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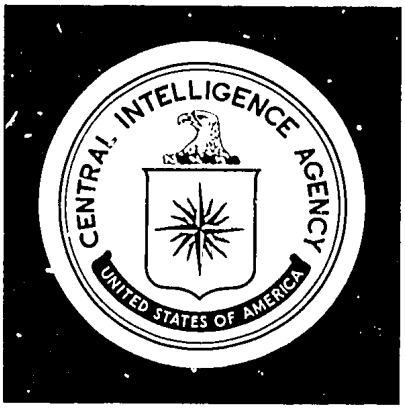

DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

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Haiti: New President's First Year

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New President's First Year

Jean-Claude Duvalier's government has established its credentials at home and abroad well enough to attract the interest of international lending agencies, foreign governments, and private investors. Modest economic improvement has been made, and the government has lost no chance to proclaim that economic and social development are its main objectives. The government has yet to face a serious challenge; tensions between its key members have so far proved to be self-adjusting. The increasing power of the unsavory Luckner Cambronne, Minister of Interior and Defense, has caused and will continue to cause resentment. No threat has arisen either from the exiles or from local sources, Communist and non-Communist. While the government has not won the hearts of the social and economic elite, it has won a more or less interested neutrality. Moreover, the young President appears to enjoy popular sympathy and even the affection of the peasant majority.

The combination of Haiti's enormous development problems, meager resources, and inexperienced leadership is a formidable obstacle to the realization of social and economic advance. It is possible that eagerness to grasp new opportunities, ignorance of the techniques of developmental planning, and competition for personal gain may prove overpowering. Still, the new government has brought some material and psychological benefits, and there are grounds for cautious optimism it will bring more.

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Old and young Duvalier

...heir but not prisone · of the past?

Phase One

In its first year, the government of President for Life Jean-Claude Duvalier has worked hard to establish its credentials at home and abroad. It moved to rid Haiti of the evil reputation and isolation incurred during Francois Duvalier's long rule.

At home, there has been no letup in the campaign begun on the first day of the new administration to lighten and enliven the atmosphere. Particularly abusive National Security Volunteers commanders were dismissed, and the force itself was reined in, relieving the landscape of a threatening presence and neutralizing locally powerful old Duvalierists who might have balked at the new leadership. The Ton Ton Macoute, the elder Duvalier's private terrorist squad, is no longer in evidence. The "Duvalier Revolution" has been treated with reverence, but the new administration has insistently emphasized its concern with its economic development aspects. In his judiciously staged public appearances, the new President has tried to capitalize on his youth both to seek indulgence for inexperience and to underscore the idea that his government is vigorous and forward-looking, heir but not prisoner of the past.

Haitians who left the country during the elder Duvalier's regime have been urgently invited to return and lend their skills and energies to the work of development. The sentences of convicted anti-government conspirators were recently commuted from death to prison terms. Visitors familiar with Haiti have remarked on the contrast between today's relaxed atmosphere and the enveloping apprehension of the recent past. The foreign press has been courted in an obvious effort to document and publicize the new departures. The response has been gratifying. Foreign investment projects that limped along during the last days of the late dictator's administration are being pushed ahead. The young President has discreetly but publicly acknowledged that his father's administration was not without blemish.

Not only has the foreign press been invited to come and see for itself, but invitations have been extended to a wide range of officials of other governments, international organizations, and business interests. Diplomatic relations with

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Nicaragua's Somoza pays a visit.

Costa Rica and Ecuador have been renewed. Haiti is hopeful that the warm reception given its delegation to the Conference of Caribbean Foreign Ministers in Caracas last November portends renewal of ties with Venezuela, the only important Latin American country with which Haiti does not have relations. Officials of the Dominican Republic and Haiti have exchanged visits, and Dominican President Joaquin Balaguer has accepted an invitation to come to Haiti. President Somoza of Nicaragua so enjoyed his February visit that he extended his stay by a day.

President Duvalier has expressed his intention to visit world capitals to underline the new look in Haitian foreign policy. A Haitian Government mission to Europe and the Middle East headed by Minister of Information Fritz Cineas and staffed with planning and economics technicians began its tour in Paris on 17 April. Officials of international organizations have remarked favorably on the unexpected professionalism of the Haitian officials with whom they have dealt. The high point of the foreign contacts was the special mission, headed by the Minister of Interior and Defense Cambronne, which came to Washington 13-17 March. Contrary to expectations, the mission did not press for aid or grants, concentrating instead upon explaining the changes the new government has made and the plans it has for the future.

Underlying these efforts to project a new image has been an anxious concern with security and national defense. There were political motives behind the organization of the Leopards, an elite counter-insurgency unit, but there was also a genuine concern with self-defense. The shortcomings of the nearly non-existent navy (two small coastal craft, neither of which is really seaworthy) and an almost equally deficient air force prompted the government to buy patrol boats and helicopters and to negotiate for other modern aircraft. It has sought US military credits for additional materiel. The concern with arms is in part a hang-over from the previous regime's preoccupation with external and internal threats to security, but it stems as well from a legitimate desire to overcome real deficiencies. In their present state, the Haitian armed forces could not repel a well-armed attack. That neither the Dominican Republic, Haiti's traditional enemy, nor Cuba has shown any sign of

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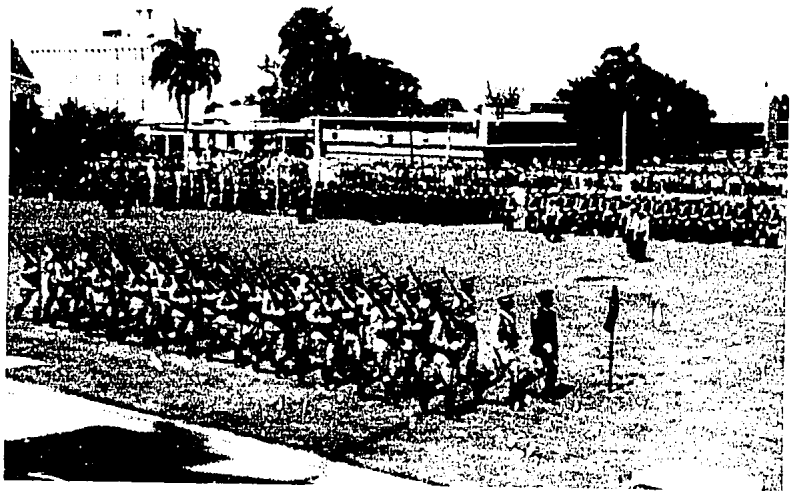

Cadets march in review.

making such an attempt has not allayed Haitian apprehension. The confusion in the various exile groups, lack of support within Haiti, and the hostile terrain reduce for the present the prospect of successful attack from that quarter.

However superficial the domestic changes have been, they have afforded the Haitian people a respite from repression and harassment. The government is becoming a familiar fixture, and the indifference toward it of the social and economic elite has given way, if not to enthusiasm, at least to neutrality.

Phase Two

In his speech to the National Assembly on 17 April, President Duvalier described his mission thus: "To increase national production, raise per capita income, diversify the national economy without ever losing sight of the social objectives of the Duvalierist Revolution." The President cited increased exports, new agricultural and tourist activity, larger tax revenues, and additional electric power capacity as the major sources of funds for economic improvement. In contrast to his address last year to the same body, in which he also emphasized modest improvements in the economy, the President was more specific about Haiti's needs for multilateral and bilateral assistance.

The speech is in a sense the climax of Phase One. The government has done as much as it can to achieve the essential but intangible preliminaries of establishing its legitimacy and demonstrating Haiti's interest in regularized relations with the rest of the world. The effort to convince the Haitians and the world that things have changed for the better in Haiti has been accompanied by a realistic, and dignified, acknowledgment that Haiti's material poverty and related social ills are so great that foreign help is essential to any real improvement.

The tangible and intangible obstacles to economic development are many and complex. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Most Haitians live poorly on tiny, privately owned farms, outside the money economy. Political turmoil arising from conflict between ruthless, opportunistic politicians has deprived the

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country of protective political institutions and has kept its social and economic system at a primitive level. The government's urgent overtures to the exiles has a public relations aspect, but it also reflects the lack of skilled manpower. While some members of the new government are trained and talented technicians, their number is far too small to cope with the purely technical demands that modest development projects make. Haiti is so severely deficient in Western 20th Century economic and social organization that even in ideal circumstances—and the present ones are far from ideal—the benefits of economic growth and development would be a long time reaching the non-participating majority.

Judging from the sympathetic treatment the world press has given the new government on its first anniversary, the effort to erase the impression of Haiti as a pitiable and despised outcast has succeeded. The future will require more—an increase in foreign investment to permit the start or acceleration of development projects. This, in turn, will not only strain the country's limited human and material resources but will introduce new tensions into the government.

The Evolving Collegium

The young President's government is actually a collegium of cabinet members, key military officials and his mother, the powerful Madame Duvalier. Early speculation that the style and priorities of the new government were not the result of a collegial consensus but of the prevailing influence of Luckner Cambronne, firmly supported and advised by Madame Duvalier, has been pretty well confirmed. Any lingering doubt about Cambronne's position was dispelled in March when he headed the special mission to Washington. Cambronne was clearly the undisputed leader of that mission.

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Right-hand man of the late dictator, Cambronne is by all odds the most energetic, strongest, shrewdest, and one of the most powerful

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President Duvalier and his Mother

members of the government. His unscrupulousness and avarice are legendary. Lifted from poverty to riches and power by the elder Duvalier, his formidable energies and service to the Duvaliers, past and present, are powerful assets. On the other hand, his impulsiveness and greed, the many enemies created by his extortion and bullying on behalf of Duvalier senior, and his blatant exercise of influence in the new government at the expense of other ambitious and loyal Duvalierists have made him many enemies and are liabilities. Impressive as his position is, he is by no means invulnerable. Although President Duvalier has publicly praised Cambronne in private, the President has restrained Cambronne's attempts to overstep his authority.

Should Cambronne entertain the idea of taking over the government, urged perhaps as much by the desire to protect his financial and personal interests as by a desire for total power, his chance of success would be problematic. Not only does he have a wealth of enemies, but he would have difficulty in consolidating military support. The three major units of the armed forces are independently commanded. Although General Claude Raymond is chief of staff of the armed forces, he does not control the military. The commanders of the Presidential Guard, the Dessalines Battalion, and the Port-au-Prince Police guard their prerogatives zealously. This compartmentation protects against any concerted military move against the civil authority.

A conspicuous alteration in the make-up of the collegium would be particularly inconvenient just as international lending agencies, foreign governments, and investors are beginning to show an interest in Haiti. The importance of demonstrating that the new government is a permanent and positive force appears to have been generally accepted over the past year and has probably served to unify the collegium and defer dissent. The Cambronne/Duvalier alliance, and hence the stability of the collegium, was reinforced last summer when the President's sister and private secretary, Marie-Denise Dominique, sought to downgrade Cambronne and extend her own influence. She and her husband Max, then ambassador to France, were sent back to Paris. The following January, Ambassador Dominique was publicly and abruptly relieved of his post. Mrs. Dominique has apparently accepted the setback for the moment, but her known rancor against Cambronne makes her a potential rallying point for anti-Cambronne sentiment.

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Duvalier and Luckner Cambronne

While the President has reportedly grown in assurance over the past year and has developed a taste for his job, there is little evidence that he is a Prince Hal. The atmosphere of sycophancy, flattery, and public adulation that surrounds him will work against his realizing the promise that some observers discern in him.

Prospects

The durability of current slight liberalization has not been tested. Any event that could be construed as a threat to the government might provoke a return to terror and coercion. There are many in Haiti and abroad who abominate the persistence of the Duvalier spirit. They anticipate no real relief from the sterile vigilance of basically repressive government or from Cambronne's concern with the acquisition of more modern arms and equipment, unsuited to Haiti's real defense needs. But neither they, nor the many exile groups, have much potential for translating their apprehensions into action. The exiles will continue to plot, but their conflicts and basic incompatability pose serious obstacles to their launching a significant anti-government effort. In Haiti, an attitude of neutrality toward the government and willingness to profit from economic advantages will probably prevail among the social and business elite.

If Cambronne succeeds in diverting scanty financial resources to the purchase of unnecessary military equipment, a new and disturbing element will be introduced. It was he who promoted the organization of the Leopards, although the unit is said to report directly to the President. Nonetheless, Cambronne's obsession with overarming belies the promise of less concern with security in favor of economic development. It also raises the suspicion that Cambronne is seeking to protect and expand his power. Additional military resources under Cambronne's control might stimulate latent dissatisfaction to a critical point.

On the whole, the prospects for continued stability and development outweigh these negative factors. Realistically, there is no better alternative to the existing government in near or remote prospect. The collegium remains adequately unified. Opposition remains latent at best. The compartmented military and the prospect of economic improvement, the government's success in establishing an authenticity and style, and the welcome relaxation of the atmosphere are grounds for cautious optimism that neither repression nor a violent attempt against the government is in immediate prospect.

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