

Current Intelligence Country Handbook
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Current Intelligence Country Handbook

DAHOMEY



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DAHOMY

I. Political

Dahomey's chronic instability produced an abrupt change of regime in December 1965 when the country's military leaders seized power in a bloodless coup. It was the third time since independence in 1960 that the army had intervened to force the resignation of a president. On the two previous occasions—an army-supported, trade-union, urban revolt in October 1963 and a limited military coup in November 1965—the army quickly relinquished control to a civilian government. Following the most recent extra-legal change of government, former army chief of staff Christophe Soglo assumed the presidency. He apparently intends to hold power indefinitely. Barring a sudden and unexpected overthrow of the Soglo regime, it looks as if Dahomey will have a military government for at least the next two years.

Underlying Dahomey's instability is a deteriorating economy, a perpetually quarreling leadership, and strong regional and ethnic differences. For more than a decade these deeply rooted differences were reflected in a struggle for power among the country's top regional leaders: Sourou-Migan Apithy (Southeast); Justin Ahomadegbe (Southwest); and Hubert Maga (Center and North). Each of these leaders was backed by regional, tribal, or economic interest groups and championed by various opportunists. None had a broad political base, and their three-cornered competition usually resulted in an unstable alliance of two leaders against the third. The military takeover in 1965 was motivated in part by the army's desire to halt factional maneuvering by civilian politicians and in part by the personal ambition of some officers. Ex-presidents Ahomadegbe, Maga, and Apithy have not been politically active since the coup, but cannot be counted out in any future turning of the Dahomean political merry-go-round.

General Soglo has suspended the constitution and dissolved the parliament, local government bodies, and political parties. He has announced that he will hold elections and install a civilian government only after stability has been achieved and the Five Year Plan (1966-70) is well underway. The Soglo government is staffed primarily by civilian technicians and appears more competent than its predecessors. It is, on the whole, moderate, although there are some

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liberal elements within it which chafe at some of the regime's conservative policies.

Soglo may have set up a competing source of power in a 36-member advisory group called the National Renovation Committee. This committee, which includes representatives of labor, youth, elders, and the old political parties, is a political hodgepodge. Although dominated by its military elements it includes several influential leftist agitators and troublemakers. The committee apparently looks on itself as an incipient legislature and has on occasion criticized government initiatives. Soglo, and the small group of army officers who wield essential power in the government, view the committee purely as a consultative organization and would probably not hesitate to dissolve it if it became recalcitrant.

Probably the most serious potential challenge to Soglo's authority lies within the army itself. In naming Major Alley as chief of staff, Soglo gave up his personal power base, and must now rely on Alley's loyalty and support. For the time being Alley and the small army appear to be solidly backing the regime, but a future conflict between Soglo and his more competent chief of staff cannot be ruled out. Alley's political views and ambitions remain something of a question mark, but there are indications that a regime headed by him might be more leftist than the present one.

2. Economic

The problems posed by Dahomey's economic underdevelopment and budgetary deficits have been repeatedly exploited by political opposition elements to undermine the position of the national leadership of the moment. Dahomey, however, would be unable to pay its own way even with the most effective leadership. It is a poor country, with grave economic problems stemming from a lack of natural resources, primitive methods of agricultural cultivation, and a shortage of investment capital. The virtually stagnant economy depends on palm products (palm kernels and palm oil) which account for approximately two-thirds of Dahomean exports. The production of export crops has increased only very slightly over the past ten years. Production of subsistence crops increased slightly from 1959-1963 but thereafter declined somewhat.

Dahomey is burdened with an unusually large group of semi-educated men who are unemployed and restless. This group has been enlarged by the migration of the rural underemployed into the southern cities and by the forced repatriation to these cities of Dahomean

wage-earners who had migrated to other African countries to work in commerce and civil service. There are perhaps 20,000 unemployed out of Cotonou's approximately 100,000 inhabitants. The unions have tried to obtain economic advantages for their 25,000 or so members but have been hampered by poor organization, lack of funds, and quarreling leadership. The civil service is grossly overmanned and contributes to the large budgetary deficits which the country has had since 1961.

France has regularly made up the budgetary deficits but has repeatedly threatened that it cannot be counted on to bail Dahomey out indefinitely. Nevertheless, as of early 1966 Paris appeared reconciled to providing budget support at about the 1965 level of 750 million francs CFA (\$3 million). France's contribution to Dahomey's Five Year Plan was under negotiation in March 1966. In 1965, the total annual French aid level—including budgetary—was about \$17 million.

Under French pressure, Dahomey has embarked, without notable success, on an austerity program. The Soglo government has maintained the 25 percent cut in civil service salaries instituted by the Ahomadegbe government, launched a new five year plan, and eagerly sought foreign investors. Prospects for economic development are, however, gloomy.

3. International Relations

Dahomey's foreign policy has fluctuated with the rise and fall of its key politicians, with a pivotal issue in recent years being recognition of Communist China. Until the downfall of President Maga in October 1963 Dahomey was counted as a firm friend of Nationalist China and one of the most conservative states of Africa. Under the Apithy-Ahomadegbe regime, the country attempted to pursue a more nonaligned policy, recognizing Communist China in November 1964. The economic aid it hoped for never materialized, and one of the first things General Soglo did was to suspend relations with Communist China and expel all the Chinese Communists. In April 1966 the Soglo government was negotiating an economic assistance agreement with Nationalist China, with recognition hinging on the size of Taiwan's aid.

Economic necessity and a long political tradition dictate the regime's close ties with France. France is Dahomey's major trading partner, receiving 75 percent of the country's exports. Paris provides budgetary support, capital for economic development, training and equipment for the military forces. Through its diplomatic representatives

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in Dahomey and through French technical counselors attached to various ministries it is able to exercise considerable influence over government operations. Dahomey's need for additional foreign investment is great; however, the Soglo regime has been energetically seeking to diversify its political and economic associations. Dahomey maintains diplomatic ties with the USSR and several East European Communist countries, but these contacts have so far resulted only in cultural exchange and minor economic agreements. None of these countries has given a firm indication that it is willing to match or even supplement France as an aid donor.

In African affairs Dahomey's major interest lies in regional groupings which might be economically profitable. It tends, however, to be an unsteady partner in such alliances because of a fear that it might lose out on a more advantageous arrangement elsewhere. Dahomey is a member of the conservative Ivory Coast-dominated Council of the Entente and of the moderate African and Malagasy Common Organization (OCAM). It plays a minor role in the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and has never had many illusions about being a leader on the African continent.

4. Subversion

There is no Communist Party in Dahomey, nor is there any organized left-wing intellectual movement. Considerable discontent exists, however, among the unemployed, students, labor leaders, and politicians both in and out of the administration. In the spring of 1965 the Ahomadegbe government arrested and later released several members of a group called the "Committee of 104," an alleged subversive organization rumored to be backed by ex-President Apithy. Although there is as yet no significant organized opposition to the Soglo regime, a number of anti-government tracts—apparently put out by followers of either Ahomadegbe or Apithy—have been seized. Northern tribal supporters of ex-President Maga, who is now in Paris, possess some disruptive potential, particularly since the release from prison of northern tribal leader Chabi Mama. For the present things appear to be quiet in this area, however. Soviet officials in Dahomey have been fairly active in making contacts with political and trade union leaders but have not gained the support of any key leaders or groups. Factors favoring the government's survival are the apathy and passivity of most of the rural population, the inability of the varied opposition to unite around a program or leader, French pressures and influence, and the support of the army.

5. Ethnic Problems

Marked sociological, geographic, and historic differences separate the people of the north and south of Dahomey. These differences have been the cause of sharp conflict historically and until the military coup of December 1965 shaped the struggle for power between leaders of the two regions. The southern tribes—comprising some 60 percent of Dahomey's population—consist of Adja, Fon, Goun, Aizo, and Yoruba. They have the highest literacy rates, inhabit the most fertile and developed area of the country, and dominate the present government. The Northern tribes—of whom the Bariba are the most important—are mostly poor and illiterate. They have been inadequately represented in the central government since the downfall of northern-born President Maga. In March 1964 a combination of regional and ethnic animosity erupted into violence as Bariba tribesmen from Parakou attacked southerners living in that city. Army troops had to be used to restore order. Such incidents are uncommon, however. Dahomey is also troubled by rivalries within the south itself, where local leaders in Abomey, Cotonou, and Porto Novo tend to see the central government as a means by which they may gain advantages for their town and undercut rival communities.

Chronology of Key Events

- 1892 Area of modern Dahomey brought under French administration.
- 1902 Dahomey officially designated a colony of France.
- 1958 Dahomey becomes an autonomous republic within the French Community.
- 1959 Hubert Maga becomes premier.
- 1960 (August) Dahomey becomes independent.
(December) National Assembly elections; Maga elected president and Sourou-Migan Apithy vice president.
- 1963 (October) Maga regime overthrown by trade union and other urban elements whose leaders urge army chief of staff Christophe Soglo to assume temporary control.
(December) The Parti Democratique Dahomean (PDD) is formed as a national unity party.
- 1964 (January) New constitution approved by popular referendum. Apithy elected president and Ahomadegbe vice president in uncontested elections.

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- 1965 (November) The army, with a minimum show of force, pressures both Apithy and Ahomadegbe to resign. A provisional government, headed by National Assembly President Congacou (next in line according to the constitution) takes over.
- (December) General Soglo seizes power in a bloodless military coup, suspends 1964 constitution, local government bodies, and all political parties.

Selected Factual Data

LAND

44,700 sq. mi., southern third of country is most fertile; cultivated land 13%, forests 19%, remainder fallow, vacant, pasture, waste

PEOPLE

Population: 2.4 million; males 15-49, 568,000; 285,000 fit for mil. service; about 25,000 males and 20,000 females reach mil. age (18) annually; both sexes liable for mil. service

Ethnic Divisions: 99% Africans (Fon, Adja, Aizo, Yoruba, Bariba, Fulani, Dendi, Somba, Pila-Pila), 0.4% Europeans

Religion: 12% Muslim, 8% Christian, 80% animist

Language: French official; Fon and Yoruba most common vernaculars in south, at least six major tribal languages in north

Literacy: about 10%

Labor force: 85% of labor force engaged in agr., 15% civil service, artisans, and ind.

Organized labor: approximately 75% of wage earners; divided among two major and several minor unions

GOVERNMENT

Capital: Porto Novo (official), Cotonou (de facto)

Regional breakdown: 6 regions

Type: independent republic since 1960; regime established following revolution in 1963 was replaced Nov. 1965 by a provisional government

Branches: elected president and vice president, unicameral legislature, independent judiciary

Government leader: General Christophe Soglo

Suffrage: universal for adults

Elections: last elections Jan. 1964; election uncontested, with regime candidates receiving over 95% of votes; new elections pending

Political parties and leader: Dahomey Democratic Party (PDD) only party; led by Secretary General Gabriel Lozes
Communists: some; probably some sympathizers
Member of: UN (ILO, FAO, UNESCO, WHO, ICAO, UPU, ITU, WMO), Afro-Malagasy Common Organization, Organization of African Unity, EEC (associate)

ECONOMY

GDP: about US\$140 million (1963), under \$75 per capita
Agriculture: major cash crop is oil palms; peanuts, cotton, tobacco also produced; main food crops—corn and root crops; animal husbandry
Major industries: light and processing industries
Electric power: 7,000 kw. capacity (1964); 16.5 million kw.-hr. consumed (1963)
Exports: \$13.2 million (1964); about three-fourths palm kernels and palm oil; other agricultural products
Imports: \$31.4 million (1964); consumer goods, cement, fuels
Trade: mostly with France
Aid: French aid, over \$15 million a year; US economic through (FY 1965) \$8.7 million, now about \$1.0 million a year
Exchange rate: 247 Communauté Financière Africaine francs=US\$1
Fiscal year: calendar year

COMMUNICATIONS

Railroads: 359 mi., all meter gage (3'3 $\frac{3}{8}$ "'); government owned
Highways: 3,828 mi.; 369 mi. paved, 2,529 mi. otherwise improved, 930 mi. unimproved
Inland waterways: 445 mi. navigable
Ports: 1 principal (Cotonou), 1 minor
Civil Air: no major transport aircraft
Airfields: 7 total (including 1 inactive airfield site); 1 with permanent-surface runway; 2 with runways 4,000–7,999 ft.
Telecommunications: telephone service concentrated in south, 3,100 telephones; telegraph limited, but more extensive than telephone; fair radio coverage with 1 AM station

DEFENSE FORCES

Personnel; army 1,060, air force 26, gendarmerie 1,270, French mission 50
Major ground units: 3 infantry battalions
Aircraft: 6 (no jets)
Supply: dependent on France

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Military budget: for fiscal year ending 31 Dec. 1965, \$4,106,000;
less than 13% of total budget

National Intelligence Survey (NIS) Material

The following sections of the NIS are relevant:

NIS Area 50M (Dahomey)

GENERAL SURVEY

Gazetteer

NIS Area 50 (West Africa)

Sec 35 Ports and Naval Facilities

NIS Area 50-II (West Africa, Southern Part)

Sec 23 Weather and Climate

NIS Area 50C (French West Africa, Togo & Spanish Sahara)

Sec 21 Military Geographic Regions

Sec 22 Coasts and Landing Beaches

Sec 24 Topography

Sec 25 Urban Areas

Sec 31 Railway

Sec 32 Highway

Sec 91-94 Map and Chart Appraisal

Map

The best available general reference map is: US Army Map Service; *World (Africa) 1:1,000,000*; Series 1301, sheets NB 31 and NC 31; 1961.

