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Director of  
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# National Intelligence Daily

Thursday  
20 October 1988



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~~Top Secret~~**Special Analysis****BURMA:****Students Lead Civil Unrest**

*This is the second in a series of Special Analyses on groups active in the unrest affecting Burma*

**Students have traditionally been the catalyst for change in Burma, periodically inciting mass demonstrations to vent their frustration with rigid, autocratic governments. They have achieved unprecedented political gains this year after being joined by up to 1 million citizens in three months of massive protests, forcing three consecutive governments to resign. The takeover on 18 September by Defense Minister Saw Maung, however, led to a harsh crackdown on protesters, and student influence has since waned. With schools ordered to close and key student groups badly fragmented, students probably are not a serious threat to the military regime.**

Although students will continue to push for change, the majority apparently favor continued peaceful resistance. Most students are likely to remain in the background and support major opposition figures, such as former General Aung Gyi and former Defense Minister Tin Oo, in their efforts to oust the military regime.

An increasing number of students, however, are turning to violence as the only option to force the government to become more democratic. Burma's largest student group split after some of its leaders resigned, probably as a result of the growing militancy of several factions,

The militants are trying to arm themselves and are seeking support from insurgent groups such as the Burma Communist Party and the Karen National Union. An armed student insurgency would almost certainly provoke further violent suppression by the Army and could delay promised elections.

If students align with insurgents, they may also drive a wedge between themselves and the populace. People have accepted their agitation for change in part because Burmese society accords them high status. Education is the chief means for entry into midlevel and senior government positions and other professions and is one of the few avenues for achieving success. Communities will often pool resources to pay a student's expenses because of the prestige and status of education. This attitude has persisted despite the fact that most university graduates are unemployed or accept menial jobs with little relevance to their education.

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