CRISNO 329

COUP ATTEMPT IN THE GAMBIA

Background:

Senegal experienced a foreign policy crisis as a result of a coup attempt in its neighbor and client, The Gambia, from 30 July 1981 to 29 January 1982.

Background Dawda Jawara had been in power since The Gambia attained independence in 1965, at first as Prime Minister and from 1970 as President. Opposition groups had attempted to overthrow his regime on several occasions, mainly because of discontent over the state of the economy, and its dependence on groundnuts for most of its export earnings: one of these attempts generated an international crisis (see Case #318).

Summary:

On 30 July 1981, while Jawara was in London, the leftist 12-member National Revolutionary Council (NRC) led a coup against his regime, accusing the president of "corruption, tribalism, social oppression, and creating a bourgeois class." Within hours the NRC took control of the airport, the radio station, and most of the capital. They announced the suspension of the constitution and proclaimed their intention to establish a "dictatorship of the proletariat."

The coup triggered a crisis for Senegal, which felt an obligation to intervene -- as it did in 1980 (see Case #318). Indeed, Jawara immediately requested Senegal's military intervention. President Diouf of Senegal responded on the 31st by dispatching 400 soldiers to its neighbor. By the 6th about 2,700 Senegalese troops were deployed in The Gambia. In the meantime, Jawara proclaimed a state of emergency upon his return to Banjul on 2 August.

On 19 August, at Diouf's initiative, the two states announced their intention to create a confederation, Senegambia. A summit meeting in The Gambia's capital led to an initial agreement. The inauguration of the confederation, with the signing of a treaty on 29 January 1982, marked the end of the crisis. (Two days later Senegalese troops left The Gambia.)

Verbal support for Senegal's military intervention was conveyed to Diouf by the U.S. president, the chairman of the OAU, and several African leaders. The USSR's Tass news agency denied allegations of involvement in the coup. The UN was not involved in the crisis.

References:

ACR 1981-82; AR 1981, 1982; ARB 1981, 1982; ARec 1981; Keesing's 1981; WA 1981.

Last Updated: 1/5/2004