

BURMA'S  
FOREIGN POLICY

*A Study in Neutralism*

*by*

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1951, which called on all members to keep military units in readiness to act as part of UN forces in case of new aggression. On this resolution only India and the Argentine abstained while the Soviet bloc voted "no."

On subsequent resolutions regarding Korea, the Burma voting pattern was maintained with constant justification statements by Burman delegates that their votes demonstrated "non-alignment" and "independence of action." The Burmans saw no inconsistencies in their voting behavior and since their positions taken in the UN seemed not to have affected, one way or another, their "friendly relations" with both the nations of the Communist bloc and those of the Western bloc, they became even more certain of both the validity and the workability of their basic foreign policy concepts.

*The Issue of Kuomintang Troops in Burma*<sup>67</sup>

On March 25, 1953, Burmese Foreign Minister Sao Kun Hkio cabled the Secretary-General of the United Nations filing Burma's complaint regarding aggression against it by the Chinese Nationalist regime on Formosa. The cable charged the Nationalist Government with directing and supporting guerrilla activity in Burma and requested that the United Nations brand Nationalist China as an aggressor.<sup>68</sup>

A few days later U Nu gave Burma's views on the possible UN course of action then viewed as most desirable. According to *The New York Times*, "Prime Minister U Nu said today he hoped the United Nations would instruct the Formosa Government to order Nationalist Chinese forces in North Burma to surrender their arms and submit to internment."<sup>69</sup> U Nu expressed the view that repatriation of the Nationalist troops "would raise too many international complications . . . 'We don't know what the attitude of Red China would be if we asked Taipeh to repatriate these forces,'" the Burmese leader explained.<sup>70</sup> On March 25, U Nu had stated, "that at that moment relations between Red China and Burma were good, and the Chinese were kept informed about and appreciated the strenuous efforts being made by the government to overcome the KMT nuisance."<sup>71</sup>

U Nu's remarks nevertheless indicated that the Burmans were as yet uncertain as to Communist China's attitude toward whatever

action the UN might take, and this attitude clearly loomed as a crucial factor in all Burman attempts to solve the KMT problem. In this regard, U Kyaw Nyein had gone so far as to state, the previous August, that the Burmans were concerned about Chinese Nationalist troops in their country "only because this situation could give the Peking Government a claim for intervention."<sup>72</sup>

On March 31, noting that "Formosan troops were attacking the armed forces along the entire 800 miles of the eastern border of Burma and within Burmese territory," the Burman delegation requested that their complaint be included on the General Assembly agenda.<sup>73</sup> The request was approved.

Shortly thereafter, American Ambassador William J. Sebald met with U Nu in Rangoon to discuss the situation. According to *The New York Times*, Ambassador Sebald offered to mediate with the Nationalist Government regarding the presence of their troops in Burma and asked for a cease-fire during their repatriation. U Nu was reported to have set a definite time limit within which the KMT troops would be obliged to lay down their arms and leave Burma.<sup>74</sup>

In any case, Justice U Myint Thein, chairman of the Burma UN delegation, presented Burma's complaint against the Chinese Nationalist Government before the UN Political Committee on April 17. U Myint Thein gave a detailed account of aggressive activities in Burma by the Nationalist intruders and presented a considerable amount of evidence to back up Burma's claim that the KMT troops in northeastern Burma under general Li Mi were being supported and controlled by the Chinese Nationalist regime in Formosa. Included in evidence were a number of captured directives from the Nationalist Government to Li Mi's forces, reports of Li Mi's Taipei visit, the fact that Li Mi's original group of roughly 1,500 poorly equipped stragglers had grown to a force of 12,000 well-armed men, and even supporting statements by Chinese Nationalist officials.<sup>75</sup> The Burmans introduced a resolution calling for the condemnation of Nationalist China as an aggressor nation and for the UN to take appropriate action to bring about the disarming and internment or withdrawal of Chinese Nationalist troops in Burma.<sup>76</sup>

Replying to Burma's charge, the Chinese Nationalist representative, Dr. Tsiang Ting-fu, stated that "My government has no control over the Yunnan Anti-Communist and National Salvation Army."

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and that in entering Burma, “that Army has acted contrary to the wishes and orders of my government.” Admitting paradoxically that “We do have some influence over General Li Mi,” Dr. Tsiang promised in conclusion that his government would exercise its “moral influence” to help bring about a solution to the problem, but opposed the Burma draft resolution and rejected Burma's “monstrous charge” of Nationalist aggression.<sup>77</sup>

Various compromise resolutions were subsequently discussed, and on April 22 an amended Mexican proposal was adopted by a vote of 58-0, with Burma and Nationalist China abstaining. The resolution was adopted by the General Assembly on the following day by a vote of 59-0, with only Nationalist China abstaining. It provided that the United Nations should: (1) deplore and condemn the presence of foreign forces in Burma; (2) declare that these forces must be disarmed and either agree to internment or leave forthwith; (3) request all states to respect Burma's territorial integrity and political independence; (4) urge all states, on the request of Burma, to assist in the peaceful evacuation of these forces; (5) urge all states to refrain from assisting these forces; (6) invite Burma to report on the situation to the Eighth Session; and (7) urge the continuance of negotiations now in progress between member states.<sup>78</sup>

Although the resolution failed to name the Chinese Nationalist Government as aggressor as Burma had requested, the Burman delegation voted for the Mexican resolution when it came up before the General Assembly after having abstained in the Political Committee vote on the previous day. Chief Burma delegate U Myint Thein explained that “In view of the unanimity displayed in the Political Committee and because of Burma's dedication to democratic ideals and to peace and peaceful ways, the Government of Burma felt that they would have to identify themselves with a resolution which after all fully recognized the intolerable state of affairs in Eastern Burma and sought settlement of the issue in a peaceful way.”<sup>79</sup>

On May 8, the United States proposed a four-power (Burma, Nationalist China, Thailand, the United States) conference to discuss means of solving the guerrilla problem. The Burma Government at first rejected the proposal, stating that Burma did not wish to attend a conference including the Chinese Nationalists. The Burma

Government took the position that such a conference should, without Burma's participation, draw up a plan and submit it to Burma for consideration.<sup>80</sup> But the Burmans later modified their stand, agreeing to the formation, under UN auspices, of a Four-Nation Joint Military Commission to discuss the means and procedure for evacuating Nationalist troops from Burma. It will be noted that whereas Burma had previously opposed evacuation in favor of interment because of uncertainty regarding Communist China's attitude toward the former measure, they now accepted, possibly after some expression of Peking's approval, evacuation as a preferable solution.

The Four-Nation UN Commission met in Bangkok on May 21, 1953. The Burma delegates at first refused to sit with their Chinese Nationalist counterparts. By the middle of June, however, the Burmans were reported to have been impressed by the sincerity of American efforts to bring about the evacuation of Li Mi's forces.<sup>81</sup> Representatives of all four powers began meeting as a Committee of the whole, and on June 22, the American Ambassador to Thailand, Edwin F. Stanton, announced full accord on evacuation procedure. The plan drawn up by the Four-Nation UN Commission called for Nationalist troops to cross over into Thailand, from where they would be flown or shipped to Formosa. The evacuation was to be completed within three or four weeks provided that Li Mi's soldiers obeyed orders.<sup>82</sup>

When the Commission attempted to implement the plan through direct negotiations with leaders of the guerrilla forces in Burma, however, the latter were far from cooperative. According to *The New Statesman and Nation*,

The KMT commanders in Monghsat . . . refused to guarantee the security of the Burmese representatives. When talks were transferred to Bangkok, these five KMT saboteurs launched such wild propaganda that the American and Formosan representatives rebuked their irresponsibility. Their next line was the announcement that they would not withdraw from Burmese territory until ordered by General Li Mi. When the Committee ordered the General to Bangkok, he pleaded illness and sent his deputy and two staff officers on July 7. . . . General Li Mi told Chiang Kai-shek that he would on no conditions issue orders to his National Salvation Anti-Communist Army to withdraw from Burma where their sole mission was to act as a barrier between the Chinese Communists and their opposite numbers in Burma.<sup>83</sup>

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The Commission fared no better with General Li Tse-feng who claimed to have succeeded Li Mi as commander. The former likewise refused to accept evacuation to Formosa, claiming that most of his troops were indigenous to the border area and that evacuation would violate the principle of "voluntary repatriation" established in Korea.<sup>84</sup>

Burma's representatives continued to press the American delegation to "take a stronger line with the recalcitrant jungle generals,"<sup>85</sup> while Defense Minister U Ba Swe provided further evidence of Burma's growing annoyance by stating on July 30 that Burma would ask the UN to unseat Nationalist China and brand it an aggressor unless the guerrillas were evacuated.<sup>86</sup>

Evacuation negotiations continued throughout the summer as did sporadic fighting between Burman and KMT troops. On September 16, 1953, Burma's Ambassador to Thailand, U Pe Khin, finally submitted a demand to the Chinese representatives on the Joint Military Commission that Nationalist China agree to the evacuation of 5,000 of the 12,000 Nationalist troops in Burma within three weeks and the remainder within three months.<sup>87</sup> The demand was designed to counter the possibility of a token withdrawal stretched out during the coming General Assembly session. The Chinese Nationalist representatives refused to accept both the Burman demand and a compromise proposal put up by the United States. The American chairman "severely censured" this attitude, while the Burma delegation walked out of the conference.<sup>88</sup> Notwithstanding this breakdown in the negotiations, the American chairman of the Commission requested that the evacuation proceed as planned. With the agreement of Thailand and Nationalist China, staging points were set up.

On September 25, the Burma Government again brought the problem before the United Nations. Chief Burman delegate U Myint Thein stated that the complacency of some UN members had "alarmed us," and compared this complacency with concern over "certain developments in the Kingdom of Laos . . . where no lack of volunteers were willing to resort to extreme measures . . . to put out the fires inspired by people with a different political ideology."<sup>89</sup> Citing the failure of the UN-established commission and of the Chinese Nationalist government's refusal to accept responsibility for Chinese Nationalist troops in Burma, he requested a few days later

that the issue be placed at the head of the UN Political Committee's agenda. On October 4, the Political Committee voted to do so notwithstanding a request by American delegate Lodge for delay, pending the promised start of the evacuation.<sup>90</sup>

On October 29, the Evacuation Committee announced from Bangkok that Burma had agreed to a cease-fire until November 15 to permit the evacuation of about 2,000 troops to Thailand en route to Formosa. The Nationalists pledged to disavow and cut off supplies to the guerrillas remaining in Burma after those willing to return to Formosa had been evacuated.<sup>91</sup>

Defense Minister U Ba Swe had complained earlier in the month that it was becoming "more and more apparent that the Nationalists sought only a token evacuation."<sup>92</sup> On October 31, U Myint Thin outlined his government's attitude toward the proceedings thus far in somewhat greater detail. Speaking before the UN Political Committee, the Burma delegate acknowledged with "deep gratitude" American efforts toward a solution, but added, "Without meaning to be ungrateful, I venture to state that in dealing with the authorities on Formosa, moral pressure is not enough. If something more than that, such as a threat of an ouster from their seat in the United Nations, were conveyed to the authorities on Formosa, or if the United States would go a step further and threaten to suspend aid, I assure you the Kuomintang army will disappear overnight."<sup>93</sup> On November 5, he stated before the same committee that the evacuation of only 2,000 men and disavowal by Formosa of the remainder was "no consolation" and "not the semblance of a solution."<sup>94</sup>

Meanwhile, on October 28, American Embassy officials in Bangkok had contracted with a private airline to carry Nationalist troops to Formosa at the rate of 200 per day. The governments of Thailand, Nationalist China and the the United States agreed to defray the cost. On November 5, the UN Political Committee shelved the issue, and the evacuation began two days later.

The evacuation proceeded in a manner hardly satisfactory to the Burma Government. At first, Thai police refused to permit Burman observers at the staging points.<sup>95</sup> Burman representatives were allowed to join other members of the Joint Military Commission at these points only after the Government of Burma made an official complaint to the Thai Government. Shortly after arriving at the

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evacuation sites, the Burman observers complained that many of the evacuees were women and children and that combatants should be evacuated first. Some of the soldiers being evacuated had been recruited only ten days before, while others were unarmed or carried obsolete weapons.<sup>96</sup> Nor had the KMT troops in Burma ceased their activities. On November 22, Nationalist guerrillas joined a strong force of Karen rebels in an attack on a passenger train and an armed escort train between Rangoon and Moulmein.<sup>97</sup>

At Burma's request, the UN Political Committee renewed consid- eration of the KMT problem on November 17, 1953. At this time, U Myint Thein complained that most of the evacuees were "dead- wood" and that the few weapons which had been surrendered were of ancient vintage. He again stated that the United States could bring about a solution by cutting off military aid to the Chinese Nationalist Government.<sup>98</sup> A. J. Carey, the American representative on the joint Military Commission, reported that 1,103 troops had already reached Formosa, but acknowledged that few weapons had been surrendered.<sup>99</sup>

The debate before the Political Committee centered around an eight-nation draft resolution which had been presented on the same day.<sup>100</sup> The resolution expressed concern over the failure of the evacuees to surrender their arms and requested the United States to work for the evacuation of the estimated 10,000 Nationalist troops still in Burma.<sup>101</sup> The resolution was adopted by a vote of 51-0 with 6 abstentions. Burma agreed to an extended cease-fire and the issue was dropped from the UN agenda.

The evacuation dragged on throughout the winter of 1953-54. On May 30, 1954, General Li Mi, now in Formosa, announced the formal dissolution of the Yunnan Anti-Communist National Salvation Army.<sup>102</sup> But on July 1, Chinese Nationalist troops were again reported to be fighting Burmese units in Kengtung.<sup>103</sup> On July 30, the Four-Nation Joint Military Commission announced, however, that the program had been completed with the evacuation of 7,000 men and their dependents, the remaining troops deciding to stay.<sup>104</sup>

On August 20, Burma submitted a new request to the UN Secre- tary-General that "Burma's complaint regarding aggression against it by the Government of Nationalist China" be placed on the agenda of the General Assembly.<sup>105</sup> In their complaint, the Burma Govern-

ment described results obtained thus far as a "token evacuation." This request was approved, and on September 29, Burma submitted a report to the UN charging that "about 6,000 Chinese Nationalist troops were still hugging the Thai-Burma border, ostensibly to resist to an anti-Communist drive, but primarily to enrich themselves by controlling the opium trade and manufacturing counterfeit currency."<sup>106</sup> James Barrington, who had replaced U Myint Thein as Chief Burma delegate, added that "Their continued existence represents a threat, not only to our country, but to the peace and tranquility of the whole of Southeast Asia."<sup>107</sup>

A third UN resolution was adopted deploring the fact that numerous foreign forces remained in Burma and that they were better armed and equipped than when the evacuation began. But the Burma representative acknowledged that the evacuation which had already been carried out "represented the limit of what could be accomplished by international action" and that the disposition of the remaining Nationalist troops was their own responsibility.<sup>108</sup> The Burma Government requested no further action and on October 15, 1954, the issue was discussed for the last time in the United Nations.

The Burma government could hardly regard that United Nations action on the one case it had taken to that body as satisfactory. From the Burman point of view, the case was clear cut. Here was a band of foreign troops on Burman soil acting as insurgents against the government and clearly being supplied from a nation (Taiwan) with which Burma had no formal diplomatic or other relations. Since the Chinese Nationalist government was clearly dependent upon the United States for its viability, the Burma government saw no reason why the United States could not bring effective pressure on the Chinese Nationalist government to force the evacuation or surrender of the refugee Kuomintang troops in Burma. It acknowledged the assistance of the United States in arranging for the partial evacuation of these troops, but was disappointed because of its failure to obtain stronger United Nations support.

The result of this experience in the United Nations was to make most Burman leaders feel that their original hopes that membership in the United Nations offered a small nation like theirs protection and succor against outside interference were misplaced. The mis-

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nants of the Kuomintang troops remaining in Burma have continued to give trouble and in March, 1961, a foreign supply plane was shot down by Burma air force fighters, thus proving to the Burmans that the Chinese Nationalist government was still guilty of complicity in supporting the KMT troops against the Burma government. In this instance there was no desire to reopen the case in the United Nations.

Thus, Burma's experience with the Korean War issue and with its attempt to get help in solving the KMT problem caused considerable disillusionment about the United Nations in Rangoon. The Burman leaders have often asserted that reliance on the United Nations for protection of their sovereignty and security is a dubious foundation and that Burma "does not want to become another Korea or a Congo." It is quite possible, therefore, that disillusionment with the United Nations as a protector of the security of small states has made it easier for the Burma government to work more closely with Communist China and to place greater reliance on its neutralist policy which dictates friendly relations with all countries.

#### *Burma's Neutralist Policy in UN Politics*

Before 1954, although the Burma government generally followed the position taken by other neutralist members, its justifications for voting were more often based on independent reasoning quite different from that of India. After 1954, when closer relations had been established with both the U.S.S.R. and Communist China, there was a tendency for the Burma delegation to join with India more often or at least not take a position contrary to that of the majority of the Afro-Asian bloc, a group constantly growing in number. This voting pattern is shown with respect to a number of the key issues on the General Assembly's agenda prior to 1960.<sup>109</sup>

As would be expected, the Burman government has consistently espoused the cause of anticolonialism. It supported the Indonesian Government's case against the Netherlands on West Irian. This general position on colonial questions often resulted in the Burma delegation voting affirmatively for Soviet bloc resolutions, but even here the Burma delegation often qualified its support for such resolutions by insistence that recommendations should involve an orderly