groups of rebels to tie down large numbers of soldiers over extended periods. The soldiers' refusal to leave the main roads to pursue their attackers, because they fear the rebels' alleged magical powers, has allowed the dissidents free movement throughout the area. [redacted]

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[Redacted] aerial resupply to Nimba is provided twice daily by a Cessna 208 carrying troops, arms, and ammunition. Liberian troops in Nimba have exercised poor fire control and, [Redacted] at the current rate of usage, they will run out of ammunition soon. [Redacted]

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Regional Scapegoats

Doe has tried to deflect domestic criticism of the Army's mishandling of the Nimba situation by charging Ivory Coast, Burkina, and Libya with supporting the insurgents. Citing confessions by captured dissidents, he has claimed that these countries harbored, financed, trained, and equipped the rebels. The President's accusations pushed regional tensions to a flash point in early January when he asserted that his troops were prepared to cross the border to battle insurgents harbored by Ivory Coast. In response, Abidjan warned that it would defend its boundaries. Even though tempers have cooled in recent weeks, [Redacted] Monrovia still believes Ivory Coast tacitly supported the rebels and has sought unsuccessfully to enlist other regional leaders [Redacted]

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[Redacted] in criticizing Abidjan.
[Redacted]

Despite the confessions of the captured dissidents, outside support for the rebels was probably fairly modest, in our view.

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Responding to International Concerns

President Doe has been sensitive to the international outcry against AFL atrocities.

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[Redacted] unlike his dismissal of foreign accusations of military brutality after a coup attempt in 1985, Doe this time has tried to respond to criticism from the United States and Liberia's neighbors by shifting key military personnel and taking other measures to reduce tension in Nimba.

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Monrovia also is concerned about international pressures to reverse the tide of refugees streaming into neighboring Ivory Coast and Guinea. Both countries are ill-equipped to handle large numbers of refugees and have pleaded with Doe to resolve the situation in Nimba so the refugees can return home.

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[Redacted] Ivorian officials estimate that during January some 40,000 to 60,000 refugees crowded into small Ivorian border villages between Toulepleu and Danane. The isolation of Guinea's border areas has severely hampered accurate refugee counts in that country, but local officials and an international relief agency estimate that roughly 80,000 Liberians from Nimba have fled to Guinean border areas. Ivorian and Guinean officials have gained support in

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principle from the international community, but so far only a trickle of relief goods has reached the refugees [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Based on our observations of similar situations in the past, we believe organizational and logistic problems are likely to delay the delivery of adequate relief supplies for several more weeks, increasing the prospect for serious food shortages. [Redacted]

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Monrovia has tried to coax Liberian refugees back home, but has few resources to commit to the effort. Doe has commissioned the Liberian National Disaster Relief Committee, a poorly organized, normally dormant group, to provide food and basic government services as AFL troops clear parts of Nimba from threats of rebel attack, and Liberian legislators and other officials from Nimba have agreed to try to convince the refugees that it is safe to return. Meanwhile, the International Red Cross has been granted access to Nimba and has distributed limited quantities of rice, cooking oil, and other emergency supplies. [Redacted]

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President Still in Control...For Now

The fighting in Nimba has not yet threatened the President's hold on power. Doe's public appearances in recent weeks have helped ease popular anxiety about his ability to cope with the challenge. The major opposition parties apparently are abiding by public pledges not to exploit the situation. [Redacted]

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Outlook

The AFL's ineffectiveness probably will enable the Nimba dissidents to continue to harass military troops and civilians for at least several more months, despite Doe's appointment of relatively capable officials to direct the Nimba campaign. The rebels probably can survive by hiding in tiny off-road hamlets where AFL troops are unlikely to venture. Rebel operations will be limited not so much by AFL troop movements as by their small numbers and ability to capture weapons, ammunition, and other equipment from government forces. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] AFL discipline problems are likely to reemerge as the government sends in fresh, untrained troops recently recruited from largely criminal elements. A resulting increase in AFL atrocities would encourage more Nimba residents to flee or join the dissidents. As ammunition stocks dwindle,

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AFL troops probably will become even less willing to risk patrolling outside base camps, leaving the field open for expanded rebel activity. If rebel threats to attack Krahn towns in neighboring Grand Jide County--where villagers reportedly have armed themselves as a precaution--are carried out, ethnic tensions would worsen considerably.

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Liberian refugees are unlikely to return to their homes during the next several months without credible assurances that the government can protect them and provide relief assistance. Ivory Coast, on the other hand, has already programmed relief supplies for at least three months, with a likely extension to six months if warranted, although Guinean and Ivorian impatience with Monrovia's ineffectiveness is likely to grow if the situation drags on.

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Fallout from the dissident incursion is likely to complicate Doe's already chronic domestic problems. The President's tribal reconciliation campaign, which has helped lower resentment of the regime in recent years, has been set back dramatically by ethnic animosities fanned during the recent fighting. Hostility among tribal groups within the AFL is likely to continue

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especially if fresh troops are recruited from tribal groups distrustful of their officers and each other. Over time, senior military officers may become increasingly reluctant to bolster Doe if he continues to fail to provide adequate materiel and personnel to units fighting in Nimba.

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The economy of Nimba--considered a vital economic belt--is likely to be hardpressed if the fighting is not halted soon. Logging operations have been suspended in much of the county. Some of the recently harvested rice crop probably has been destroyed or stolen, and if refugees do not return by April to plant rice, a large portion of Nimba's annual crop--which accounts for 20 percent of Liberia's rice production--will be lost. Although iron mining has not been disrupted, a wider insurgency could jeopardize ore shipments from Yekepa to the port at Buchanan.

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Doe's difficulties in coping with the incursion and its aftermath are likely to aggravate tensions between Liberia and the United States. Monrovia is likely to blame Washington for not offering lethal military assistance

[Redacted] He may claim that Qadhafi has targeted him because of his relationship with Washington

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Doe also may see the upheaval in Nimba as another excuse to further delay cooperation with the IMF in designing a new economic reform

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program for Liberia. Even though Doe reportedly remains committed to holding national elections next year, wider unrest could lead him to cite voter registration difficulties as a justification to postpone the vote. Meanwhile, the US is likely to come under increasing pressure from several quarters to more strongly criticize the Doe regime as reports of human rights abuses continue to surface, especially if Doe shows signs of backpeddling on political and economic reforms. [redacted]

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Appendix 1: Chronology of Events

December 1989

26 Dissidents who infiltrated from Ivory Coast capture Nimba County towns of Butlo (on Ivorian border) and Kpetu.

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27 Military placed on alert, troops dispatched to Nimba under command of General Smith. Dissidents attack government forces in Bahn.

28 Security checkpoints set up around Monrovia.

30 Doe broadcasts first public statement about coup attempt, assuring listeners "all is well".

31 Fighting begins at Kahnple. Dissidents capture resupply convoy with substantial quantities of arms and munitions. Troops close highway between Sanniquellie and Yekepa.

January 1990

1 Fighting in Kahnple continues. Charles Taylor, in BBC interview, claims to command rebels, calls for Liberians to join the struggle to remove the Doe government. Butlo recaptured by military.

2 Kahnple recaptured by military, but hit-and-run incidents continue throughout Nimba.

3 [Redacted]

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4

Robert Phillips, amnestied supporter of a failed coup attempt in 1985 and opposition party activist, brutally murdered in Monrovia, allegedly by uniformed men.

Doe publicly indicts Ivory Coast for harboring Liberian dissidents and allowing its territory to be used as a "springboard" for rebel incursions; warns "we know how to cross borders," fanning speculation that hot pursuit is planned.

6

Ivorian President Houphouet-Boigny denies Doe's allegations of support for rebels, stresses humanitarian nature of Abidjan's policy of allowing presence of unarmed exiles.

9

US Ambassador makes formal demarche concerning human rights abuses by Liberian military, continues to offer disaster assistance and non-lethal aid.

10

Ivorian Foreign Minister makes demarche informing Doe that Ivory Coast would defend its territory against incursions, but stresses "passionate" commitment to peace.

Government displays captured dissidents at press conference; dissidents claim Libyan and Burkinabe support.

13

Heavy fighting at Zali, on border with Ivory Coast.

15

Fighting moves further south, incidents reported at Blewali.

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[Redacted] refugees in Guinea and Ivory Coast exceed 50,000. Doe threatens publicly to execute soldiers who harm civilians.

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24 Rebels retake Kahnple and seize weapons, also attack AFL troops near Zogowe. General Craig arrives in Nimba County to take command of the anti-insurgency force, replacing General Smith, who suffers from ill health and has been unable to maintain discipline or morale.

26 AFL retakes Kahnple. [Redacted]

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29 Doe accuses US of focusing on military abuses rather than the "Libyan-backed incursion".

30 Guinean President Conte and Sierra Leone's President Momoh meet with Doe in Monrovia to urge restraint. Offer expressions of solidarity but refuse to join Doe in blaming Ivory Coast.

February

1 AFL retakes and occupies Kahnple. [Redacted]

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7 Liberian refugee count in Guinea may exceed 80,000, with another 60,000 estimated in the Ivory Coast.

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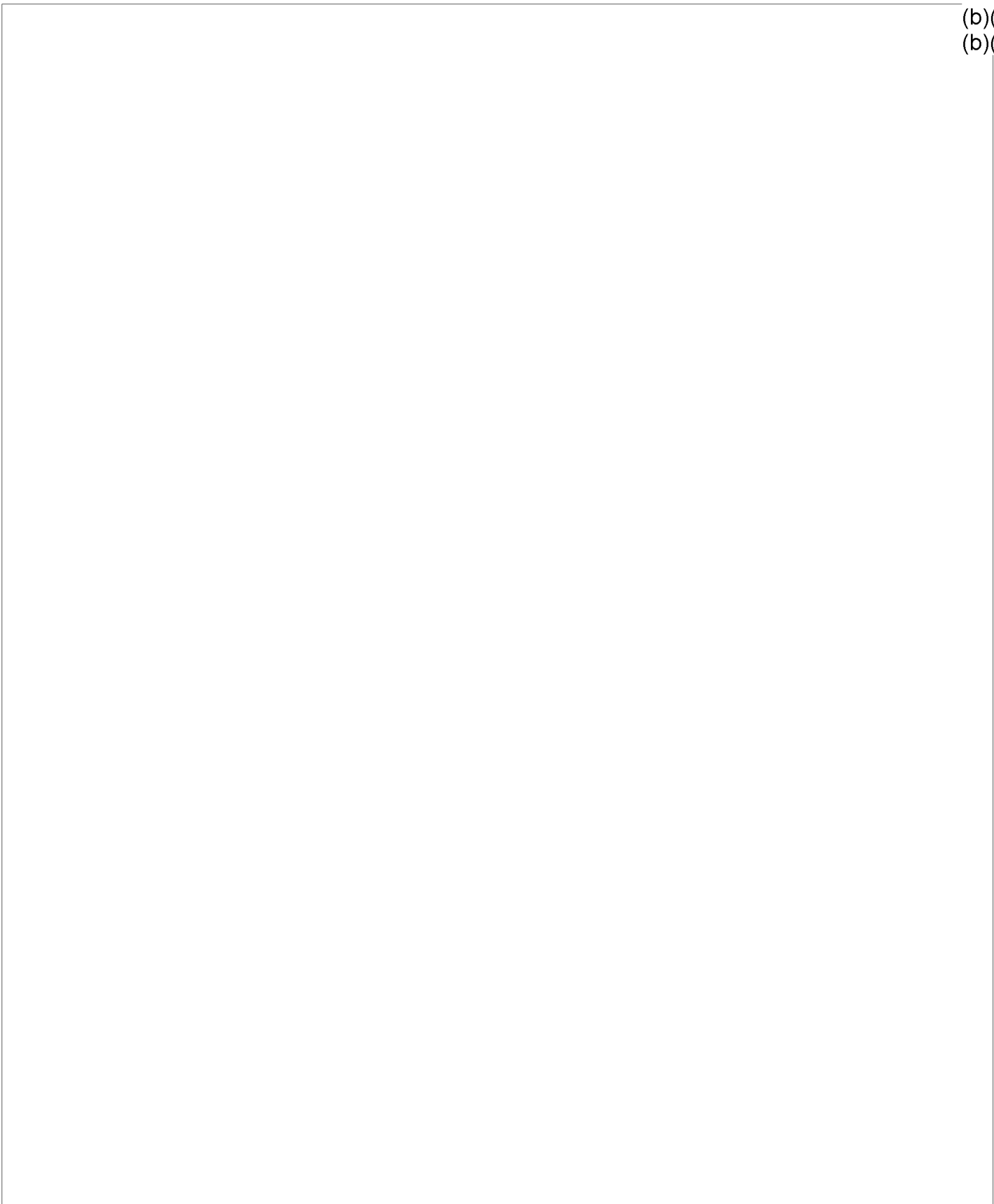
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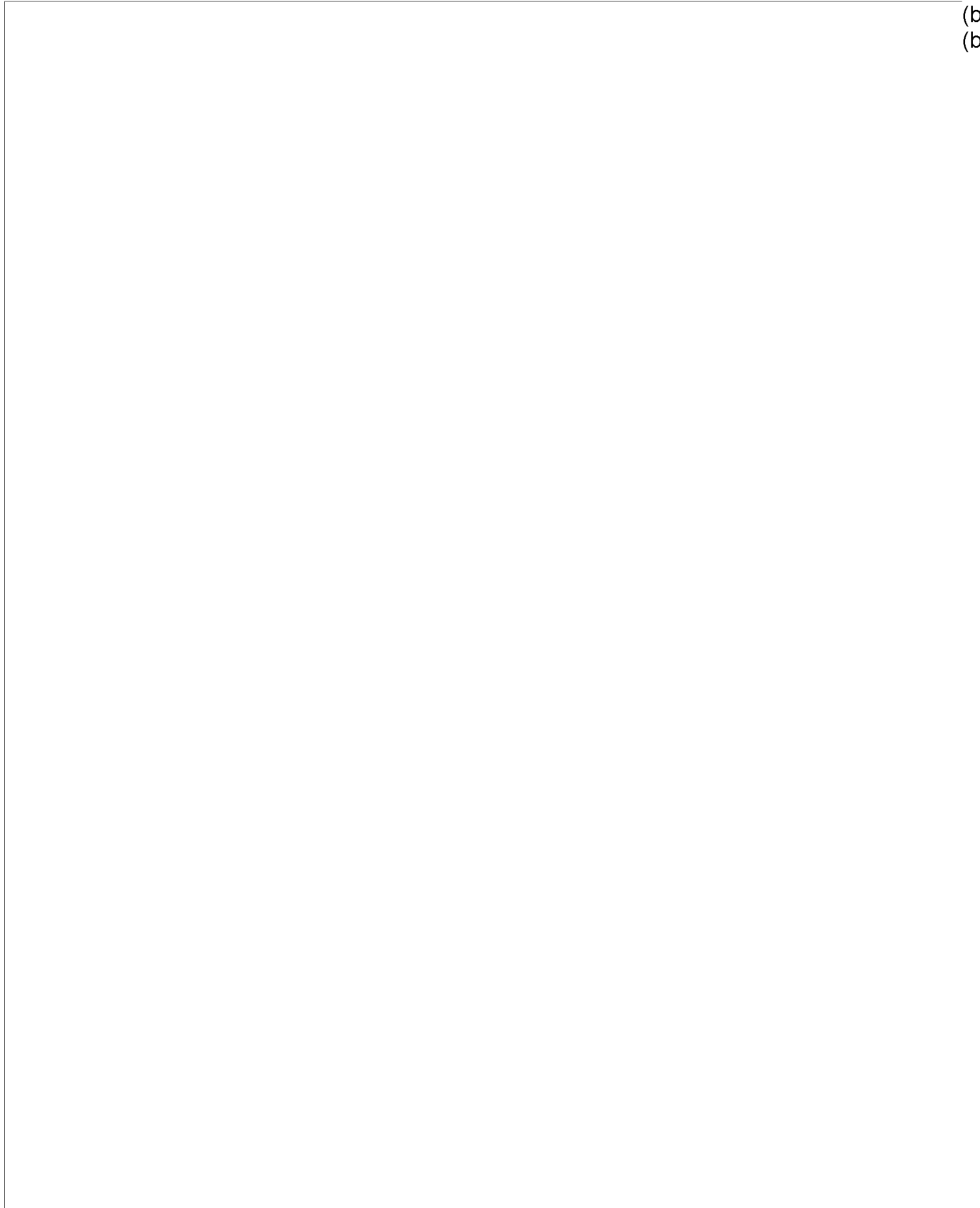
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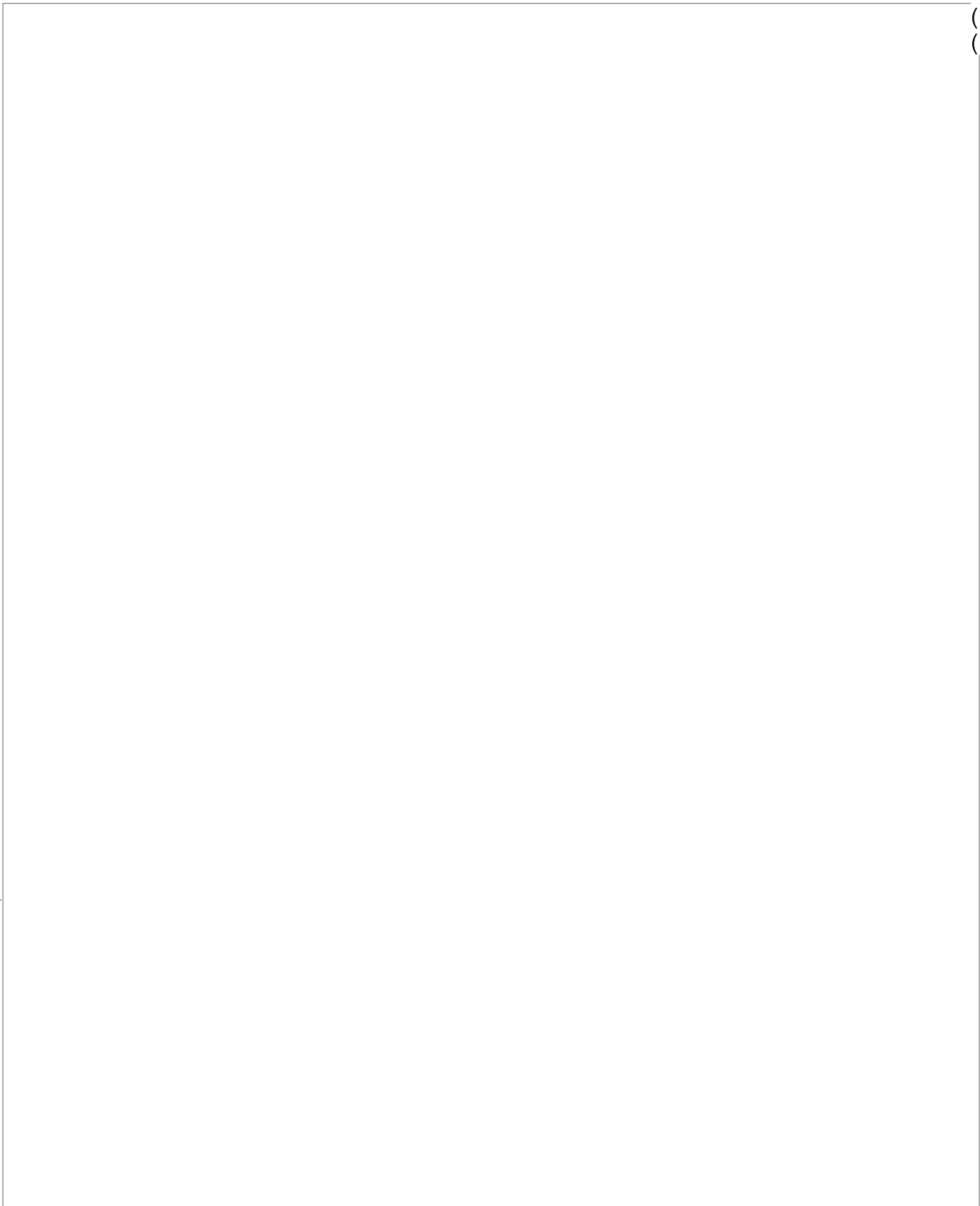
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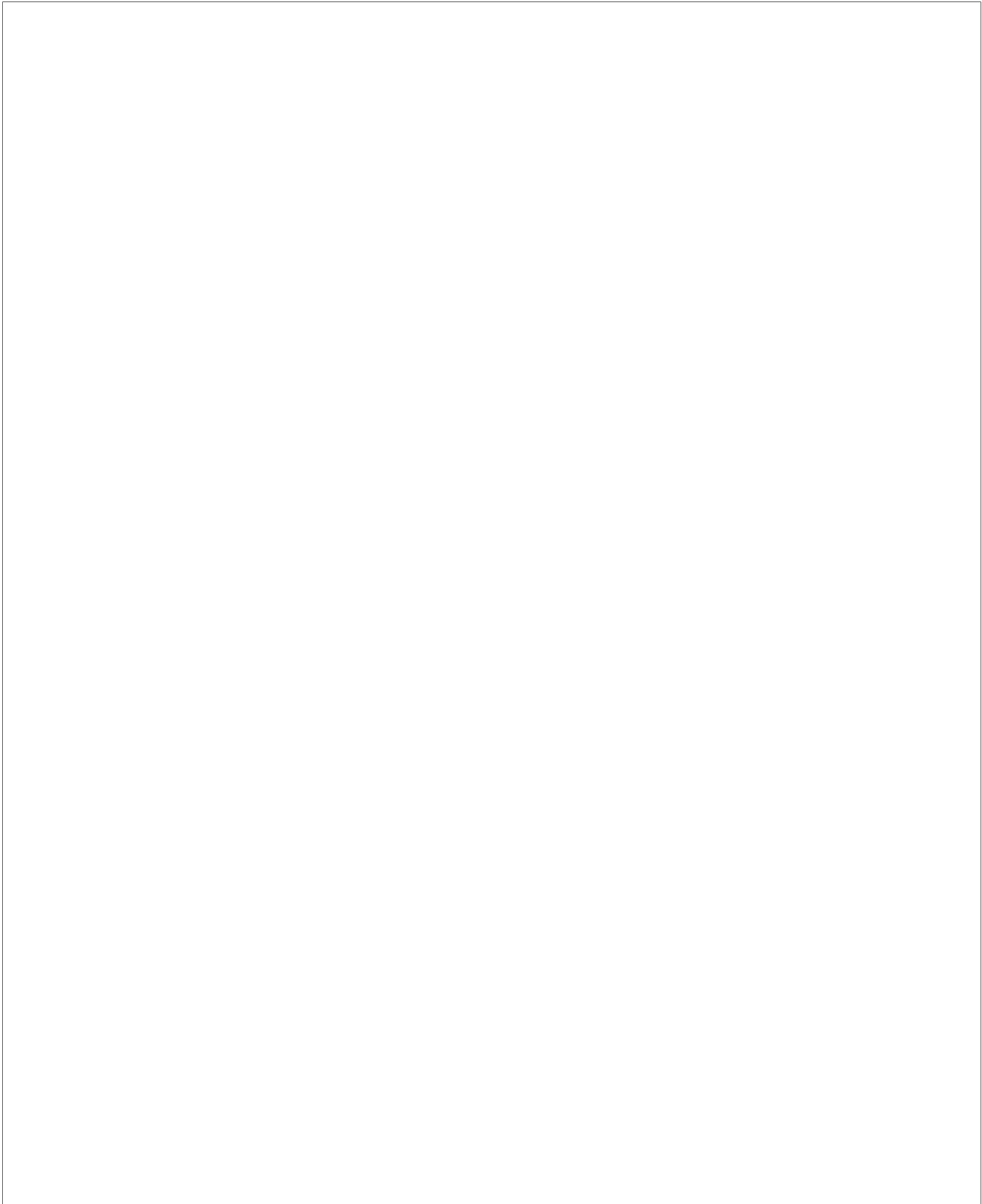
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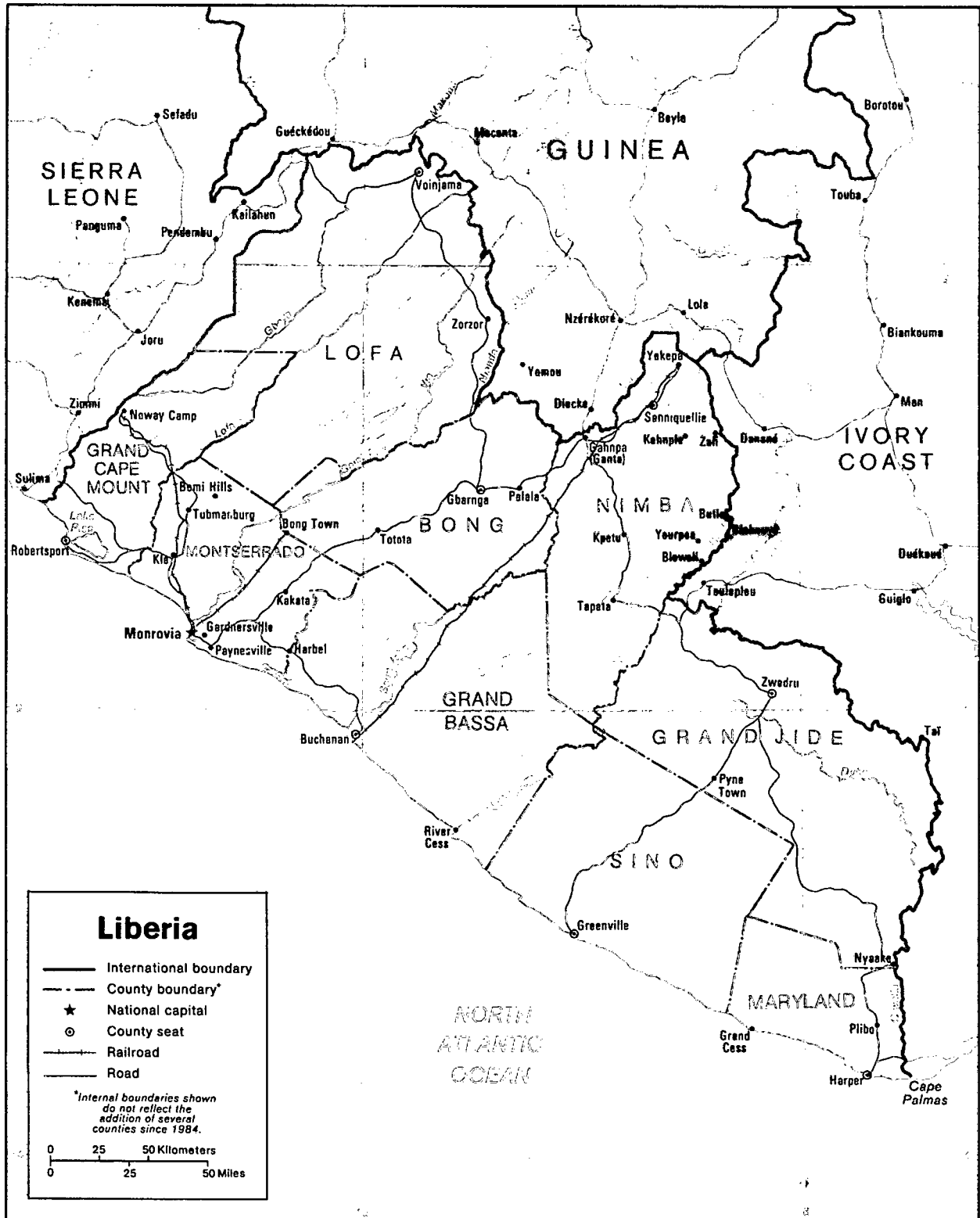
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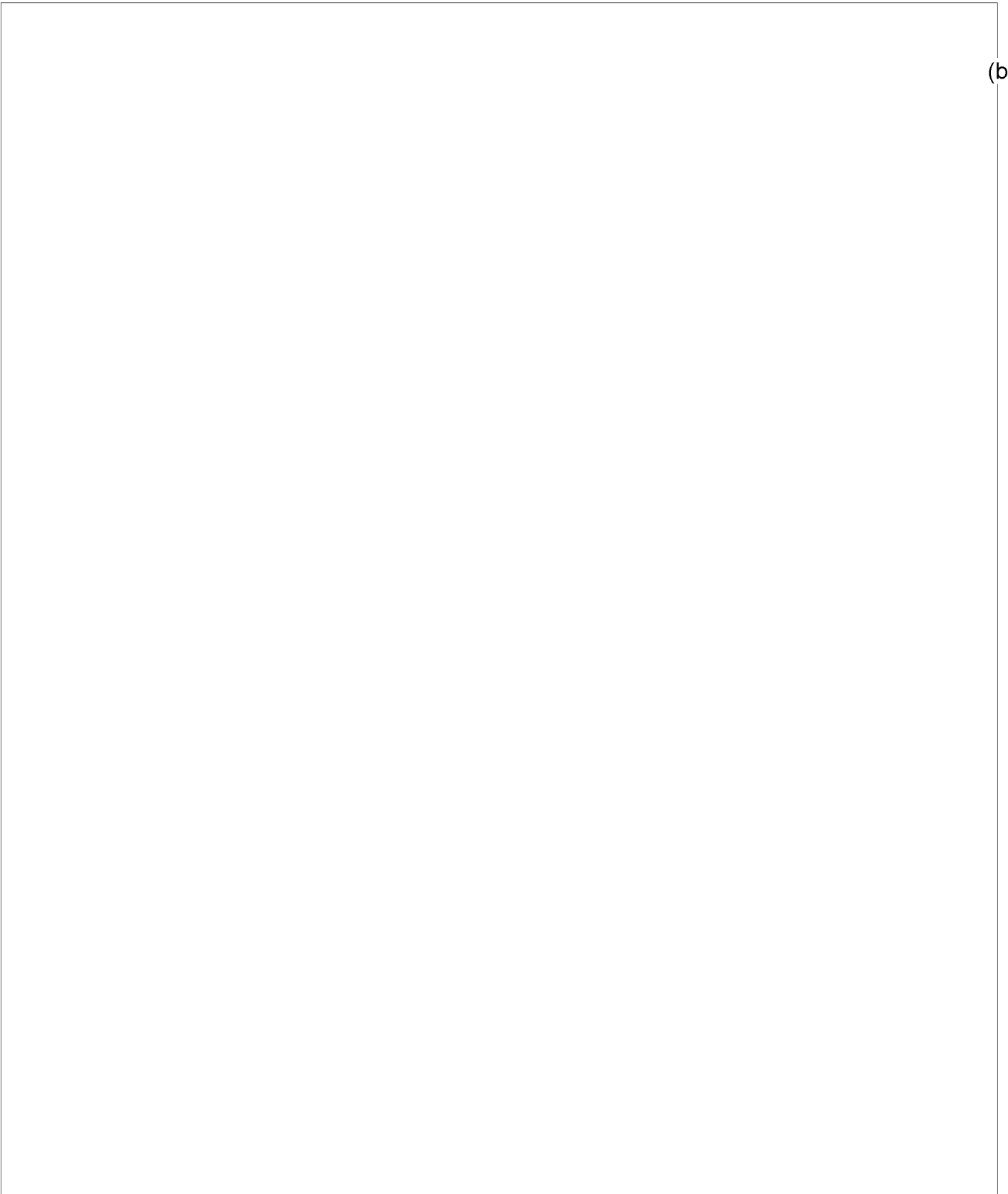
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