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by D.C.I. for  
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HSC Briefing*

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RIVALRY FOR PHILIPPINE PRESIDENCY BECOMING INTENSE

The resignation of Philippine Defense Secretary Magsaysay heightens the political turmoil that will continue in the Philippines until next November's presidential elections. A repetition of the coercion and fraud that accompanied the 1949 election would seriously endanger Philippine stability and there are many indications that President Quirino will attempt such means to obtain his own re-election.

Magsaysay's break with Quirino followed a secret agreement of last November with Nacionalista Party leaders to accept the nomination at their convention, set for 12 April. The Nacionalista commitment to Magsaysay was not accepted by all Party leaders and Magsaysay's relative inexperience in the unprincipled politics of the Philippines leaves him vulnerable in the current maneuvering. One party to the agreement, however, estimates that Magsaysay's nomination on the Nacionalista ticket is 99% certain.

For several months, President Quirino has been working, with little success, to counter the popularity that Magsaysay achieved by his successes against the Huks. In early 1950 the Huks numbered some 20,000 and were gaining support as a result of popular disillusion with the government and the ill-disciplined armed forces. They were able to carry out well-coordinated raids reaching to within a few miles of Manila

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and had spread their organization from Central Luzon to the southern part of the island and to the island of Panay. They were reportedly in liaison with the Communists in China. Magsaysay took the defense portfolio in August 1950 and within less than a year had restored discipline to the armed forces. By late 1951 the Huk organization had been severely hurt and its armed strength had fallen to less than 10,000, largely limited to Central Luzon.

Magsaysay's campaign against the Huks caused his emergence as the one Filipino leader who appeared to represent a clean break with the reactionary and corrupt politicians characteristic of both parties. Dealing directly with the Army Chief of Staff, Quirino has effected the reassignment of certain army and constabulary officers with the apparent purpose of putting his proteges in a strategic position to control the elections.

While Quirino has not revealed how he will counter Magsaysay's resignation, it has been reliably reported that the Army Chief of Staff will soon charge that the Defense Secretary had been guilty of gross malfeasance, claiming that armed forces' funds were diverted to further Magsaysay's political aspirations.

The current Nacionalista Party leadership offers little better prospect of good government for the Philippines than the Liberals. Jose Laurel, the wartime puppet president, is the party's most powerful figure; Senator Claro Recto, who

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periodically makes anti-American pronouncements has been mentioned as a possible Nacionalista foreign secretary. However, with Magsaysay at its head there would be a good possibility that the Party's old guard would gradually be supplanted by younger, more progressive men.

The crucial problem this year, however, is whether the electorate will be permitted a free choice. Popular disillusion following the fraudulent elections of 1949 enabled the Huks to make their greatest gains, whereas the relatively clean elections of 1951 contributed directly to their present weakness. The widespread popular interest in clean elections which was developed in 1951 continues unabated. Many observers believe that fraudulent elections next fall might so disgust the electorate that a serious rebellion against the present form of government would result.

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