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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

PROSPECTS FOR SURVIVAL OF A NON-COMMUNIST REGIME IN BURMA



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The intelligence organizations of the Department of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Joint Staff participated in the preparation of this estimate. All members of the Intelligence Advisory Committee concurred in this estimate on 30 July.

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PROSPECTS FOR SURVIVAL OF A NON-COMMUNIST REGIME IN BURMA

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the prospects for survival of a non-Communist regime in Burma, and to estimate Chinese Communist capabilities and intentions with respect to direct or indirect intervention.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The present non-Communist Burmese Government is seriously threatened by internal weaknesses

1.3(a)(5) [redacted] and by the continued existence of insurgent groups in the country.

2. The Burma Communist Party is the most dangerous of the insurgent groups. It has already received some aid from the Chinese Communists and will probably receive increased technical and material aid from this source during the next twelve months.

3. The Burma Communist Party, given such increased aid, will probably be able within the next year or two to achieve *de facto* control over a considerable area of northern Burma. In that event an effective Communist-dominated coalition of insurgent groups would become more likely.

4. The Chinese Communists have the capability to overrun Burma. They are more likely to attempt to attain their objectives in Burma by methods short of open intervention. Introduction of "volunteers" in considerable numbers is a continuing possibility.

1.3(a)(4)

DISCUSSION

Stability of the Burmese Regime

7. The Socialist-oriented Government of Prime Minister Thakin Nu, which assumed office in January 1948 at the time Burma achieved its independence, has been threat-

rebel forces, principally Communists and dissatisfied ethnic minorities, imperiled the very existence of the regime. Although rebel capabilities were considerably reduced in 1950 when the government gained control over all

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occupy considerable territory, including sections of the strategic central valley, and they continue to harass important lines of communication throughout Burma.

8. The government's insecure position is a result not so much of the strength of the insurgent groups as of its own weakness.

1.3(a)(5)

Political weakness has been compounded by the financial and military strain of combating internal insurrections and by the failure to regain pre-war levels of production in important basic commodities, particularly rice. In spite of these difficulties, the results of the general elections now underway indicate that the government still enjoys sufficient popular support to insure that few if any changes in its non-Communist orientation are likely to take place by constitutional methods.

9.

1.3(a)(5)

One example is the current struggle for control of the armed forces between the government and the army commander-in-chief, General Ne Win. For some time government leaders have been attempting to undermine Ne Win's dominant personal position within the army. Ne Win may retire completely from the struggle and leave the government in undisputed control. On the other hand, there is a continuing possibility that Ne Win might attempt a military coup, which could lead to protracted violence.

1.3(a)(4)

In addition to, and quite apart from, the Ne Win problem, there have been recurrent reports of dealings between the Communists and left-wing extremists who previously supported the government, and there is a possibility that an effort to overthrow the government might come from this direction.

In any event, internal crises are likely to continue to weaken the stability of the regime in the face of the insurgent and Chinese Communist threats.

10. The Burmese armed forces are small, inadequately trained, and poorly equipped. The ground forces, regular and auxiliary, number approximately 43,000 men, almost all organized in infantry units. The navy is small and consists of coastal and river craft; it has been effective in assisting in the establishment and maintenance of control of the delta area and principal waterways. The small air force is capable of small-scale ground support and tactical reconnaissance. Altogether these forces, most of which are concentrated in the strategic central valley, are superior in capability to the insurgent forces now arrayed against them. The Burmese armed forces cannot, however, stamp out insurgent guerrilla operations. The insurgents are widely dispersed on the fringes of the central valley and a concentration of government forces in sufficient strength to destroy any one major force would leave other areas dangerously exposed. Similarly, the government has not had adequate forces to occupy the border regions and is powerless to interdict communications between insurgents in northern Burma and the Chinese Communists.

11. The "anti-imperialist" conditioning of the present Burmese leaders has resulted in considerable reluctance to accept Western economic or military aid. The Burmese Government hesitantly accepted a British military mission which is providing training for the Burmese armed forces. However, Burma refused to participate in the UK-sponsored Colombo plan. The Burmese Government is somewhat less distrustful of the US and signed an ECA agreement in September 1950, which thus far has resulted in grants of approximately \$10,400,000 in aid. The US has also made available to Burma ten ex-Coast Guard cutters for use as river patrol craft. However, the Burmese Government does not presently appear ready to assume the obligations that would enable it to receive further US military assistance.

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The Insurgent Threat

12. The principal insurgent forces in Burma are the Burma Communist Party [redacted], the rival "Communist Party (Burma)" [redacted], the Karen National Defense Organization [redacted], and remnants, [redacted] of the Peoples Volunteer Organization (PVO), an amorphous left-wing group stemming from the anti-Japanese movement. In the past these groups have frequently dissipated their strength by fighting one another. The Burmese Government can probably continue to keep these insurgent groups from imperiling the existence of the regime, if it retains control over the Burmese armed forces and if the insurgents do not receive substantial outside aid.

13. A serious threat, however, lies in the possibility that the Burma Communist Party will succeed in its renewed efforts to form an effective coalition against the government. The Burma Communist Party still retains influence over small disaffected left-wing elements of the old anti-Japanese resistance movement (PVO) and has entered into a truce with the rival "Communist Party (Burma)." [redacted]

[redacted] However, the coalition is still too loose for over-all coordinated military operations against the government, and it is doubtful that the various groups will cooperate with the Burma Communists over an extended period of time unless they become convinced that the latter have the power to achieve ultimate victory. The Karens, particularly, have been anti-Communist in the past, and are unlikely to cooperate except for immediate military advantage.

Chinese Communist Aid to the Insurgents

14. The most dangerous internal threat to the Burmese Government comes from the Burma Communists supported by Communist China. The Burma Communists have, reportedly after

two unsuccessful attempts, succeeded in obtaining some assistance from the Chinese Communists. [redacted] evidence does not indicate that any substantial aid [redacted] has so far been provided.

In the absence of effective counter-pressure, the Chinese Communists probably will increase their technical and material aid during the next year.

15. [redacted] the Burma Communists are still too few in number, too inexperienced and too undisciplined to absorb the amount of military aid necessary to win control of and administer the entire country within the next year. [redacted] with the aid they are capable of utilizing and are likely to obtain, the Burma Communists will probably be able within the next year or two to achieve *de facto* control over a considerable area of northern Burma. From this secure area, the Burma Communists in the future would then be able to mount stronger military and psychological attacks against the government. In particular, the possibilities of an effective anti-government coalition of insurgent groups would be enhanced, and the internal stability of the government would be further jeopardized.

Other Chinese Communist Courses of Action

16. Beyond the threat posed by the prospect of an increase in Chinese Communist material and technical aid to the Burma Communist guerrillas, the Burmese Government is otherwise threatened in both the long and short run by the Chinese Communists. [redacted]

1.3(a)(4)

1.3(a)(4)

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20.

These forces

could be deployed across the Burma border at several points simultaneously, and, although the terrain is difficult, it would not seriously impede the movement of lightly equipped Chinese Communist forces, particularly if undertaken during the October-to-May dry season.

17.

18. The presence of Chinese Nationalist troops in the China-Burma border area and the existence of a disputed and undelineated boundary between Burma and China provide pretexts for diplomatic pressure on the Burmese Government and even for Chinese Communist military excursions into Burmese territory. Because the Burmese Government would be unable to oppose successfully such military operations, they would weaken its prestige and at the same time facilitate Chinese Communist aid to the Burma Communists. Therefore, we believe that limited military operations in the border areas must be regarded as a continuing danger.

19. The Communists have no immediate prospect of gaining control of Burma except through the intervention of large Chinese Communist forces.

21. In spite of the relative ease with which Burma could be overrun, [] an open invasion is improbable in the near future even if the Chinese Communists are able to disengage in Korea. The Chinese Communist and Soviet leaders probably regard the present internal situation in Burma as favorable to an eventual Communist victory without resort to open invasion with its attendant risks, especially of Indian and UN intervention.

22. There is, however, a continuing possibility that Chinese Communist "volunteers" in considerable numbers might be introduced to assist the Burma Communist guerrillas. The likelihood of such action would be increased if the efforts of the Burma Communists were to encounter serious obstacles, if their forces were threatened with destruction, or if the Chinese Communist and Soviet leaders for any reason desired to hasten Communist control of Burma and calculated that it could be done with a minimum risk of Western retaliation. The Communist leaders probably do not regard Indian or UN intervention as likely in any event short of open invasion.

1.3(a) (4)

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Prospects for Survival of the Present Burmese Regime

23. There is little prospect that the Burmese regime can survive over the long run unless it can greatly increase its political and military strength. The attainment of this strength will depend upon the consolidation of the regime's political support, the improvement of government administration, and the expansion and revitalization of the armed forces.

considerable sentiment for a settlement with the Burma Communists would be generated among politically-conscious elements within the government-controlled area. [redacted]

[redacted] the dominant elements within the government probably would not succumb to such pressure. Rather than arrive at an accommodation with the Communists, the Burmese Government would [redacted] fight with its own resources as long as possible.

1.3(a)(4)

1.3(a)(4)

24. There is little doubt that if Burma were openly invaded by Chinese Communist forces, the Burmese Government would make a strong appeal for armed UN intervention. [redacted]

[redacted] the Burmese Government likewise would seek armed UN intervention if the Chinese Communists should introduce "volunteers" in substantial numbers, or if they should apply such strong military or diplomatic pressure as directly to imperil the existence of the regime.

25. On the other hand, if the Burma Communist forces should gain extensive military successes in northern Burma, [redacted] the Burmese Government would initially seek extensive outside aid. In such a circumstance,

26. The greatest immediate danger to the Burmese regime lies in the possibility that, by propaganda and subversion and through an undetected improvement in Communist guerrilla capabilities, the position of the Burmese Government will be undermined without the leaders acknowledging the threat and taking effective countermeasures.