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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

24 June 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: The Political Outlook in Burma

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1. Over the past year political stability in Burma has steadily deteriorated as a result of the widening split in the Anti-Fascist Freedom League (AFPFL), the coalition of socialist and nationalist groups which has dominated Burma since the end of the Japanese occupation. The two opposing factions are headed by Premier U Nu and the Socialist leaders Ba Swe and Kyaw Nymin. Their differences are primarily personal. Faced with strong parliamentary opposition within the AFPFL, Nu won a bare 127-119 vote of confidence in early June only with the aid of 40 votes provided by the National Unity Front, a Communist-front organization. Nu's opponents have now struck back by deposing him as president of the AFPFL and expelling him and nine supporters from the League.

2. The outlook is for a period of heightened political tension, possibly including violence, in which the Communists will probably make some gains. U Nu will probably soon call new elections in an effort to win stronger parliamentary support. There is a better than even chance that he could carry such elections. In so doing, however, he might come to depend on

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Communist front organizational support to replace the AFPFL apparatus which has recently been denied him by his Socialist opponents.

3. However, we believe that the British ambassador in Rangoon's assertion -- that "Burma could become a people's democracy within a year if things are allowed to take their course and the army does not intervene"* -- somewhat overstates the danger. The majority of the politically-conscious Burmese are anti-Communist, and the Army leaders are essentially pro-Western. Should the NUF win a favored position in the U Nu ranks, this in itself might encourage a coalescence of non-Communist forces around U Nu's present opposition and provoke the army into an open move against pro-Communist political forces. Lastly, is not a Communist, and is probably sincere in his assertions that he is not and will not become beholden to the NUF.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

SHERMAN KENT
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* Quoted in

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