

JFK ASSASSINATION SYSTEM
IDENTIFICATION FORM

AGENCY : NARA
RECORD NUMBER : 176-10036-10274
RECORD SERIES : National Security Files: William H. Brubeck
AGENCY FILE NUMBER :

ORIGINATOR : NLJFK
FROM :
TO :
TITLE : John F. Kennedy document Control Record
DATE : 8/19/1963
PAGES : ~~1~~ 2
SUBJECTS :
DOCUMENT TYPE :
CLASSIFICATION :
RESTRICTIONS :
CURRENT STATUS :
DATE OF LAST REVIEW : 9/10/2000
OPENING CRITERIA :
COMMENTS : National Security Files, Box 383: Congo 8/63-11/63. Box 4.



S/S 12362

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

Belk

This document consists of _____ pages
No. _____ of _____ Series, Series _____

August 19, 1963

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. McGEORGE BUNDY
THE WHITE HOUSE

SUBJECT: Government Crisis in Congo (Brazzaville)

President Youlou of Congo (Brazzaville) resigned on August 15 when the French army, which had answered his appeal to intervene to preserve order, in accordance with a secret agreement, received instructions from de Gaulle not to obey Youlou's orders to fire on the crowd. An interim committee of four Congolese army officers took over the government power to "assure order". On the morning of August 16 a provisional government of technicians under the leadership of Alphonse Massamba-Debat was announced and a statement broadcast by the chairman of the military interim committee officially transferred "civil, political and military powers", allegedly received from the former President, to the new head of government. (See enclosed list of new Cabinet members.) The National Assembly has been dissolved but no date has been set for new elections. Youlou and about 50 others, including all former ministers except, apparently, Minister of Industrial Production Bazinga, are now under Congolese army protection or detention. The Congolese army is maintaining tight security in the African quarters of Brazzaville and the night curfew is still on.

Widely travelled (including visits to both the United States and the Soviet Union), able and intelligent, Massamba-Debat is an old UDDIA party comrade of Youlou's. He was, however, relieved first of his post as President of the National Assembly and later as Minister of Planning for expressing too many independent ideas. Offered the post of Ambassador to Paris in May of this year, he refused what was probably an attempt to get him out of the country. It is not clear, however, at what point he began to take an active role in recent developments nor whether he was the choice of the labor leaders or the army, or merely the best candidate to present himself.

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With the exception of the Chief of Government and the Minister of Interior, the new ministers have not held political office before. Mostly young university graduates, many formerly held directorships in the ministries they now head. Many of them have shown a definite friendliness toward the U.S. The new Chief of Government was a leader grantee in 1962 and the new Foreign Minister arrived in Washington August 16 at the end of his leader grant visit. We have no indication of specific political orientation of the new Cabinet. Most of them are known to have been dissatisfied with the former regime's corruption and waste and, as young members of the elite, they may be presumed to support a more "nationalist" stand than did Youlou. However, the new government has pledged to maintain all the international relations of its predecessor and to respect its agreements. It has expressed special friendship and gratitude toward France, and particularly for the noninterference of the French army.

We are not yet able to estimate with any certainty the new government's chances for survival. Still unclear are the respective roles of the labor leaders and the Congolese army in recent developments, the present attitude of the former toward the provisional government, and the extent and sources of support for a possible comeback attempt by Youlou. We do not know what decision the French government will make on recognition. We are also awaiting indication of the positions of the African states in this regard. Reports indicate that some UAM governments have sought reassurances from de Gaulle and are even considering attempting a reconciliation between Youlou and his enemies. Meanwhile, in answer to a request for guidance, we have authorized our Embassy in Brazzaville to maintain cordial informal contacts with the potentially friendly new government, but to avoid any action which implies recognition.

Walter R. G. Heman

Benjamin H. Read
Executive Secretary

Enclosure:

List of Provisional Government

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