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Arming Nonalignment: Yugoslavia's Relations with Burma and the Cold war in Asia (1950-1955)

By Jovan Čavoški, April 2010



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Christian F. Ostermann and Mircea Munteanu Series Editors

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Arming Nonalignment: Yugoslavia's Relations with Burma and the Cold War in Asia (1950-1955)

(New Evidence from Yugoslav, Chinese, Indian, and U.S. Archives)

Introduction

The issue of relations between Yugoslavia and Burma (Myanmar) during the Cold War remains a woefully understudied topic in Cold War historiography.¹ Besides a few contemporaneous indications in some western military magazines and literature on the Yugoslav origins of certain weapons systems in the Burmese Armed Forces (*Tatmadaw*), and in particular artillery pieces, gunboats, and airplanes, there was no serious, in-depth study of this relationship.² Considering limited access to documentation in the Yugoslav and Burmese archives at the time, the limited availability of secondary literature is understandable. This paper starts a completely new chapter in the international historiography of Yugoslavia's and Burma's Cold War. The recent opening in Belgrade of archival material covering the Cold War has made this aim achievable.

Writings on Burma's Cold War history before 1988-89 events remain scarce, with little documentation available.³ This is particularly true of the literature on early Burmese foreign policy. The best documented study of Burmese foreign policy during the 1950s was published in

¹ In 1989 Burma changed its name to Myanmar and that of its former capital from Rangoon to Yangon. The old names are used in this article to maintain the historical context and time frame.

² One of the most prominent military journals occasionally making references to Yugoslavia's military assistance to Burma in modernizing its armed forces was *Jane's Defense Weekly*. Also, one of the leading western experts on the *Tatmadaw* Andrew Selth has superficially treated the issue of Yugoslav-Burmese military cooperation. See Andrew Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces: Power Without Glory* (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2002); Andrew Selth, "Burma's Maritime Strategy," published in Jurgen Schwarz, Wilfried A. Herrmann, Hanns-Frank Saller, *Maritime Strategies in Asia* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2002), pp. 293-323.

³ A recently published study on the origins of the military rule in Burma has successfully filled in certain gaps we had in the general understanding of internal policies of this country, while the role of Yugoslavia in Burmese politics, due to lack of primary sources, has been superficially treated, though its importance is clearly acknowledged. See Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2003).

1963.⁴ Numerous articles on Burmese foreign policy were published in leading journals during the 1950s and 1960s; however, a majority were based on open sources. The new materials on Burma coming out of the former Yugoslav archives prove to be even more valuable.⁵

This paper will show the events surrounding the initiation of Yugoslavia's arms shipments to Burma in the early 1950s and how these actions shifted the power equation inside the Burmese society and in its immediate neighborhood. Using recently declassified documents from the major Yugoslav archives (President Tito's personal archive, Foreign Ministry Archives of Serbia, the Defense Ministry Archives of Serbia, and the Archive of Yugoslavia, which retains the records of the Yugoslav state and communist party), Chinese archives (Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives), Indian archives (National Archives of India, Ministry of External Affairs), and U.S. archives (National Archives and Records Administration) as well as private collections such as the ones at the National Security Archive, this paper will look at the impact that these arms transfers had on the overall development of the bilateral strategic partnership between Belgrade and Rangoon and how these arrangements between two distant countries were perceived by the government circles in the U.S., China, and India. The paper will argue that Yugoslav-Burmese military cooperation substantially altered some of the strategic plans of the great powers with regards to this region.

Present-day events in Myanmar still grab world headlines. A proper understanding of the role the Yugoslav factor played in Burmese foreign and domestic policies during the early Cold War years is necessary in order to make an assessment of the role of history and politics in Burmese foreign policy and the influence this country had on crucial developments in Southeast Asia.

⁴ William C. Johnstone, *Burma's Foreign Policy: A Study in Neutralism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963).

⁵ Even though nonalignment was proclaimed by the Yugoslav Government as the official foreign policy doctrine, besides a certain number of articles published some time ago, there has not been any serious scientific debate or study of the relationship with African and Asian countries, particularly with Burma. All good and solid analyses of these problems were largely contained inside the walls of the official ministries, while the archives were generally kept off limits for most researchers. In this way, many of the crucial topics of the Cold War, Yugoslav foreign policy, nonalignment etc. had remained understudied, Burma included. Now, with the opening of some archives, the younger generations of professors and students, this author included, have embarked on a journey of serious research of Cold War issues. Besides some recently published studies on the origins of the Yugoslav policy of nonalignment like Dragan Bogetic, *Nova strategija spoljne politike Jugoslavije 1956-1961* [New Strategy of the Yugoslav Foreign Policy, 1956-61] (Beograd: ISI, 2006), there is still only one detailed study in English on Yugoslavia and the nonaligned countries (Burma included) and it was published almost 40 years ago: Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970).

New trends in the international history of the Cold War have focused toward the concept of *pericentrism*, “undermining” the classical notions of bipolarity and the superpower hegemony, thus giving more space to the small and medium “powers.” Pericentrism firmly positions smaller actors inside the general Cold War framework, but adds more weight to the actions and influence they exerted inside the international system as a whole.⁶ This kind of approach has recently gained more influence, as some of its presumptions have been corroborated by newly declassified documents.⁷ This paper shows how the “junior” partners of great powers have managed to promote their own interests, disturbed the delicate balance of the Cold War, and refused to play secondary roles dictated by the superpowers. More importantly, they did so while taking advantage of the bipolar system. Yugoslavia was one of the greatest beneficiaries of the zero sum game between the Soviet Union and the United States; to a certain extent, so was Burma.

The Basis of a Precarious Partnership

In the absence of close scrutiny, the relationship between Yugoslavia and Burma appears to be so exotic and unnatural that its importance to international historiography is questionable. What could a Southeast Asian and a Balkan country find in common? What issue could become a rallying point for the leadership in Belgrade and Rangoon (Yangon) alike? The Chinese Embassy in Rangoon, in its confidential report, hinted that the relationship went deeper than the surface: “relations between Burma and Yugoslavia...fall into special category of relations...while the political cooperation between these two countries cannot be ignored.”⁸ [emphasis added] What made this relationship so special? Was it national interest or ideology? Mounting Cold War contradictions sometimes forced national leaders to make specific choices. It also introduced grand opportunities for better positioning of countries inside the global system by playing off conflicting forces of the ideological blocs.

⁶ See Tony Smith, “New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 24, no. 4 (Fall 2000), pp. 567-91.

⁷ One of the most successful examples of this kind of historiography is Piero Gleijeses’ book *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill, London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁸ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives (hereafter CFMA), 105-00846-02(1), *Miandian yu Nansilafu de guanxi* (*Zhongguo zhu Miandian shiguan bianxie ziliao*) [Burma-Yugoslavia relations (materials collected by the Chinese Embassy in Burma)], December 18th 1958, p. 8.

Geographic distance notwithstanding, since Burma's independence and Yugoslavia's disassociation from the Soviet bloc, the two countries developed their partnership on all levels. In many ways, Yugoslavia represented a role model to Burma—pursuing a specific road to socialism, proclaiming a nonaligned position in world politics, balancing between great powers, etc. Political and economic ties aside, what had launched this relationship into the frontlines of Asian politics was its military dimension. The importance of this alliance was summarized by Burma's Socialist leader U Kyaw Nyein: "Yugoslavia and Burma are countries both building socialism. Their foreign policy is based [on the principle] of preservation of peace. Therefore they have similarity of interests and goals."⁹

Many high-level Burmese officials including U Kyaw Nyein, impressed by Yugoslavia's socialist model, proclaimed as their future political goal "to transform Burma into the Yugoslavia in Asia."¹⁰ Burmese Prime Minister U Nu (backed by U Kyaw Nyein) was actively promoting a self-sustainable socialist model that could be reconciled with the fundamental concepts of the Buddhist religion. Yugoslav state-building efforts fit well into the Burmese leadership's vision of the future, and was therefore fully acceptable.¹¹ Following the statements of many Burmese officials putting stress on this ideological component of the Yugoslav-Burmese relationship, the equally enthusiastic Burmese press proclaimed that "the decentralization of control in industry and the creation of workers' and producers' councils are ideals which welfare-minded leaders have been striving to achieve here in Burma."¹² These notions were distinguishing features of Yugoslavia's path to socialism.

Hugh Tinker, author of the very first authoritative history of post-colonial Burma, shrewdly observed why these two distant countries, without any previous contact throughout history, developed such strong affection for each other:

Certainly the two countries have many affinities: both have federal constitutions and include within their boundaries diverse races and religions; both are situated precariously on the very edge of the Communist world empire; both are endeavoring to take revolutionary strides from a medieval, agricultural society

⁹ Arhiv Josipa Broza Tita (hereafter AJBT) [Archives of Josip Broz Tito], Kabinet Predsednika Republike (hereafter KPR) [Cabinet of the President of the Republic], I-2, Elaborat "*Burmanska Unija*" [Report "The Union of Burma"], November 1954, p. 149. This is a confidential analysis of Burma's history, internal and foreign policies, economic situation etc. made personally for Tito on the eve of his visit to India and Burma 1954-55.

¹⁰ Hugh Tinker, *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Years of Independence* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1961. 3rd Edition), p. 362.

¹¹ AJBT, KPR, I-2, Elaborat "*Burmanska Unija*," pp. 91-92.

¹² Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, p. 58.

toward a modern, industrialized order; and both are committed wholeheartedly to a policy of neutralism which they hope to galvanize into something dynamic, a positive force among nations.¹³

A similar statement was made in the report made by the Burmese military mission to Yugoslavia in 1955, pointing to the general historical and geopolitical similarities with their own country:

Yugoslavia's population of 18 million being formed into one social unity and country out of many racial (sic!) entities, and five states such as in the Union of Burma, and in the stage of social and economic development on perhaps more vigorous and pronounced socialist economic lines and having on the north and eastern borders the satellite states of the militant Soviet bloc.¹⁴

As Tinker correctly pointed out in this passage (and as confirmed by the Burmese Army), Yugoslavia and Burma found common ground in the fields of ideology and foreign policy. Although arms shipments could indicate a mere marriage of convenience, mutual ties went much deeper than the surface. These stable foundations made military arrangements even more successful, long-term, and lucrative.

The downfall of old colonial regimes and the emergence of new states and nations placed enormous challenges before young national leaderships to create political systems that were independent, stable, and economically self-sustaining. Since any leaning toward capitalism was often associated with the humiliations of the oppressive colonial rule, many Third World leaders were openly embracing socialism as the path toward modernity and development. This was especially true because its state-centered and justice-orientated ideals were generally in line with their own beliefs. As Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah pointed out, "Capitalism is too complicated a system for a newly independent nation. Hence the need for a socialist society." However, economic and other assistance from the superpowers usually came with many strings attached, sometimes making this kind of aid too expensive to receive.¹⁵

Under these circumstances, the Yugoslav example offered a kind of exit strategy because it still maintained the essence of socialism (and was therefore more appealing), but it had

¹³ Hugh Tinker, *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Years of Independence*, p. 362.

¹⁴ Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, p. 177.

¹⁵ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 86-97; John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 152-185.

substantially distanced itself from the Soviet or Chinese social models.¹⁶ From the standpoint of many developing nations, this proved that ideological leanings could be meaningfully divorced from association with one of the superpower blocs. At the same time, what really made cooperation with Belgrade so attractive to countries in the Third World was the fact that Yugoslavia itself was a small country, one which could never become so politically, ideologically, or militarily dominant that it could encroach on their newly acquired freedom. Yugoslavia was widely held as one of the equals among the nonaligned, the only European country sincerely embraced by the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America as one of them.¹⁷

Some years later, when Yugoslav influence among Third World countries had become a well noted and unavoidable fact, U.S. diplomats stationed in Belgrade gave an insightful assessment of Yugoslavia's goals in the developing world. Besides the immediate political and economic benefits from the cooperation with the global South (avoiding pressure from the superpowers, gaining markets for industrial goods and raw materials), American officials stressed the ideological link between Belgrade and numerous developing countries:

Although both politics and economics are thus important, the motivating factor in Yugoslav policy toward underdeveloped countries...is that of ideology...It is evident...that the concept of 'workers' councils'...is one which they have stressed in their many contacts with leaders from the underdeveloped countries and there is some evidence that Yugoslav agricultural and local self-administration policies have attracted favorable attention in some areas...In general, the Yugoslav 'ideological' effort seems to have concentrated not so much on specific features of their system as it has on the broader aspects of their own success as proof of the advantages of socialism. In this respect they have apparently achieved some success...This socialism...need not follow the "classical" pattern but may begin to emerge almost at once, albeit different in forms...¹⁸

After the Asian Socialist Conference held in Rangoon in early 1953 where Yugoslav delegates played an active role, Vladimir Dedijer, author of Tito's renowned biography, strongly advocated in one of his articles that Yugoslavia should extend its ties with Asian and African

¹⁶ For more on the evolution and the characteristics of the distinctive Yugoslav socialist system of "self-management" and "workers' councils" see Branko Petranovic, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918-1988 III* [History of Yugoslavia, 1918-1988, vol. 3] (Beograd: Nolit, 1988), pp. 288-308, 339-356. On certain limitations facing the Yugoslav socialist model in the Third World see Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, pp. 204-208. Nevertheless, Rubinstein concluded that although this kind of Yugoslav ideological influence could be incomprehensible to much of the Western audience, there it was as a fully grown political reality.

¹⁷ Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, pp. 81-84.

¹⁸ National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), Record Group (hereafter RG) 59, 668.00/4-2661, *Yugoslav Policy in the Underdeveloped Countries*, April 26th 1961, pp. 14-15.

nations by making use of their desire to adopt socialism. To do so, Dedijer argued, popular front organizations like the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Yugoslavia (SSRNJ in Serbian), not the ruling Communist Party (LCY), should be placed at the forefront as the agencies responsible for establishing contacts with progressive forces of the developing world. According to Dedijer, socialism had much stronger appeal abroad than communism, which was associated more with the USSR and PRC. This would facilitate efforts to create favorable grounds for the promotion of stronger ties with such political forces as the ruling Congress Party in India or the Antifascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) in Burma.¹⁹ By choosing this course, Yugoslavia challenged not only Soviet, but especially Chinese ideological influence among the developing nations. Newly declassified Chinese and Yugoslav documents show that Sino-Yugoslav competition for ideological and political influence among the nonaligned nations was much wider and more acute than was previously believed.²⁰ Sino-Yugoslav Third World competition is reemerging as one of the long forgotten stories of the global Cold War.

Besides ideological attraction, Yugoslavia and Burma were brought closer together by their determination to pursue the policy of "active" neutralism and nonalignment was an equally effective factor in binding these two countries together. Prime Minister U Nu suggested that "Burma's foreign policy is not framed on the basis of political ideologies, therefore, Burma has no intention of taking sides in the struggle between Communist and anti-Communist forces."²¹ That is why Burmese leaders, facing major internal and external challenges, prudently chose the path of neutralism, nonalignment, seeing to preserve, at least in their own mind, Burma's freedom of action on the international stage.²² When the U.S. formed the SEATO pact in

¹⁹ Vladimir Dedijer, "A Yugoslav View on the Problem of Collaboration in the International Workers' Movement," *Review of International Affairs*, vol. 4, no. 10 (May, 1953).

²⁰ This would become more than evident during the late 1950s and early 1960s, in the formative period of the Nonaligned Movement. Newly declassified materials from the Yugoslav/Serbian and Chinese archives widely support this fact. See confidential report made for the CC LCY: Arhiv Jugoslavije (hereafter AJ) [Archives of Yugoslavia], Centralni komitet Saveza komunista Jugoslavije (hereafter CK SKJ) [Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia], 507/IX, 60/II-79, *Antijugoslovenska kampanja i drustveno-politicka i ideoloska kretanja u Kini* [Anti-Yugoslav campaign and the social-political and ideological tendencies in China], 1959; or circular telegrams from the Chinese Foreign Ministry on Tito's trip to Asian and African countries 1958-59: CFMA, 109-00860-01(1), *Waijiaobu jiu dui Nansilafu de gongzuo fangzhen he Nansilafu neizheng waijiao dongxiang gei ge zhu waishi lingguan de tongbao* [Circular telegrams from the Foreign Ministry to all foreign missions abroad on the principles of relations with Yugoslavia and tendencies of Yugoslavia's domestic and foreign policies], September-December 1958.

²¹ William C. Johnstone, *Burma's Foreign Policy*, p. 69.

²² William C. Johnstone, *Burma's Foreign Policy*, pp. 68-76; Frank N. Trager, "Burma's Foreign Policy, 1948-1956: Neutralism, Third Force, and Rice," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1 (November, 1956), pp. 89-93; John

September 1954 to contain Chinese influence in Southeast Asia after the Geneva Conference, Burma, together with India and Indonesia, rejected the initiative and stayed out of any bloc structures.²³ In July 1955, during his first official visit to the U.S., U Nu reiterated Burma's adherence to the policy of neutralism:

In the present circumstances, Burma's membership in any alliance with a great-power military bloc is incompatible with its continued existence as an independent state. Our recent history is such...that in the minds of the people of Burma an alliance with a big power immediately means domination by that power.²⁴

As both countries found themselves in the neighborhood of either superpower blocs or bordering great powers, Yugoslavia and Burma found they shared a common interest: exerting maximum diplomatic freedom, and seeking to remain outside of any possible confrontation between the superpowers could only be accomplished by standing together in international affairs, behind the standard of the founding principles of the UN. Yet few other countries faced similar challenges while seeking similar goals. Therefore, Burma's and Yugoslavia's options for sympathetic governments remained narrow.²⁵ It was natural for both Belgrade and Rangoon to forge this kind of alliance. Burma's proclamation of "the third force or neutral force" as an official foreign policy doctrine was substantially influenced by Yugoslavia's edifying experience with Stalin.²⁶ Mistrust of great powers was also very strong in both capitals, thus becoming the driving force behind their friendship. During his visit to Burma, Tito said to Prime Minister U Nu that

I will never trust any great power, since each and every one of them has imperialist appetites, both Western countries and Russia, and we cannot ignore

Seabury Thomson, "Burma: A Neutral in China's Shadow," *The Review of Politics*, vol. 19, no. 3 (July, 1957), pp. 336-350.

²³ Gary R. Hess, "The American Search for Stability in Southeast Asia: The SEATO Structure of Containment" in Warren I. Cohen, Akira Iriye, *The Great Powers in East Asia, 1953-60* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 272-295. The general failure of SEATO was obvious when the U.S. succeeded to solicit support for this plan only among its old Asian allies like Thailand and Philippines (Pakistan also joined to counter India), among European powers (U.K. and France) and in Australia and New Zealand. No other important Asian country ever joined this pact. Burma and India practically led the opposition to this new alliance in Asia.

²⁴ Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), p. 165.

²⁵ On the position of nonalignment inside the global Cold War system see John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), pp. 124-128. Naturally enough, India was also there as one of the leading proponents of nonalignment and peaceful co-existence. However, in the early 1950s Yugoslavia was still too distant for Indian foreign policy, while for Burma India was too close to undertake such steps as the ones already made with Yugoslavia (strong political unity, military cooperation etc.).

²⁶ Frank N. Trager, "Burma's Foreign Policy, 1948-1956: Neutralism, Third Force, and Rice," p. 97.

that China might become like that one day...as it has been the case in history for many times...We should never trust [them] 100% and we should strengthen and build our inner defense force.”²⁷

Burmese ambassador to the U.S., James Barrington, stressed Burmese fears in 1953 stating that “with the achievement of our independence we need to be reassured on every possible occasion that we are regarded as equals, that we will not be taken for granted, and that we will not once again become pawns in the game of power politics.” Yugoslav officials fully agreed with their Burmese counterparts.

For both Rangoon and Belgrade, military links established between states had to be made *voluntarily* and not at the direction or behest of great powers. This was an obvious sign of the foreign policy independence that nonaligned countries had actively sought.²⁸ Yugoslav-Burmese military cooperation fit into this pattern of neutralism that was subtly underpinned by strong national defense structures within the nonaligned world.²⁹ On the other hand, military aid from regional or global great powers always came with many unacceptable preconditions.

With time, Rangoon became Belgrade’s “window” into Asia, particularly toward India, China, and other parts of Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Indonesia), linking together European and Asian problems into one coherent picture and promoting the true meaning of “active co-existence.” For the Burmese, joining hands with Yugoslavia represented a crucial means to circumvent superpower and regional pressures and build stable national institutions (political and military ones) that could preserve their fragile sovereignty in hostile geopolitical surroundings. Both countries believed that only if issues of individual countries could become an integral part of global developments, if they could create strong mutual bonds between them based on certain

²⁷ AJBT, KPR, I-2/4-2, *Zabeleska o razgovorima koji su vodjeni na brodu “Mindon,” 14.I 1955 u 15.30h izmedju Predsednika FNRJ, Marsala Josipa Broza Tita i Predsednika burmanske Vlade U Nua* [Minutes of conversation between the Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito and the Burmese Prime Minister U Nu on the ship “Mindon,” January 14th 1955, 4.30pm], p. 4.

²⁸ Khalid I. Babaa, Cecil V. Crabb, Jr., “Nonalignment as a Diplomatic and Ideological Credo,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 362 (November, 1965), p. 11-12.

²⁹ The fact that by 1953, most of the leading Burmese officers were socialist-leaning and strongly anti-British also allowed Yugoslavia to gain a firm foothold inside the Burmese military. This faction wanted to create a new army, completely free from British, Communist, or ethnic Karen influence. Members of this group were General Ne Win, Col. Maung Maung, Brig. Aung Gyi, Socialist U Kyaw Nyein and others. Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, pp. 121-122.

universal principles and substantial exchange, would they be capable of withstanding pressure from the great powers.³⁰

The logic behind all these actions can be summarized in three statements: if we stand alone no one will listen to us; if we stand together our voice can be heard; but, if we have guns to support our principles, they will definitely listen to what we have to say. Tito warned his Burmese friends, “Any kind of international detente or different attempts for disarmament cannot lull me, I think it is better to have guns and a strong army than to wait for others to disarm.”³¹ Saber-rattling, of course, did not go hand in hand with the officially proclaimed demands of nonalignment, however, small countries had to find ways to survive the mishaps of Cold War confrontations.³² The case study of Yugoslav arms shipments to Burma clearly demonstrated that even small countries, to a certain extent, could pursue a policy of “walking softly and carrying a big stick.”

Yugoslavia and Burma: Discovering Each Other

Since the Yugoslav state did not maintain meaningful ties with Asian countries before WWII, some rudimentary contacts through the honorary consulate in Shanghai and only formal diplomatic relations with Japan notwithstanding, the rapidity with which mutual interactions developed after 1945 was surprising. Yugoslavia had embarked on an ambitious path of foreign-policy expansion that was not customary for a country of its size. Nevertheless, revolutionary zeal and self-consciousness sometimes weighed much more than ideas about true size or importance in international politics.

³⁰ During his talks with U Nu, Tito stressed the importance of this kind of approach: “Asia and Europe are one and if a conflict erupts here, then it is not possible for Europe to stay out of it. That is why the attempts of Asian countries and ours in Europe to stay out of blocs and to fight against them have been so persistent. We consider that bloc divisions indicate that, in due time, a conflict could break out that would prove to be catastrophic to mankind and initially it would consume small countries. Therefore, we are against these bloc divisions that represent danger of war.” AJBT, KPR, I-2/4-2, *Zabeleska o razgovorima koji su vodjeni na brodu „Mindon,” 14.I 1955 u 15.30h izmedju Predsednika FNRJ, Marsala Josipa Broza Tita i Predsednika burmanske Vlade U Nua*, p. 3.

³¹ AJBT, KPR, I-2/4-2, *Zabeleska o razgovorima koji su vodjeni na brodu „Mindon,” 14.I 1955 izmedju Predsednika FNRJ, Marsala Josipa Broza Tita i Predsednika burmanske Vlade U Nua* [Minutes of conversation between the Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito and the Burmese Prime Minister U Nu on the ship “Mindon,” January 14th 1955], p. 5.

³² One Burmese officer reiterated Tito’s words about creating strong armies of minor powers in order to survive the Cold War: “U Nu thinks we can make friends with everybody. Nu didn’t want to spend any money on the army. His friendliness was okay but we have got to have a big stick.” Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, p. 162.

The Yugoslav (Serbian) archives show that Yugoslavia initiated its Asian foreign policy well before the rift with Stalin; Rangoon made first contacts with Belgrade on the eve of proclaiming its independence. According to new archival evidence, in 1947 Yugoslavia clandestinely established diplomatic ties with Jiang Jieshi's (Chiang Kai Shek's) Republic of China, thus becoming the first socialist country, besides the Soviet Union, to do so. Against this background, there was an intense exchange of delegations between Yugoslavia and certain Asian countries and Communist Parties. For example, a delegation consisting of members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) visited Yugoslavia and held detailed talks with Marshal Tito, while one Yugoslav delegation attended the Second CPI Congress held in Calcutta in February 1948.³³

Throughout the late 1940s, Yugoslavia was in active pursuit of its revolutionary foreign policy in Asia, closely following the official ideological line of the USSR. However, ties with countries like China, India, and Burma clearly showed that the ambitions of the Yugoslav leadership had already overstepped Balkan and European boundaries. Yugoslavia's influence was far more extensive than any other Soviet satellite, and its revolutionary prestige was a role model to many Asian national-liberation movements.³⁴ Only the triumph of the Chinese Communists would overshadow the lessons of the authentic Yugoslav revolutionary experience.

Under these conditions, Burma was no exception. In July 1947, a delegation consisting of two high ranking Burmese officials including U Kyaw Nyein, then Minister of Internal and Judicial Affairs in the transitional government visited this far away Balkan country with the aim of acquainting themselves with the general features of Yugoslavia's socialist system.³⁵ Already by December of that same year, U Maung Ohn, representative of the AFPFL, Burma's ruling party, and personal secretary to the first Prime Minister, was in Yugoslavia exploring the possibilities for establishing diplomatic relations and economic cooperation, emphasizing during

³³ On this episode see the author's forthcoming article in the journal *Cold War History* "Overstepping the Balkan Boundaries: the Lesser Known History of Yugoslavia's Early Relations with Asian countries".

³⁴ In December 1947, even Mao Zedong himself made a statement that the CCP should learn from the Yugoslav revolutionary experience, since the Yugoslavs had fought their way to victory without making any compromises. Niu Jun, "The Origins of the Sino-Soviet Alliance" in Odd Arne Westad (ed.), *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (Washington, D.C., Stanford, California: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 62.

³⁵ Diplomatski arhiv Saveznog ministarstva inostranih poslova (hereafter DASMIP) [Diplomatic archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], Politicka arhiva (hereafter PA) [Political archives], year 1947, fascikla (hereafter f) [folder] 47, document 418079, *Burmanska delegacija dobre volje posetila Jugoslaviju* [Burmese good-will delegation visited Yugoslavia], July 1947; Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, p. 25.

official talks that the “[Yugoslav] Constitution served as the role model for Burma’s new Constitution.”³⁶ This signaled that Rangoon seriously considered enhancing relations with Yugoslavia as one of its foreign policy priorities. Despite increasing ties, Yugoslavia remained captive to Moscow’s ideological bias, often portraying people like Indian PM Nehru and Burmese PM U Nu as reactionary politicians and imperialist puppets.³⁷ This directly contributed to the general sluggishness in developing bilateral ties with Burma.

Tito’s break with Stalin in 1948 and the political and economic isolation from the Soviet bloc that immediately ensued compelled the Yugoslav leadership to seriously contemplate a foreign policy alternative that would include rapid expansion of diplomatic and trade contacts with as many countries as they could. Close political coordination with Asian and African countries in the UN during the Korean War brought Belgrade closer to the official stance of these nations, thus opening doors to Yugoslavia’s future Third World contacts.³⁸ Nevertheless, facing a potential invasion from the Eastern bloc countries in 1950-51, while continuously suffering from severe economic blockade and constant armed skirmishes on its frontiers, Yugoslavia had desperately sought Western military and economic assistance.³⁹ During early 1950s, this had

³⁶ DASMIP, PA, 1947, f-124, 425154, *Zabeleska o razgovoru druga Price sa predstavnikom burmanske vlade Maung Ohn, dana 5 decembra 1947 godine* [Minutes of conversation between comrade Price and the representative of the Burmese Government Maung Ohn, December 5th 1947]. Also, details of Burma’s first Constitution were borrowed from the United States, France, and largely from the legislation of the United Kingdom. F. S. V. Donnison, *Burma* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1970), p. 141.

³⁷ Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, pp. 26-27. As one can see from declassified documents, Yugoslav representatives at the Second CPI Congress actively lobbied for military uprising against the Indian Government, promising money and rifles to achieve this goal, while one Burmese communist testified that “the Yugoslav comrade...had advised him to go ahead with armed revolution in Burma.” ASCG, CK SKJ, 507/IX, 42/I-24, *Zabeleska o razgovoru sa bivsim gensekrom KPI Dzosijem 25.marta 1956* [Minutes of conversation with the ex-General Secretary of CPI Joshi, March 25th 1956], DASMIP, PA, 1948, f-159, 430981, *Zabeleska o razgovoru sa Indijskim Visokim Komesarem u Londonu, od 13.novembra 1948 godine, otpravnika poslova, savetnika, ambasade u Londonu, dr F. Kosa* [Minutes of conversation between councilor Kos, charge d’affaires of the embassy in London and the Indian High Commissioner in London, November 13th 1948]; Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, pp. 28-30; William C. Johnstone, *Burma’s Foreign Policy*, p. 32. However, Yugoslav representative at this event Vladimir Dedijer officially denied this in his book *Izgubljena bitka Josifa Visarionovica Staljina* [The Battle Stalin Lost] (Rijeka: GRO “Liburnija,” 1982), pp. 20-21, 30-46. On the other hand, documents tell a slightly different story.

³⁸ Dragan Bogetić, *Koreni jugoslovenskog opredeljenja za nesvrstanost* [The Origins of Yugoslavia’s Choice for Nonalignment] (Beograd: ISI, 1990), pp. 204-223; Jadranka Jovanović, *Jugoslavija u Ujedinjenim nacijama 1945-1953* [Yugoslavia in the UN, 1949-53] (Beograd: ISI, 1985), pp. 49-50; Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, pp. 33-34.

³⁹ During these years U.S. intelligence sources were seriously taking into consideration that the Soviet block countries could launch a coordinated invasion of Yugoslavia to overthrow Tito’s regime. See *From “National Communism” to National Collapse: U.S. Intelligence Community Estimative Products on Yugoslavia, 1948-1990* (Washington, D.C.: National Intelligence Council, 2006), pp. 100-132.

become Belgrade's priority number one, as it believed its very survival was at stake.⁴⁰ Relations with Asian countries, particularly with Burma, had been more in the realm of personal enthusiasm of Yugoslavia's ambassadors in the field, than an issue preoccupying the thoughts of higher echelons of country's foreign policy establishment.⁴¹

This kind of personal enthusiasm had largely influenced the substantial changes of attitude in Yugoslavia toward countries like India and Burma. This was supplemented by increased interest of these countries in intensifying ties with Tito, whom they saw as a Communist renegade, and whose international stature had risen under the pressure from Moscow. Tito's skillful diplomacy, which secured crucial support from the U.S., Britain, and France, further increased his stature. Surrounded by bloc NATO and the communist Camp, Belgrade viewed every new friend as centrally important.

The title of "the architect of Yugoslavia's Asian foreign policy" should fall to the first ambassador to India, also accredited to Burma, Josip Djerdja (1950-52).⁴² His diplomatic skills and astuteness threw India and Burma into the limelight of Belgrade's newly discovered opportunities to pursue the policy of nonalignment.⁴³

⁴⁰ More on Yugoslavia's relations with the West, especially on the question of military and economic assistance during this period, see Darko Bekić, *Jugoslavija u Hladnom ratu: Odnosi sa velikim silama 1949-1955* [Yugoslavia and the Cold War: Relations with the Great Powers, 1949-1955] (Zagreb: Globus, 1988); Lorraine M. Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat: The United States, Yugoslavia, and the Cold War* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Dragan Bogetic, *Jugoslavija i Zapad 1952-1955: Jugoslovensko priblizavanje NATO-u* [Yugoslavia and the West, 1952-1955: Yugoslavia's Rapprochement with NATO] (Beograd: Sluzbeni list SRJ, 2000); Bojan Dimitrijevic, *JNA od Staljina do NATO pakta: Armija u spoljnoj politici Titove Jugoslavije* [Yugoslav People's Army from Stalin to NATO: Army in the Foreign Policy of Tito's Yugoslavia] (Beograd: Sluzbeni list SCG, 2006); Ivan Lakovic, *Zapadna vojna pomoc Jugoslaviji 1951-1958* [Western Military Assistance to Yugoslavia, 1951-58] (Podgorica: Istorijski institut Crne Gore, 2006).

⁴¹ For example, Foreign Minister Edvard Kardelj and Yugoslav ambassador to India Josip Djerdja had completely divergent assessments of India's foreign policy activity. While Kardelj tended to depict Nehru's posture in ideological terms, Yugoslav ambassador was far more realistic and sympathetic to New Delhi's international involvement. Darko Bekic, *Jugoslavija u Hladnom ratu*, p. 194; DASMIP, PA, 1951, f-33, 42331, *Telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in India*, January 28th 1951.

⁴² Josip Djerdja (1913-1989), Yugoslavia's first minister plenipotentiary in Albania in the aftermath of WWII, then ambassador to India, Egypt, long standing deputy Foreign Secretary, chairman of the foreign policy committee of the Federal Assembly and its vice-chairman. Ranko Petkovic, *Subjektivna istorija jugoslovenske diplomatije 1943-1991* [Subjective History of the Yugoslav Diplomacy, 1943-1991] (Beograd: Sluzbeni list SRJ, 1995), pp. 145-146.

⁴³ Many researchers, facing certain discrepancies in some published testimonies, tended to believe that Djerdja did not have that much influence on shaping Yugoslavia's orientation toward Asian and later African countries, e.g., Darko Bekic, *Jugoslavija u Hladnom ratu*, pp. 319-320. However, based on my recent research in the archives, this doubt has been largely shattered. Joze Vilfan, the next ambassador to India had precise instructions from the Foreign Minister Kardelj to push for a more active foreign policy in India, finding common ground for joint action, expanding political and economic ties with India, Burma, Indonesia, and focusing ever more on China's activity in Asia. Indeed, Djerdja had made a "revolution" in Yugoslavia's foreign affairs. AJBT, KPR, I-5-b, India, 1952.

For Djerdja, reaching out to Burma became an opportunity to firmly position his own country inside the international system in Asia. During talks with the Burmese Foreign Minister in October 1950, he was invited to present his credentials in Rangoon as soon as possible. Djerdja considered this to be an auspicious moment to officially establish diplomatic relations with Indonesia as well.⁴⁴ While presenting his credentials to the Burmese Government in March 1951, Djerdja personally witnessed the prestige that Yugoslavia and Marshal Tito enjoyed in this distant country. In his urgent report to the Foreign Ministry, he emphasized that:

officially and in public, the presenting of credentials was accepted as a significant political success of the Government...After all, I share the firm belief that in Burmese eyes Yugoslavia, together with Marshal [Tito's] reputation and his policies, stands in line with very few countries...In Burma they emphasize the need for a relationship with us and they [draw] inspiration from our experience.⁴⁵
[emphasis added]

This personal account had a profound impact on Djerdja's understanding of the importance of Burma in Asian affairs. He urged the Yugoslav government to establish diplomatic representation in Rangoon, since "establishing a small office of our Embassy in Rangoon, with one intelligent man there, would be of the utmost benefit...because Rangoon holds the most forward position toward China and Vietnam."⁴⁶ [emphasis added] Fortunately, Djerdja's ambition and farsightedness were completely shared by his successors Joze Vilfan⁴⁷ and future ambassador to Burma Dobrivoje Vidic.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ DASMIP, PA, 1951, f-33, 4332, *Telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in India*, October 26th 1950.

⁴⁵ AJBT, Kancelarija Maršala Jugoslavije (hereafter KMJ) [Chancellery of the Marshal of Yugoslavia], I-3-b/157, *Telegram from the Yugoslav embassy in India*, March 7th 1951. In his report Djerdja noted that many representatives of Eastern and Western countries alike were not that glad to see his presence in Burma. In the end, he pointed out that Yugoslavia had many friends in Burma and they needed "our help" to avoid mistakes or failures.

⁴⁶ DASMIP, PA, 1951, f-68, 43205, *Telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in India*, May 15th 1951. Burmese officials had already offered assistance to Yugoslavia in establishing official contacts with Ho Chi Minh, while Vietminh representatives in Rangoon sent their publications to the Yugoslav Embassy in New Delhi on an almost daily basis. In February 1950, Yugoslavia recognized Ho Chi Minh's government, but, under pressure from the Soviet Union and China, the Vietminh formally ignored this. Darko Bekic, *Jugoslavija u Hladnom ratu*, pp. 141-144.

⁴⁷ Joze Vilfan (1908-1987) was head of the Yugoslav UN mission, deputy FM, ambassador to India and Burma (1952-53), and after 1953, general secretary of the President of the Republic. *Ko je ko u Jugoslaviji* [Who is Who in Yugoslavia] (Beograd, 1957), p. 764.

⁴⁸ Dobrivoje Vidic (1918-1992) was one of the most distinguished Serbian politicians and diplomats on the Yugoslav political scene. He occupied many high posts, including President of the Socialist Republic of Serbia. He was Yugoslavia's ambassador to Burma, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain, head of the Yugoslav mission to the UN, and undersecretary for foreign affairs. Ranko Petkovic, *Subjektivna istorija jugoslovenske diplomatije*, p. 146.

Engulfed into Chaos: Burma in Political Turmoil

Since gaining its independence, Burma faced constant political upheavals, military uprisings, economic hardships, and direct foreign entanglement. Squeezed between two Asian giants—India and China—and finding itself at the crossroads of influence actions carried out by the superpower blocs, Burma faced the daunting task of maintaining and strengthening the fragile sovereignty.⁴⁹

As Southeast Asia become more relevant to the international correlation of forces during the early Cold War years, Burma came under closer scrutiny by the superpowers. The prospect of Burma turning toward Communism could have had serious implications for American interests throughout Southeast Asia. Alarms went off in Washington, as dominoes were expected to fall on the back of French failures in Indochina. During the 1950s, Burma was viewed as just as strategically important as Vietnam.⁵⁰ As one CIA analysis indicated, any government change in Rangoon could have had far-reaching consequences for all of its neighbors:

Aside from the further loss of Western prestige, Communist sway over Burma would further endanger India and Pakistan...Furthermore, such a development, particularly if coupled with the emergence of a pro-Soviet Government in Indochina, would constitute a direct threat to the present regimes in Thailand and Malaya...Thus the situation in Burma directly affects the stability of areas where U.S. political, economic, and strategic interests are clearly apparent.⁵¹

On the other hand, there were certain indications that Burmese communists enjoyed logistical support from China, and some of their leaders even received training across the border. These measures were presumably implemented to ensure the stability of the soft underbelly of the “world revolution,” as Stalin and Mao perceived it.⁵² Burma remained important to both Western

⁴⁹ John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 2001), pp. 251-253.

⁵⁰ Jeffrey T. Richelson, *Presidential Directives on National Security from Truman to Clinton* (Washington, D.C.: The National Security Archive, 1999), PD 00284, “United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia,” June 25th 1952; Andrew Selth, *Burma’s Armed Forces: Power Without Glory*, p. 14. U.S. strategic planners were also considering forging a united military defense against the Chinese between Burma, India, and Pakistan, together with other Southeast Asian nations.

⁵¹ Jeffrey T. Richelson, *The Soviet Estimate: U.S. Analysis of the Soviet Union, 1947-91* (Washington, D.C.: The National Security Archive, 1995), SE 00081, “The Communist Influence in Burma,” January 11th 1950, pp. 5-6. Since Burma was a major exporter of rice, the CIA considered that Communists, if they had got a hold on power, could have started economic warfare in Asia (against India, Ceylon, Malaya, and Japan) by manipulating the price and distribution of Burmese rice surpluses.

⁵² AJBT, KPR, I-2/4-2, *Zabeleska o razgovorima koji su vodjeni na brodu „Mindon,” 13.I 1955 izmedju Predsednika FNRJ, Marsala Josipa Broza Tita i Predsednika burmanske Vlade U Nua* [Minutes of conversation between the Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito and the Burmese Prime Minister U Nu on the ship “Mindon,” January 13th 1955], p. 10; AJBT, KPR, I-2, Elaborat “Burmanska Unija,” pp. 130-131; Shen Yu-Dai, “Peking and Rangoon,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 5 (January-March, 1961), pp. 131-135; Xie Yixian (ed.), *Zhongguo waijiao shi*:

and Eastern bloc strategies in Southeast Asia, therefore making the task of maintaining Burmese foreign-policy independence in world affairs challenging. Acquiring weapons from either of these two camps or some regional powers would have created difficulties for the regime in Rangoon. This basically underlined the importance of Yugoslav-Burmese military cooperation in an international context.

What ultimately demonstrated Burma's fundamental weakness in handling all of these issues was the central government's outright inability to effectively and forcefully project its authority into every corner of the country. Facing different groups of rebels, military bandits, mutineers, and possible foreign intervention, the Burmese government and army were not up to the challenge of independently quelling opposition forces. As Dr. Maung Maung, official historian of Burma, wrote that "there were maybe 2000 soldiers at Gen. Ne Win's disposal. All scattered in decimated, weak battalions and companies."⁵³ The army's ranks were left decimated after brutal ethnic clashes between the Burmese and Karens, when most of the Karen officers and soldiers, who constituted the majority of the previous colonial forces, left the *Tatmadaw* and joined the "Karen National Defence Organization" (KNDO).⁵⁴ The minority of the communists led by Thakin Soe had been in rebellion ever since 1946 ("Red Flag" communists or Trotskyites), however, in March 1948 by far the largest communist group, the Burmese Communist Party (BCP or "White Flag") with Thakin Than Tun at its helm had been outlawed and they had also joined the conflagration that was blazing around Burma's interior.⁵⁵

Immediately after independence, and especially during the period 1948-49, the dominant governing force of the AFPFL suffered a severe internal split which brought into existence different political and ethnic minority-based armed gangs (besides Karen, also Shan, Kachin, Chin etc.,) that occupied considerable parts of the countryside in a very short period of time.⁵⁶

Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shiqi 1949-1979 [A Diplomatic History of China: The Period of the People's Republic, 1949-1979] (Henan: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1988), pp. 25-26; John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, pp. 158-160.

⁵³ Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, p. 96. It was estimated that the Burmese Army had lost 42% of its equipment and 45% of its personnel during these first years of independence. On early army-building efforts see also Hugh Tinker, *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Years of Independence*, pp. 323-330.

⁵⁴ Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, pp. 129-134.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey T. Richelson, *The Soviet Estimate: U.S. Analysis of the Soviet Union, 1947-91*, SE 00081, "The Communist Influence in Burma," January 11th 1950, pp. 7-11.

⁵⁶ Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, chapter 5. William C. Johnstone, *Burma's Foreign Policy*, pp. 48-51; AJBT, KPR, I-2, Elaborat "Burmanska Unija," pp. 23-25; F. S. V. Donnison, *Burma*, pp. 142-145. Besides the "White Flag" and "Red Flag" Communist insurgents, there were also paramilitary groups

Occasionally, even Rangoon itself was under threat of being overtaken by these forces, while the Burmese leadership (AFPFL and Socialists) could exert influence over only slightly more than 30% of the country's territory. Burma was in total disarray.⁵⁷ The establishment of these ethnically-based guerrilla groups was part of the U.S. strategy to counter Communist encroachment into Burma. These plans had to be executed clandestinely, in order to avoid enraging the Burmese Government.⁵⁸ Interference by great powers into Burma's internal affairs had already taken its toll and the situation appeared likely to deteriorate further.

What worried most of the people in Rangoon, and also many in Western capitals, was the diverse impact of China. This not only encompassed the activities of the newly established communist government in Beijing, but also the presence of renegade Guomintang troops (GMD, or Nationalist) in northern parts of Burma and on the border with Thailand.⁵⁹ These GMD units were dispersed remnants of the 8th and 26th Armies which had been crushed in 1949-50 by the advancing troops of the communist People's Liberation Army (PLA). Most of these detachments under the command of General Li Mi were concentrated in the Kengtung province of Burma, spreading over to the border region of Monghsat. Even though some of their forward deployed units were pushed out of a few border towns by the Burmese Army, the majority remained in the region of Shan state building barracks and air strips where supplies from Taiwan or Thailand could be flown in.⁶⁰ The main task of these GMD troops according to Taiwan's plan, was to undertake subversive actions against the Chinese Communist authorities in the province of

organized into "People's Volunteer Organization" who were close to the "White Flag" faction. Different ethnic and religious insurgents were also present, including the above-mentioned KNDO and Muslim "Mujahed." All these rebels taken together had approximately 36,000 men and were far better organized than the government troops.

⁵⁷ Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, pp. 1-24. Already in the early 1950, the U.S. was considering rendering necessary military aid to the Burmese Army under the provisions of the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) and in close coordination with the British who had a defense agreement with Burma. Although the Burmese were, at first, contemplating this possibility, very soon they reneged due to the American support for the Guomintang troops in Burma. Furthermore, the U.S. was very worried that the Chinese Communists would use political chaos in Burma to exert their own influence. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1950, vol. VI, East Asia and the Pacific (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1976), pp. 233-244, 252, 255.

⁵⁸ Jeffrey T. Richelson, *Presidential Directives*, PD 00284, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia," June 25th 1952, pp. 14-15. In May 1952, Karen rebels contacted the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok through a Thai intermediary, demanding supplies of weapons and ammunition from the Americans. They were threatening to turn to the communists for weapons should their attempts to obtain assistance fail. NARA, RG 59, 690B.92/5-2152, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State*, May 21st 1952.

⁵⁹ Burma was the first non-communist country to recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) in December 1949, and the second (after India) to establish official diplomatic relations with Beijing in June 1950. Xie Yixian (ed.), *Zhongguo waijiao shi: Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shiqi 1949-1979*, p. 19.

⁶⁰ Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, pp. 111-115.

Yunnan (the majority of GMD soldiers were recruits from that region) and make an attempt to regain a foothold in the south of the country as part of concerted nationalist efforts to return back to the mainland.⁶¹ As time went on, the overall number of clashes between the Burmese and GMD units rose frequently and steadily.

By 1953, the GMD numbers rose to 12,000. Even more worrisome was the fact that they had established close military coordination with the Karen insurgents.⁶² The challenge of fighting the GMD was much more serious than anything the *Tatmadaw* had faced to date.

Taking into account the fact that war was raging on the Korean peninsula at that same time, many top-level people in Washington D.C. thought that material support for the GMD troops in Burma could divert some of the PLA forces from the Korean theater, thus lessening the pressure on U.S. troops there and simultaneously creating a new means of destabilizing communist rule in China. As evidenced by Presidential Directive 00284, use of remaining nationalist troops against the communists was an integral part of the U.S. grand strategy in Asia: "Employ as desirable and feasible anti-communist Chinese forces, including Chinese nationalist forces, in military operations in Southeast Asia, Korea, or China proper."⁶³ Already in early 1951, upon the personal directive of President Truman, the CIA had initiated "Operation Paper" to coordinate the clandestine supply of men and materials to GMD forces in Burma through Taiwan and Thailand, sometimes even directly supplying Li Mi's units during their offensives in Yunnan during 1951-52.⁶⁴ Most of these flights were carried out by Civilian Air Transport

⁶¹ *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific (1987), p. 43.

⁶² AJBT, KPR, I-5-b, Burma, *Izjava Vlade Burme o Kuomintanskoj agresiji u Burmi* [The Statement of the Government of Burma on the Guomindang Aggression in Burma], March 2nd 1953; Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, p. 156. As time passed, more and more Burmese troops were sent to fight GMD units, leaving empty space in the interior of the country where communist insurgents or Karen rebels could expand their own influence.

⁶³ Jeffrey T. Richelson, *Presidential Directives*, PD 00284, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia," June 25th 1952, p. 15. In March 1952, memorandum of the Joint Chiefs of Staff called for covert military operations against communist nations in Asia, particularly noting "the military potential inherent in the Chinese Nationalist forces along the northern frontier of Burma." *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XIV, part I, China and Japan (1985), p. 18.

⁶⁴ John W. Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia* (Armonk-London: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 148-150, 154; Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, pp. 125-128; Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, p. 155. In 1952, 700 men were airlifted from Taiwan to bolster Li Mi's units for the forthcoming military operations, while during 1952-53 many tons of communication equipment and medical supplies were flown into Monghsat. Flights carrying weapons and ammunition were flown on an almost daily basis. However, General Li Mi personally told U.S. military officials in Taipei that these numbers were exaggerated (only 20 trips to Monghsat in 1952 and each airplane could carry maximum 10 people or one ton of payload). NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/3-253, *Telegram from the U.S. Military Mission in Taiwan to the Department of the Army*, March 2nd 1953.

(CAT), a CIA front company.⁶⁵ To Rangoon, such actions were particularly worrisome, as they might have triggered a backlash from Beijing which could undermine the efforts for the peaceful settlement between Burma and China.⁶⁶ GMD forces were also engaged in the highly lucrative opium smuggling business (a few hundred tons per year) which allowed them to finance guerrilla operations and to support themselves.⁶⁷ GMD presence in Burma had become a multifaceted problem for the government in Rangoon.

Burmese officials were deeply embittered by the fact that the U.S. had supported nationalist operations in Burma by supplying them with weapons and rendering logistics from Thailand. Caucasian bodies were even found by the Burmese Army among the GMD casualties and documents found on them identified the dead as Americans. There were also reported sightings of people wearing American uniforms marching together with GMD units.⁶⁸ American ambassador to Burma, David M. Key, was continuously frustrated that he had to blatantly lie to the Burmese that the U.S. was not involved in any way with Nationalist activities, as Secretary of State Dean Acheson demanded he do. Unwilling to proceed in this manner, Ambassador Key quickly resigned from his post in April 1952.⁶⁹ As the U.S. embassy in Rangoon continued to

⁶⁵ CAT was primarily organized to carry out covert operations, air-drop agents and supplies against the communist countries in Asia, mainly against the PRC. CAT was registered in Taiwan under local regulations, flying under the nationalist flag, and operating a fleet of C-46 and C-47 airplanes that was comparable to the national airlines of many small countries. This company was originally set up by General Claire Chennault, commander of the legendary "Flying Tigers" and a close friend of Jiang Jieshi's. Later it would be absorbed by Air America, another CIA front in Laos. Besides CAT, another CIA subsidiary, Southeast Asia Supplies Corporation, was also in the business of supplying GMD forces in Burma. It was headed by Paul Helliwell, a well-known intelligence operative and a close associate of Gen. Chennault in the "China Lobby." John W. Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia*, pp. 97-99; Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, pp. 128-132.

⁶⁶ *FRUS*, 1951, vol. VI, part I, Asia and the Pacific (1977), pp. 273-274, 278-285. U.S. Embassy in Burma concluded that GMD troops wanted to engage the PLA in the Yunnan border region and invite the invasion of Burma, therefore "provoking all out war in which they have all to gain and nothing to lose." NARA, RG 59, 690B.93/5-1251, *Telegram from the US Embassy in Burma to the Department of State*, May 12th 1951.

⁶⁷ Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, pp. 142-143. Thailand was used as the main route for smuggling opium, and some officials of the Thai military were closely associated with GMD generals in this business.

⁶⁸ *FRUS*, 1951, vol. VI, part I, Asia and the Pacific, pp. 313-316. Burmese Minister of Defense U Ba Swe told ambassador Vidic in confidence that his troops had captured a GMD major-general and the head of the intelligence both of whom confirmed that the U.S. was 100% involved with the nationalists in Burma through Taiwan and their Embassy in Bangkok. DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 43516, *Zabeleska o razgovoru ambasadora FNRJ u Burmi druga Dobrivoja Vidica sa U Ba Swe, Ministrom narodne odbrane u Vladi Burme, 29.mart 1953.godine* [Minutes of conversation between the Yugoslav ambassador comrade Dobrivoje Vidic and Burmese Minister of Defense U Ba Swe, March 29th 1953]. A year earlier, Burmese officials told ambassador Vilfan that they had captured some American and British officers working with GMD and Karen insurgents. DASMIP, PA, 1952, f-14, 45977, *Telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in India*, April 28th, 1952.

⁶⁹ John W. Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia*, pp. 153-154. Ambassador Key was informed from Burmese sources that alleged major Stewart and another captain were

raise objections about the American involvement with Taiwan in Burma, Washington demanded official denials be given to the Burmese government regarding U.S. involvement.⁷⁰

While Burma was one of few countries in the world that recognized the PRC Government, the unresolved border issue between two countries (and GMD actions) seriously jeopardized the formation of a constructive bilateral relationship.⁷¹ Due to the communist rebellion inside Burma, many high-ranking politicians in Rangoon expressed their doubts over the possible neutrality of the Chinese communists with respect to their ideological allies in this neighboring country. On the other hand, many Burmese officers were truly obsessed with the communist threat, marking the Chinese as the long-term enemy and calling for the reorganization of the *Tatmadaw* into a capable force which could hold a potential PLA invasion at the border for three months.⁷² However, PM U Nu sought to bring Burma and China closer together on issues of preservation of general peace in Southeast Asia, avoiding armed conflicts between states, and resolving contentious problems by peaceful means through good-neighborly policies.⁷³ Paradoxically, the GMD presence in Burma had brought temporary reconciliation between Beijing and Rangoon.⁷⁴

In March 1953, local PLA commanders in Yunnan contacted their Burmese counterparts on the other side of the border, stating that they were ready to “supply...troops in adequate

seen with nationalist troops, but he was instructed by the Secretary of State to immediately deny these claims, although the State Department knew that major Stewart, employee of CAT, was residing with GMD troops. NARA, RG 59, 690B.93/5-3151, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Burma to the Secretary of State*, May 31st 1951.

⁷⁰ *FRUS*, 1951, vol. VI, part I, Asia and the Pacific, pp. 289-290; NARA, RG 59, 690B.93/11-2851, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Burma to the Department of State*, November 16th 1951. The embassy particularly emphasized that the U.S. should exert more pressure on Taiwan to break the link with GMD forces in Burma and distance themselves from General Li Mi.

⁷¹ For more on the origins of Sino-Burmese border question see Lu Yiran (ed.), *Zhongguo jindai bianjie shi* [Modern History of Chinese Borders] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2006), pp. 725-812; Zhang Zhirong, *Zhongguo bianjiang yu minzu wenti: dangdai Zhongguo de tiaozhan jiqi lishi youlai* [China's Border Regions and National Questions: Challenges of Contemporary China and their Historical Origins] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004), pp. 63-76.

⁷² Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, pp. 161-162.

⁷³ William C. Johnstone, *Burma's Foreign Policy*, pp. 161-166, 211-224. Burma maintained its neutrality during the Korean War by skillfully balancing between the conflicting forces. Rangoon gave some economic assistance to the Korean people under the aegis of the UN, but it also refused to vote for the UN resolution condemning China as an aggressor. Yugoslavia also refused to vote for this resolution labeling China as an aggressor in Korea, even though Beijing never accepted Belgrade's recognition on October 5th 1949. Both Belgrade and Rangoon exercised constructive position toward the Korean War, not wanting to get involved into the superpower confrontations.

⁷⁴ During his talks with ambassador Vidic Burmese President Ba U expressed his concern that “GMD forces seek to establish their base in Burma and this could trigger settling of accounts between the Chinese [CCP against GMD] on Burma's territory.” “If they had not been getting American weapons from Siam, we would have quickly liquidated all GMD forces,” said the Burmese President. AJBT, KPR, I-5-b, Burma, *Zabeleska o razgovoru druga Dobrivoja Vidica sa Predsednikom Republike Ba U-om, 27.II 1953* [Minutes of conversation between comrade Vidic and the President of the Republic Ba U, February 27th 1953].

numbers [and] destroy KMT [GMD] troops, if Burma agreed.”⁷⁵ However, Burmese Defense Minister U Ba Swe publicly responded that “any offer from CPR [Chinese People’s Republic] to help crush KMTs will be rejected.”⁷⁶ This was exactly what the Burmese leadership wanted to avoid—the possibility, even a remote one, that the GMD issue could become just an excuse to swap one interference into its internal affairs (U.S.) with another (Chinese). It became clear in Rangoon that Burma desperately needed alternative sources of weapons, supplies, and training outside the realm of great powers that could fundamentally help rebuild the *Tatmadaw* into a respectable fighting force.

Already in 1951-52 there was a significant change in the tactics of the “White Flag” communists who had reoriented themselves toward tentative cooperation with the government in their joint struggle against the GMD, while simultaneously campaigning for general amnesty for its members. Yugoslav ambassador Vilfan was informed that Beijing, together with Moscow, decided to change their general policies toward the Burmese government and forced the BCP to back down and accept a provisional agreement with the legal authorities in Rangoon.⁷⁷ That was the main reason why the Burmese decided to generally concentrate their actions on fighting GMD troops, while only auxiliary units were left to counter Communist and KNDO resistance.⁷⁸

U.S. diplomats stationed in Rangoon were well aware that GMD forces had become a huge embarrassment for American foreign policy. They informed Washington that the U.S. Government should abandon any kind of assistance to these groups, as the groups had become a huge liability.⁷⁹ Hence, the new Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, soon after taking office in

⁷⁵ NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/3-253, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in India to the Secretary of State*, March 2nd 1953.

⁷⁶ NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/3-1253, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Burma to the Secretary of State*, March 12th 1953.

⁷⁷ AJBT, Kancelarija Marsala Jugoslavije (hereafter KMJ) [Chancellery of the Marshal of Yugoslavia], I-3-b/157, *Telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in India*, April 28th 1952. A document was seized by the Burmese troops inside the BCP HQ which confirmed the change in their general policies. Already at the end of 1952, the number of communist and Karen insurgents surrendering to the Burmese Army had significantly risen. DASMIP, PA, 1952, f-14, 416329, *Telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in India*, December 10th 1952. The U.S. Embassy in Rangoon also noted that the communists had significantly changed their tactics, concentrating more on political work among Burmese peasants in remote areas than on fighting government troops. NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/2-1953, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Burma to the Officer in Charge of Burmese Affairs, Department of State*, February 19th 1953.

⁷⁸ DASMIP, PA, 1952, f-14, 412052, *Telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in India*, September 3rd 1952.

⁷⁹ *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 12-18, 29-32. Charge d’affaires Day and later Ambassador William J. Sebald considered that GMD troops had lost any significance as a potential guerilla force against the PLA, while, at the same time, their sole existence could have tempted Beijing to send troops into Burma to crush them. Under these circumstances, these reports followed, Burma most likely would have joined forces with the invading army. They both advised the rapid repatriation of GMD troops with all their weapons back to Taiwan.

January 1953, substantially altered his predecessor's policies and decided that vigorous measures should be implemented to eliminate disruptive nationalist influence in Burma, directly hampering American influence-building actions in Southeast Asia. Additionally, the State Department also frantically wanted to avoid any kind of public discussion on this issue being brought before the UN.⁸⁰ However, Taiwan remained at odds with the U.S. regarding this issue, often stating that Taipei had very limited influence with GMD troops in Burma. Eventually they had to comply with American demands and accept gradual evacuation of GMD forces from northern Burma.⁸¹

On the other side of the fence, as a means to avoid an inter-Chinese showdown on its own soil and to compel the U.S. and Taiwanese authorities to stop any kind of meddling in Burma's internal affairs, the Burmese government decided to make the GMD issue public by putting it on the agenda of the UN General Assembly, despite Washington's opposition. Yugoslav representatives rendered necessary assistance to their Burmese colleagues by supporting their demands for outright condemnation of the GMD's activity in Burma.⁸² Minister of Foreign Affairs Sao Hkun Hkio publicly expressed his gratitude for "kindness and affinity expressed to us," while he emphasized that "connections between Yugoslavia and Burma have developed and have become more stable and in the help of [Yugoslav ambassador to the UN] Mr. Mates we see clear manifestations of friendly feelings between our two nations."⁸³ The American Embassy in Belgrade was already closely monitoring public reactions in Yugoslavia with regards to the status of GMD troops in Burma and U.S. initiatives during the general political debate in the UN.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 48-49, 58-59, 63-65.

⁸¹ *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 66-67, 79-80, 84-86. Taiwan agreed to an American proposal to form a quadripartite commission (U.S., Burma, Taiwan, and Thailand) to oversee evacuation of GMD troops from Burma. This Committee had its first session in Bangkok in May 1953.

⁸² DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-99, 46246, *Analiza misije FNRJ u UN: Kuomintanska agresija protiv Burme* [Analysis of the Yugoslav mission to the UN: the GMD aggression against Burma], May 8th 1953; William C. Johnstone, *Burma's Foreign Policy*, pp. 225-228. On April 22, the Political Committee of the UN adopted a Mexican draft resolution with 57 votes against zero, with Burma and Taiwan abstaining (Yugoslavia voted for this proposal). The following day, the General Assembly approved the amended text of the resolution almost unanimously (only Taiwan objected). However, the language of this final proposal significantly watered down what Burma had initially suggested.

⁸³ DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-99, 47372, *Telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma*, May 20th 1953.

⁸⁴ NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/4-353, *Yugoslav Press Comments on Chiang Kai Shek's Forces in Burma*, April 3rd 1953. The U.S. Embassy stressed in this report that all Yugoslav official newspapers took sides with Burmese demands in the UN, claiming that the American support for GMD forces would only further alienate other Asian nations from the West.

Besides Yugoslavia, India also actively supported Burmese demands in the UN. In private conversation with one U.S. diplomat, Pillai, secretary-general of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, agreed with the U.S. standpoint that it was better “to settle the problem, than to push [for a] resolution in [the] UN,” while he added that “Burmese headed and did not know how much influence India had.” At the end of this talk Pillai even stated that India’s “two small neighbors, Burma and Ceylon, were causing India much trouble.”⁸⁵ This emphasized the linkage between small countries like Yugoslavia and Burma in international affairs and further exemplified the perils of excessive dependence on the good will of great powers.

By that time, U Kyaw Nyein had already become one of the strongest proponents of closer political, economic, and military cooperation with Yugoslavia.⁸⁶ Even U.S. diplomats in Rangoon were acquainted with the fact for quite some time that “control over Burmese foreign relations, as well as over most activities of the Burmese Government, rests in the hands of the Socialist Party [U Kyaw Nyein] with the consent and cooperation of General Ne Win,” which obviously meant that Yugoslavia had been wooing the right people to promote its own interests.⁸⁷

The foreign entanglements of regional and international great powers had opened the doors wide for Yugoslavia’s proactive penetration into the internal affairs of Burma.

“A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed:” Opening the Gates of Burma

Continuous insurgency in many parts of Burma and the likelihood of Chinese or American intervention in the country were frightening prospects for the leadership in Rangoon. The weakness of the armed forces and their lack of reliable equipment only added to the problem. Prime Minister U Nu understood that his country desperately needed modern military equipment, but remained worried of the strings the aid might attach.⁸⁸ Minister of Defense U Ba Swe told

⁸⁵ NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/3-2953, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in India to the Secretary of State*, March 29th 1953.

⁸⁶ This was already evident in the writings of experts monitoring Burma’s foreign relations during the 1950s. John Seabury Thomson, “Burma: A Neutral in China’s Shadow,” p. 344.

⁸⁷ NARA, RG 59, 690B.00/4-1450, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Burma to the Department of State*, April 14th 1950.

⁸⁸ In the initial phase of the rebellion, Nehru’s India had supplied several shipments of arms to the Burmese Army. This assistance had enabled Rangoon to partially regain initiative against the mutineers in 1949. Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, pp. 19, 97. However, India was too big and too close to remain

the Yugoslav ambassador that “the [Burmese] do not want to rely upon the U.S., because they are afraid this could be used as means for different kinds of pressure..., they want to get rid of the British..., they cannot rely upon the Indians for different reasons...”⁸⁹ In a world divided by adversarial blocs, achieving these goals was particularly complex. A neutralist initiative needed a neutralist response. Yugoslavia was soon considered “the only sincere support.”

On the eve of independence, Burma had concluded a defense agreement with the U.K. (Let Ya-Freeman Agreement, 29 August 1947) that enabled the British to furnish military equipment and maintain a military mission (British Services Mission, BSM) there to monitor and evaluate Burmese requests for new weapons systems, training etc., all at the expense of the newly independent government in Rangoon.⁹⁰ The British, however, did not supply the weapons requested by the Burmese government, and used their presence (and the requests) as leverage to extract certain concessions from the Burmese.⁹¹ The arrangements to train Burmese officers in British military schools had a similar fate.⁹²

The Burmese leadership grew dissatisfied over time, believing the British sought only to preserve their colonial interests.⁹³ During his talks with ambassador Vidic, U Kyaw Nyein stressed that Rangoon wanted to force the British to honor the agreement between the two countries and render all necessary assistance on time and in the form of weapons and training. At

the biggest arms supplier to Burma. Influence over Burmese inner policies could have become too tempting for New Delhi.

⁸⁹ DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-13, 4513, *Ciphered telegram from the Embassy in Burma*, December 27th 1953. General Ne Win was very suspicious and implacable about military cooperation with Britain or India. He even expressed his hatred toward the British, due to their unfair treatment of the Burmese government and the army. With regards to India, he was open to political, but not military cooperation. DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 49043, *Zabeleska o razgovoru sa generalom Ne Win, komandantom Burmanske armije, 27. februara 1954* [Minutes of conversation with Commander-in-Chief of the Burmese Army General Ne Win, February 27th 1954].

⁹⁰ Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, p. 104. The Burmese were obliged to pay the expenses of all past, present, and future British presence in the now fully independent country.

⁹¹ *FRUS*, 1951, vol. VI, part I, Asia and the Pacific, pp. 294-295. A Burmese diplomat in Belgrade confided that in 1949, the British did not ship them guns they had bought two years earlier, and during a KNDO and “White Flag” attack on Rangoon, London had deliberately blocked the assets of the Burmese Government in its banks and Burma did not have alternative sources of funding at that time of peril. AJBT, KPR, I-5-b, Burma, *Zabeleska o razgovoru druga Koce Popovica sa burmanskim otpravnikom poslova U Tin Maung Gyi-em 19. januara 1953 u Drzavnom sekretarijatu za inostrane poslove* [Minutes of conversation between comrade Koca Popovic and Burmese charge d'affaires U Tin Maung Gyi in the Federal Secretariat for Foreign Affairs, January 19th 1953].

⁹² Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, pp. 166-168.

⁹³ That was the main reason that the British were demanding that the U.S. furnish necessary military equipment, thus avoiding severing their relationship with Rangoon. However, the Americans were still reluctant to comply, even though they had contemplated this scenario. Moreover the Burmese were willing to accept U.S. military assistance, but they rejected the idea of submitting to American military inspections. *FRUS*, 1951, vol. VI, part I, Asia and the Pacific, pp. 302-303, 323. Ambassador Sebald suggested that the U.S. should take some burden off the British regarding military supplies and economic assistance to Burma while still maintaining the legal framework of the British-Burmese arrangements. *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, p. 34.

the same time, the Burmese side wanted to cancel many provisions of this pact that had previously violated Burma's sovereignty (Britain's right to send air and naval forces to Burma with only formal compliance from the government of Burma; restrictions preventing the Burmese Army from not maintaining military contacts or purchasing materials from countries outside the Commonwealth, etc.).⁹⁴ Washington was also considering the inclusion of other Asian Commonwealth countries, and in particular India, into the ranks of the BSM, in the theory that such actions would increase trust between the Burmese and foreign military missions.⁹⁵

Already in 1951-52, the Burmese military had begun to explore the possibility of expanding military ties with other countries besides Great Britain, India, and the U.S. Of those, Yugoslavia was considered one of the most desirable partners. Ever since the end of WWII and especially after the conflict with Stalin, Yugoslav leadership made a crucial decision to create an independent military industry that could satisfy most of the army's needs for light and heavy weaponry. Belgrade also established and equipped R&D institutes, reconstructed and developed its military-industrial capacity, and began educating necessary technical staff. By the mid 1950s, Yugoslavia was independently producing large quantities of light weapons, light and heavy artillery weapons, anti-tank guns (AT), anti-aircraft guns (AA), torpedo boats, minesweepers, small submarines, landing craft, training airplanes, all kinds of ammunition and explosives, torpedoes, sea and land mines. Yugoslavia even began producing parts for tanks and jet airplanes, in these cases relying heavily on foreign procurements.⁹⁶ When in December 1951, Burma sent their first military observers to Yugoslavia to see the country's defense capacities, they were impressed with the achievements of Yugoslavia's military industry.⁹⁷ The estimate of Burma's higher military circles largely influenced U Nu's thinking that the purchase of arms from Yugoslavia was in full compliance with his policies of buying weapons with no strings attached.

⁹⁴ DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 43520, *Zabeleska o razgovoru sa U Co Njenom na dan 5.III 1953* [Minutes of conversation with U Kyaw Nyein, March 5th 1953]. U Kyaw Nyein said that they had refused to accept U.S. military assistance, still sticking to the British, therefore "choosing the lesser of two evils." Besides these factors, Burmese officers were very suspicious of the BSM because of its ties with the Karen leadership, forcing on them, as they dubbed it, "Karenization" of the *Tatmadaw*. Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, pp. 119-120.

⁹⁵ John Prados, *U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, Part I: 1954-1968* (Washington, D.C.: The National Security Archive, 2004), VI 00002, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia," June 19th 1952, p. 14.

⁹⁶ Aleksandar Stamatovic, *Vojna privreda druge Jugoslavije 1945-1991* [Military Industry of the Second Yugoslavia, 1945-1991] (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 2001), pp. 40-48. During this period the value of arms exports had a steady increase from 2.0% of the overall value of produced weapons in 1953 to 12.5% in 1954 and 22.9% in 1956.

⁹⁷ DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-14, 46068, *Telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in India*, April 30th 1952.

This was an extremely sensitive issue that could have disturbed the delicate balance inside Burma and in the region. By purchasing arms outside the realm of Britain, the U.S., or India, Rangoon risked disagreements with the Western powers, as their privileged position came under direct threat. On the other hand, China and the USSR would also be displeased seeing Tito's regime expanding its political and economic influence into Asia. Initially, Burmese officials chose Pakistan to approach Yugoslav diplomats and, clandestinely, ask for military assistance.

Despite the fact that official contact between the two governments was maintained through the Yugoslav embassy in India until the end of 1952, Burmese officials decided to circumvent customary channels and directly contact Yugoslav representatives in Pakistan. A possible reason for such move was the Burmese leadership's desire to keep such dealings outside the reach of India or Great Britain.⁹⁸

Based on the instructions received from the War Office in Rangoon, in January 1952 secretary of the Burmese embassy in Karachi, Ohn Khin, made official contact with the Yugoslav embassy asking whether "Yugoslavia is in a position and willing to make shipments of certain amounts of ammunition to the Burmese Army, which they urgently need." They were ready to pay for these ammunition transfers in pounds sterling or even with silver, wolfram, tin, or oil, while one military delegation was getting ready to depart for Yugoslavia and hold detailed negotiations.⁹⁹ As Burma was suffering heavy economic hardships, this offer shows the seriousness with which Rangoon viewed the situation.

No immediate official reply to this initiative is available in the Yugoslav archives. The Burmese, however, were not dissuaded. U Kyaw Nyein pushed harder to reach an agreement with Belgrade on this and other issues.¹⁰⁰ Impressed by previous reports, he decided to personally lead a large civil-military delegation to Yugoslavia and acquaint with the country's

⁹⁸ According to some American documents, Burma established a cordial relationship with Pakistan to counterbalance India's influence in Burma's border regions and among Indians residing in Burma. *FRUS*, 1950, vol. VI, East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 241-242.

⁹⁹ AJBT, KMJ, I-3-b/157, *Ciphered telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in Pakistan*, January 21st 1952. The items requested by the Burmese side were: .303 caliber rifle ammunition (any amount), 7.92 caliber rifle ammunition (at least two million rounds), 9mm caliber machine gun ammunition (any amount), .38 caliber pistol ammunition (any amount), 2" and 3" mortar grenades (15 to 50,000).

¹⁰⁰ After his first visit to Burma, new ambassador Vilfan, like Djerdja before him, advised the MFA to open a diplomatic office in Rangoon as soon as possible. Also, he indicated that U Kyaw Nyein's socialists wanted to have closer political and ideological exchange with Yugoslavia, especially since they planned to turn Burma into Asia's Socialist center. *DASMIP*, PA, 1952, f-14, 46117, *Ciphered telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in India*, May 1st 1952.

civilian and military industries.¹⁰¹ The delegation, which included several veteran field officers, sought to gain first-hand impressions of Yugoslavia's army training, education, and equipment.¹⁰² During the visit, U Kyaw Nyein stated that the Burmese side wanted "not only diplomatic, but also permanent and intensive contact." The military delegation expressed their desire "to send their men for professional training and specialization to our country, instead of Great Britain, since they share belief they [soldiers] would be educated here in a healthy spirit." [emphasis added] The Burmese officers were particularly pleased with Tito's statement that "Yugoslavia, even though in a difficult position, will spare some ammunition and light arms for the Burmese Army."¹⁰³ Tito had responded to the Burmese request made six months earlier.¹⁰⁴ Belgrade also decided to establish an Embassy in Rangoon and send its first ambassador plenipotentiary, Dobrivoje Vidic.¹⁰⁵

Chinese diplomats closely monitored these visits. In a confidential 1958 report on Yugoslav-Burmese military relations the Chinese were very interested in this relationship. The document reported that the Burmese delegation believed the Yugoslav military organization was worth studying. Concerning the visit of the Yugoslav military delegation headed by General Vuckovic in December 1952 – January 1953, the Chinese Embassy in Rangoon noticed that the reception was "extremely solemn and considerate" by all government ministries and parties. The

¹⁰¹ Before coming to Yugoslavia this delegation had visited Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, France, and Britain with a brief stop in Denmark. A deal was made with Sweden to purchase Bofors cannons for the Burmese Navy. Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, p. 154.

¹⁰² These high-ranking officers were Deputy Commander of the Burmese Army Brigadier-General Kyaw Zaw, also Commander of South Burma, then Deputies of Air Force and Navy Chief etc. Besides army personnel, the delegation also included the Head of the Planning Commission U Hla Maung and some diplomats stationed in European countries. This delegation was in Yugoslavia from June 24th until July 22nd, considerably longer than in any of the previously visited countries. DASMIP, PA, 1952, f-14, 413251, *Zabeleska o razgovoru sa burmanskim ambasadorom u Indiji na dan 18.maja 1952* [Minutes of conversation with the Burmese ambassador to India, May 18th 1952].

¹⁰³ DASMIP, PA, 1952, f-14, 411307, *Ciphered telegram from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Embassy in India*, September 24th 1952. On July 18th, U Kyaw Nyein and other members of the delegation were received by Tito himself at his residence on the Brioni isles. AJBT, KMJ, I-2-a/19.

¹⁰⁴ In December 1952, Yugoslavia's first military delegation visited Burma, thus widening opportunities for even more intensive military cooperation. DASMIP, PA, 1952, f-14, 415446, *Communication from the Ministry of Defense to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the issue of visit of the military delegation to Burma*, November 24th 1952.

¹⁰⁵ DASMIP, PA, 1952, f-14, 415346, *Letter from the MFA to the Burmese Embassy on the issue of appointing Dobrivoje Vidic as the ambassador to Burma*, November 27th 1952. In June, Burma also established an Embassy in Belgrade, appointing the country's first charge d'affaires U Tin Maung Gyi. AJBT, KMJ, I-3-b/157, *Zabeleska o razgovoru druga V. Vlahovica, zamenika ministra, sa gospodinom U Tin Maung Gyi-om, otpravnikom poslova Burme u Beogradu 26.VI 1952* [Minutes of conversation between Deputy Minister comrade Vlahovic and charge d'affaires of Burma in Belgrade Mr. U Tin Maung Gyi, June 26th 1952].

Yugoslav officers, the report continued, visited many military bases, in different parts of Burma, bases which were not often shown even to the British Service Mission.¹⁰⁶

The opening of the Yugoslav embassy in Rangoon and the first visit of the Yugoslav military delegation almost coincided with two outstanding events in Burma's foreign relations history in the early 1950s. First, was the cancellation of the defense agreement between Burma and the U.K. (the BSM was formally abolished in January 1954) and the other one was the Asian Socialist Conference in Rangoon (January-February 1953). Both these events were interconnected with Yugoslav-Burmese relations.

The Asian Socialist Conference was an attempt undertaken by the Burmese government to define a specific Asian road to socialism that was different from and highly critical of the Soviet model, raising its own profile in international affairs, while, at the same time, insisting on maintaining distance from the Western practices that were still identified by many with previous colonial policies. The presence of Yugoslavia's delegates Djilas and Bebler at the time when Stalin was still alive and unforgiving about Titoism, "foreshadowed the political direction of the Conference," even though it remained largely unnoticed in the West.¹⁰⁷ Yugoslavia's separate path to socialism had found sympathizers in Burma. Some officials boldly suggested that the LCY should serve as a link between Asian socialists and their European colleagues "whom they still viewed with reserve and justifiable suspicion."¹⁰⁸ Burma's charge d'affaires in Belgrade said that "many of the conclusions in the adopted resolution were identical to the Yugoslav position."¹⁰⁹ The British ambassador to Burma remained unimpressed with Yugoslav presence at this Conference, asking Bebler: "What do you export to Burma, what are your interests here?" Told that Belgrade was interested in ideological cooperation, he ironically concluded: "Ah yes, you export ideas."¹¹⁰ Soon after, it became clear that ideas were not the only component of the Yugoslav-Burmese trade cooperation.

¹⁰⁶ CFMA, 105-00907-01(1), *Miandian yu Nansilafu de junshi guanxi* [Burma-Yugoslavia Military Relations], December 12th 1958, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Frank N. Trager, "Burma's Foreign Policy, 1948-1956: Neutralism, Third Force, and Rice," pp. 93-95.

¹⁰⁸ Aleš Bebler, "Rangunska konferencija azijskih socijalista" [Rangoon Conference of Asian Socialists], *Naša stvarnost*, no. 3 (Beograd, 1953); Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, p. 41.

¹⁰⁹ AJBT, KPR, I-5-b, Burma, *Zabeleska o razgovoru druga Koce Popovica sa burmanskim otpravnikom poslova U Tin Maung Gyi-em 19. januara 1953 u Drzavnom sekretarijatu za inostrane poslove*. Burmese diplomat stated that the BCP was criticizing the Government for falling under Yugoslav influence.

¹¹⁰ Darko Bekic, *Jugoslavija u Hladnom ratu*, p. 494.

The cancelation of the British-Burmese military pact cleared the path for increased military cooperation between Belgrade and Rangoon. Military exchanges between small states offered a more balanced relationship than exchanges with great powers. In January 1953, Yugoslav Foreign Secretary Koca Popovic told the Burmese charge d'affaires that

“military missions of great powers in general...do not understand problems of small countries and they are guided by their own interests. However, it is quite the opposite when we come to relations between smaller countries where cooperation is necessary and beneficial as mutual visits of Burmese and Yugoslav military missions have already demonstrated.”¹¹¹

Some within the Burmese military, like General Ne Win, remained interested in military cooperation with the U.S.. However, officials like U Kyaw Nyein and U Ba Swe were firmly against that idea.¹¹² Ambassador Sebald was also counting on General Ne Win and his desire to purchase weapons from U.S. sources, even if this meant that the British would be gradually squeezed out by the Americans.¹¹³ The pro-socialist faction eventually won out, as in March 1953 the Burmese government decided to cancel its participation in the U.S. aid program until the GMD troop problem had been successfully resolved.¹¹⁴ Taking advantage of the internal

¹¹¹ AJBT, KPR, I-5-b, Burma, *Zabeleska o razgovoru druga Koce Popovica sa burmanskim otpravnikom poslova U Tin Maung Gyi-em 19.januara 1953 u Drzavnom sekretarijatu za inostrane poslove.*

¹¹² In November 1952, General Ne Win was in Washington, D.C. exploring the possibility of purchasing arms in the U.S., but American indecisiveness and pressure from certain people in the Burmese government forced him to stand down. *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 40-41; DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 43515, *Zabeleska o razgovoru ambasadora FNRJ u Burmi druga Vidica sa americkim pomocnikom vojnog atasea potpukovnikom McGowan-om na „cocktail party“ kod vojnog izaslanika Indije g.Thakara, na dan 23.februara 1953* [Notes on conversation between the Yugoslav ambassador to Burma comrade Vidić and deputy U.S. military attaché lieutenant colonel McGowan at the cocktail party organized by the Indian military envoy Mr. Thakar, February 23rd 1953]. The row between Ne Win and U Kyaw Nyein over the issue of American military assistance was so serious that once Ne Win even publicly slapped his opponent. DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 416501, *Zabeleska o razgovoru savetnika ambasade FNRJ u Burmi, druga Simica, sa Tin Thein Lu, zamenikom komandanta mornarice, na dan 18.septembra 1953* [Minutes of conversation between the councilor of the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma comrade Simic and deputy commander of the Navy Tin Thein Lu, September 13th 1953].

¹¹³ *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, p. 68.

¹¹⁴ For the text of the letter in which the Burmese government informed their American counterparts on the decision to cancel the agreement see NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/3-1753, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Burma to the Secretary of State*, March 17th 1953. PM U Nu was under severe pressure and criticism from the rank and file of the AFPFL to cancel this agreement with the U.S., due to the covert American support of the GMD. However, U Nu indicated to the American ambassador that Burma was willing to resume its participation in the aid program after the solution of the GMD issue. NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/3-1953, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Burma to the Secretary of State*, March 19th 1953; *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 103-104.

division and of U Kyaw Nyein's overwhelming authority, Yugoslavia established itself as one of Burma's main foreign policy partners.¹¹⁵

In January 1953, ambassador Vidic began to acquaint the Burmese leadership with the possibility of acquiring larger quantities of weapons from Yugoslavia. He was very intrigued by the prospects stemming from the cancellation of the defense agreement between Burma and the U.K. The British embassy remained confident that the cancellation was temporary, a negotiating tactic by the Burmese who wanted to renegotiate parts of the agreement. However, Vidic viewed the developments as an opportunity and seized it. He approached the Burmese President at a reception given in connection with the Asia Socialist Conference, told him that "we have developed our own military industry and we are ready to assist Burma in this way by selling arms."¹¹⁶ Several weeks later, during the ceremony of presenting credentials, Yugoslav ambassador said to President Ba U that similarities between the recent experience of both countries were obvious and that "the road of one small country to get world's recognition is arduous and it is necessary to gain corresponding strength (political, military)...This had saved Yugoslavia."¹¹⁷ Mutual understanding and confidence reached new heights when Vidic was the only foreign representative invited to visit the frontline facing GMD units together with the Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs.¹¹⁸

Expanding Military Cooperation

Although GMD troops had suffered some setbacks on the battlefield while the U.S. reconsidered its UN policy toward Rangoon, the situation remained hectic. All government attempts to destroy the nationalist forces in 1952-53 inflicted huge losses on the Burmese Army

¹¹⁵ During his conversation with ambassador Sebald, U Kyaw Nyein said that due to the GMD actions and their close coordination with the KNDO and other insurgents, "serious schism in party developed." "Government became desperate and feared collapse. There followed appeal to the United Nations and termination [of] TCA [aid program]." After this meeting, the U.S. ambassador had to acknowledge that U Kyaw Nyein was "one of three most powerful men in party and government." NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/4-153, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Burma to the Secretary of State*, April 1st 1953.

¹¹⁶ DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 41426, *Razgovori vodjeni na prijemu kod Predsednika Republike u cast Attlee-a 7.januara 1953* [Talks held at the reception given by the President of the Republic in the honor of Attlee, January 7th 1953].

¹¹⁷ DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 48532, *Zabeleska o razgovoru ambasadora FNRJ u Burmi druga Vidica sa Predsednikom Burmanske Unije Ba U, na dan 19.marta 1953* [Minutes of conversation between the Yugoslav ambassador to Burma comrade Vidic and the President of the Union of Burma Ba U, March 19th 1953].

¹¹⁸ DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 45358, *Ciphered telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma*, April 11th 1953.

and eventually ended in a debacle.¹¹⁹ The overall number of the GMD units had diminished, but they were still “well equipped with American weapons and they [had] heavy guns, well trained soldiers, and American instructors.” On the other side, the *Tatmadaw* was poorly armed with “British weapons, used during the war,” and suffered from shortages of ammunition. Only 60% of the Army was fully equipped with guns and ammunition.¹²⁰ With the cancelation of the agreement with the British, a new phase would begin.¹²¹

With the conclusion of the barter trade agreement between the two countries in June 1953, the necessary preconditions were met for the start of extensive military cooperation between Burma and Yugoslavia.¹²² Already in August, two Yugoslav representatives were in Rangoon to hold official talks with their Burmese counterparts over weapons procurement.¹²³ At the same time, the U.S. Department of State frantically tried to fill in the gap left by the British. With consent from London, Washington offered Rangoon immediate and virtually unconditional assistance for specific military items.¹²⁴ One British memo suggested that Burmese “may be

¹¹⁹ Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, p. 159.

¹²⁰ DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 416501, *Zabeleska o razgovoru savetnika ambasade FNRJ u Burmi, druga Simica, sa Tin Thein Lu, zamenikom komandanta mornarice, na dan 18.septembra 1953* [Minutes of conversation between the councilor of the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma comrade Simic and deputy commander of the Navy Tin Thein Lu, September 18th 1953]. The Burmese official confirmed again that the main reason for canceling the agreement with the British was to get the opportunity to purchase weapons from other countries. They were just expecting to receive the last shipment of previously acquired tanks and airplanes from Great Britain.

¹²¹ Based on U Kyaw Nyein's impressions from Yugoslavia, as PM U Nu personally pointed out, many of the people in the government had been considering introducing compulsory military service. DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 416501, *Zabeleska o razgovoru savetnika ambasade FNRJ u Burmi, druga Simica, sa Predsednikom Vlade Burme U Nu, na dan 24.septembra 1953* [Minutes of conversation between the councilor of the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma comrade Simic and Burmese PM U Nu, September 24th 1953]. This counters the widely held belief that Burma was thinking about introducing something similar to the compulsory military service for some units (militias) only after the visit of Burmese officers to Israel in June 1954. The visit to Yugoslavia had been two years earlier.

¹²² The barter trade agreement was concluded on June 29th 1953 and, while it had no greater significance for Burma's trade balance, it was used as a model for every other socialist bloc country to sign this kind of agreement with Rangoon. William C. Johnstone, *Burma's Foreign Policy*, p. 80. Great help over this agreement was rendered by U Kyaw Nyein himself who invited Yugoslav economic experts and companies to build hydroelectric stations, electric cable factories, and assist with the general economic planning. DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 48532, *Zabeleska o razgovoru ambasadora FNRJ u Burmi druga Vidica sa U Co Njenom, na dan 29.aprila 1953 u njegovom stanu* [Minutes of conversation between the Yugoslav ambassador to Burma comrade Vidic and U Kyaw Nyein at his home, April 29th 1953].

¹²³ The Burmese side was interested in purchasing torpedo boats and patrol boats and they were exploring possibilities for buying larger amounts of artillery guns, ammunition etc. The Burmese Army was preparing a military mission that would go to Belgrade and see what items could be purchased in Yugoslavia. DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 416495, *Zabeleska o razgovorima na sastanku sa predstavnicima burmanske ratne mornarice i nasih ovlašćenih predstavnika drugova Ferica i Jagodnika, održanog dana 12.avgusta 1953 u prostorijama Ministarstva narodne odbrane u Rangunu* [Notes of conversation between the representatives of the Burmese Navy and authorized representatives comrades Feric and Jagodnik, held inside the premises of the Ministry of Defense in Rangoon, August 12th 1953].

¹²⁴ *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 122-123, 126-127, 130-131.

exploring other possible sources [of] military training and equipment and attempting to play off the U.K. against the U.S. and perhaps other nations.”¹²⁵

In September 1953, an official request was presented to the Yugoslav Embassy in Rangoon. The Burmese army asked for an urgent shipment of 20 76mm M48 B-1¹²⁶ mountain cannons with 80,000 shells of different purpose (ordinary, AT, smoke) and around 500 mules, horses, and ponies.¹²⁷ Yugoslavia was ready to immediately transfer to Burma full equipment for 5 B-1 artillery batteries.¹²⁸ In November, an additional request for 12 mortars (120mm and 82mm), 4000 mortar shells, 24 rocket launchers with 6000 grenades, 6 flamethrowers, AT mines, hand grenades, and other equipment was submitted. The Burmese were making necessary preparations for even larger purchases.¹²⁹

In December, a special envoy from “JugoImport” arrived in Burma to conclude the first arms trade agreement between two countries. The overall value of the signed contract was 700,000 pounds sterling. Later the total sum reached 887,000 pounds sterling or almost 2.5 million U.S. dollars. This was in addition to the items already purchased few months prior. The order included an additional 24 rocket launchers with 6,000 grenades, 6 heavy machine guns with ammunition, 66,172 2” mortar grenades, 40,000 3” mortar grenades, 10,000 shells for 37mm cannons, 10,000 shells for 6 pound cannons, 20,000 shells for 25 pound cannons, 10,000 shells for 440mm cannons, 5,000 81mm mortar grenades, 100,000 high-explosive shells for B-1 cannons, 6,500 high-explosive shells for “Sherman” tank cannons, 10,000 shells for “Comet”

¹²⁵ *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 141-143.

¹²⁶ The M48 B-1 76mm mountain cannon was introduced into the Yugoslav Army in 1949 and, at that time, it was one of the best artillery weapons of its kind. Its range is 8750m, initial muzzle velocity 398m/s, it can fire 25 shells per minute, while its operating field was horizontally 50, vertically -15 to +45 degrees. It was very easy to assemble and disassemble, mount and dismount from horses, vehicles etc. *Vojni leksikon* [Military Lexicon] (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1981), p. 71.

¹²⁷ DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 416496, *Zabeleska o razgovoru savetnika ambasade FNRJ u Burmi, druga Simica, sa Maung Maung-om, permanentnim sekretarom Ministarstva narodne odbrane, na dan 23.septembra 1953* [Minutes of conversation between the councilor of the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma comrade Simic and permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defense Maung Maung, September 23rd 1953].

¹²⁸ DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 416496, *Zabeleska o razgovoru savetnika ambasade FNRJ u Burmi, druga Simica, sa Maung Maung-om, permanentnim sekretarom Ministarstva narodne odbrane, na dan 26.oktobra 1953* [Minutes of conversation between the councilor of the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma comrade Simic and permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defense Maung Maung, October 26th 1953]. Burmese partners even considered buying the Yugoslav ship that was supposed to transport these arms to Burma, while there was increased demand for different samples of Yugoslav weapons they could purchase in the future.

¹²⁹ DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 416496, *Zabeleska o razgovoru savetnika ambasade FNRJ u Burmi, druga Simica, sa Maung Maung-om, permanentnim sekretarom Ministarstva narodne odbrane, na dan 6.novembra 1953* [Minutes of conversation between the councilor of the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma comrade Simic and permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defense Maung Maung, November 6th 1953].

tank cannons, as well as 10 million rounds of ammunition for .303 caliber rifles and 5 million rounds of 9mm pistol ammunition.¹³⁰ In his final 1953 report counselor Simic indicated that the Burmese Army advised that: “if we could meet all their needs, they would also rely upon us regarding advanced training...We should thoroughly examine their interest in our suggestions about introducing new weapons systems into their army and, at the same time, insist upon generally satisfying all of their demands.”¹³¹

General Ne Win expressed his gratitude for Yugoslavia’s military assistance, and emphasized that “this was the very first time that one country sold them weapons without any postponement or complications.” The guns had been tested already with excellent results and he was very pleased with them. Eventually, General Ne Win said, he was very interested in building an ammunition factory with Yugoslav assistance, but until that time “they would fully rely upon procurements from our country.”¹³² Yugoslavia had found another strong ally in Burma’s ruling establishment.¹³³

Just a few weeks after this first arms trade arrangement, General Ne Win, for the first time in his career, openly said to the U.S. army and air attachés that he had compelling evidence that Americans were deeply involved with GMD units in northern Burma and that he was suspicious about the sincerity of U.S. mediating efforts.¹³⁴ If earlier General Ne Win had been one of the main proponents of receiving military aid from the U.S, by December the situation

¹³⁰ DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 416496, *Zabeleska o razgovoru savetnika ambasade FNRJ u Burmi, druga Simica, vodjenom na sastanku u Ministarstvu narodne odbrane, na dan 2.decembra 1953* [Notes of conversation of the councilor of the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma comrade Simic inside the premises of the Ministry of Defense, December 2nd 1953]. It should be also noted that numbers of delivered weapons mentioned in this and other contracts were not final and many additional deliveries were also made that were not referenced in these documents.

¹³¹ DASMIP, PA, 1953, f-15, 416496, *Report from the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma*, December 4th 1953.

¹³² DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 49043, *Zabeleska o razgovoru sa generalom Ne Win, komandantom Burmanske armije, 27.februara 1954* [Minutes of conversation with Commander-in-Chief of the Burmese Army General Ne Win, February 27th 1954]. General Ne Win advised Yugoslav representatives to address him any time they needed assistance with the Burmese bureaucracy.

¹³³ Ne Win’s closest subordinate in the War Office Thakin Chit Maung also expressed general satisfaction with Yugoslav weapons and stated that they were contemplating buying an additional allotment of B-1 guns, mortars, flamethrowers, bazookas, ammunition, etc. General Kyaw Zaw demanded from his superiors that an additional allotment of Yugoslav cannons should be immediately purchased. DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 49043, *Zabeleska o razgovoru sa Thakin Chit Maung-om, parlamentarnim sekretarom Ministarstva odbrane, 11.marta 1954* [Minutes of conversation with parliamentary secretary of the Ministry of Defense Thakin Chit Maung, March 11th 1954]. In some of these conversations Burmese officials indicated that, generally speaking, the quality of Yugoslav equipment was above the British or Indian (cannons, army boots, ammunition).

¹³⁴ NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/12-2253, *Memorandum of Conversation between General Ne Win and the Army and Air Attachés of the U.S. Embassy in Burma*, December 22nd 1953.

had significantly changed. The first Yugoslav arms shipments had changed the perception of what's possible in the military and political circles in Rangoon.

Yugoslavia's military cooperation with Burma created a sense of uneasiness among Burma's Western partners.¹³⁵ In a confidential telegram to the U.S. embassy in London, Secretary of State Dulles instructed the embassy to inform the British Foreign Secretary that the U.S. hoped London would preserve their good relationship with Rangoon, but closely monitor any changes in the military field:

Inaction on our part seems likely not only [to] damage relations [of the] U.S. and U.K. with Burma...but also [to] force Burma [to] look elsewhere for arms it wishes to buy. If Burma feels obliged [to] seek supplies from Communist sources, elements friendly to [the] U.S. and U.K. within Burma and Burma's ties with the free world will be weakened. Department doubts anything U.S. or U.K. Governments do likely [to] modify determination [of] GOB [Government of Burma] not [to] limit its source [of] arms supply to one country, on contrary delays and restrictions which Burmese consider unreasonable will tend strengthen this determination and weaken influence [of the] U.K. and U.S.¹³⁶

The NSC recommended that the U.S. should "promptly and effectively [...] furnish Burma with military equipment and supplies on reimbursable basis" and "be prepared to resume economic and technical assistance...if requested by Burma." "It is undesirable for the British to maintain a monopoly over military assistance to Burma" the NSC concluded, and "[the U.S. should] urge the British to expand their military mission...to meet Burmese requirements."¹³⁷

U.S. ambassador Sebald remained uncomfortable with the possibility that Burma could decisively turn for military assistance to the Soviet bloc countries or to Yugoslavia: "Failing early action, we incur increasing risk that Burmese might turn toward Communist bloc for supplies...Also unfortunate would be possibility that Burmese might turn to Yugoslavia and establish relationship which would tend strengthen Burma's Marxist bias."¹³⁸ [emphasis added]

¹³⁵ With Yugoslavia's ammunition shipments the Italians were completely pushed out of Burma (very soon they would leave), while the British had to accommodate themselves to the reality that many of the weapons systems they had been providing to the Burmese now had become the sole responsibility of the Yugoslavs. For example, a decision has been taken that Burma would continue purchasing ammunition mainly from the Yugoslav manufacturers. DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 49043, *Zabeleska o razgovoru sa rukovodiocem centralnog slagališta za municiju 27 februara 1954* [Minutes of conversation with the head of the central ammunition's depot, February 27th 1954].

¹³⁶ *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, p. 163.

¹³⁷ Jeffrey T. Richelson, *Presidential Directives*, PD 00384, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia," January 16th 1954, p. 17.

¹³⁸ *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 194-195. Ambassador Sebald indicated that the U.S. or U.K. arms shipments would make Burma more dependent on the "free world," while this "would result in

In conversations with his Yugoslav counterpart in Rangoon, Sebald sought to get specific information about the weapons systems sold by Yugoslavia.¹³⁹

In December 1953, Vidic was appointed ambassador to Moscow, while Krsto Bulajic was named the new Ambassador in Rangoon.¹⁴⁰ Minister of Defense U Ba Swe expressed his desire that a Yugoslav military delegation would come to Burma, conduct a complete survey of the situation and needs of the Burmese Army (especially in the air force, navy, and engineers) in order to regulate the expansion of military cooperation. Bulajic considered this as an outstanding opportunity to render badly needed assistance and to strengthen bilateral relations, as well as to “create a favorable market for our military industry and, through Burma, even in Indonesia.”¹⁴¹ Belgrade was contemplating using Burma as a bridgehead to expand its influence into Southeast Asia. Immediately after first Yugoslav arms shipments, some countries like West Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, India, and Israel offered military experts to Burma. However, at the session of the National Defense Committee Prime Minister U Nu said that “they cannot count on military cooperation with any big country, while they have to rely upon small countries, naming Yugoslavia as first, and some others (Israel, if it is possible).”¹⁴² [emphasis added]

The Yugoslav arms shipments to Burma have been increasingly visible since December 1953. Many ambassadors in Rangoon were asking Yugoslav diplomats about the details of these arms deals. Soon after the conclusion of the first arms trade agreement, the Indonesian charge d’affaires inquired about this deal, while the French also began asking.¹⁴³ Others soon followed suit.¹⁴⁴

driving a wedge into a neutral bloc...under Nehru’s influence and apparent leadership.” However, the Burmese had grown very suspicious of British promises and this was the largest obstacle.

¹³⁹ DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 42493, *Zabeleska o razgovoru ambasadora K.Bulajiaća sa americkim ambasadorom W.J.Sebald, na dan 11.januara 1954* [Minutes of conversation between ambassador Bulajic and American ambassador Sebald, January 11th 1954].

¹⁴⁰ Krsto Bulajic (1920-?), 1951-52 charge d’affaires of the Yugoslav Embassy in Moscow, 1953-56 ambassador to Burma, later ambassador to Japan. Ranko Petkovic, *Subjektivna istorija jugoslovenske diplomatije*, p. 155.

¹⁴¹ DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-13, 4513, *Ciphered telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma*, December 27th 1953.

¹⁴² DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-13, 4513, *Ciphered telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma*, January 9th 1954. Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Defense also said that “the British have objected because of arms purchases in Yugoslavia.”

¹⁴³ DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 42494, *Zabeleska o razgovorima savetnika ambasade FNRJ, druga Simica, na prijemu kod Sijamskog vojnog atasea, 14.decembra 1953* [Minutes of conversations of the councilor of the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma comrade Simic at the reception given by the Siamese military attaché on December 14th 1953].

¹⁴⁴ DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 42493, *Zabeleska o razgovoru ambasadora Bulajica sa indijskim ambasadorom Chettur, 6.februara 1954 godine* [Minutes of conversation between ambassador Bulajic and Indian ambassador Chettur, February 6th 1954].

The general failure of negotiations between Burma, Taiwan, and the U.S. over repatriation of GMD units resulted in Rangoon's firm decision to undertake unilateral measures and forcefully "evict" these units.¹⁴⁵ By October 1953 General Kyaw Zaw, under personal orders from General Ne Win, had launched a large-scale attack, shelled the GMD headquarters in Monghsat and cleared some border regions. Taipei had to agree to a phased withdrawal of GMD units from Burma.¹⁴⁶ Even though a phased evacuation plan was agreed on, (three phases from November 1953 to May 1954), most of the people that crossed the border into Thailand by March 1954 were non-combat troops (around 2,000), generally consisting of women, children, and old men. Those who were able-bodied soldiers carried antiquated weapons, not the modern ones supplied by the CIA.¹⁴⁷ Burmese officials were infuriated.

Emboldened by the new weapons systems recently bought from Yugoslavia, the Burmese Government launched a major offensive against GMD troops on March 2nd 1954.¹⁴⁸ Operation "Bayinnaung," as this offensive was officially dubbed, represented "the first time large-scale operations were carried out by an army and not by any number of battalions."¹⁴⁹ Units selected for this offensive had undergone 3 months of special training and were equipped with newly purchased weapons. New lines of communication were hastily constructed to ensure an

¹⁴⁵ Tripartite negotiations had begun on May 22nd 1953 between the U.S., Thai, and Taiwanese officials, while the Burmese representatives joined later as observers due to the fact that they only recognized the People's Republic of China and avoided any political contact with the representatives of the Republic of China in Taiwan. Although preliminary agreement for repatriation was reached on June 22nd, Taiwanese diplomats decided to procrastinate in the evacuation, thus enabling the GMD commanders to either reject this proposal or to just prepare a limited evacuation that could ultimately preserve their fighting potential. That is why Burmese representatives left the Committee on September 17th 1953. FRUS, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 104-105, 144-145; NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/7-1353, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Thailand to the Secretary of State*, July 13th 1953; 690B.9321/9-1653, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Burma to the Secretary of State*, September 16th 1953.

¹⁴⁶ Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, pp. 147-149. Agreement was finally reached in Bangkok on October 29th 1953. However, U Kyaw Nyein said to the U.S. ambassador that some of the military actions launched during the evacuation were "ill-advised" and he "strongly hinted [at] difficulties with Ne Win who apparently spearheads [the] frustrated opposition [to] further concessions [to the] Chinese." NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/11-1353, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Burma to the Secretary of State*, November 13th 1953. With time, General Ne Win was becoming master of situation.

¹⁴⁷ John W. Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia*, pp. 158-160; Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, pp. 149-151. By September 1954, only 5,742 persons were evacuated to Thailand and Taiwan.

¹⁴⁸ The U.S. Embassy in Rangoon had information from reliable sources that many units of the Burmese Army were on the move, building-up strength in the vicinity of GMD forces. They were expecting some kind of military action, but not on the scale that occurred. NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/2-2554, *Telegram from the Embassy in Rangoon to the Secretary of State*, February 25th 1954.

¹⁴⁹ Hugh Tinker, *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Years of Independence*, p. 331.

uninterrupted supply of troops and materials to the frontline.¹⁵⁰ The first combat reports particularly emphasized the use of Yugoslav cannons, bazookas, mortars, and flamethrowers to demonstrate the technical readiness of the Burmese Army to deal with these insurgents and to publicly boost the morale of troops fighting the GMD.¹⁵¹ Since these units were much better prepared, equipped, and supplied than previously, the initial success of the *Tatmadaw* was rather impressive. GMD troops were forced to withdraw from several regions including their HQ in Monghsat, their strategic airfield, main radio station, and largest supply depot. In the heat of battle, Burmese units fought their way right to the border with Thailand, even accidentally bombing some border villages.¹⁵² Most nationalist units, and some KNDO accomplices were dispersed and forced to flee.¹⁵³ Burmese public opinion backed the government, and reports about the outstanding results of Yugoslav weapons were constantly present in the headlines.¹⁵⁴ A French military attaché publicly stated that “the Burmese success against the GMD should be credited to Yugoslav guns.”¹⁵⁵ [emphasis added]

U.S. diplomats considered this offensive a step in the wrong direction that could “upset the tenuous balance in favor of evacuation of Monghsat leaders,” while endangering American good offices to resolve this conflict in a peaceful manner.¹⁵⁶ Burmese government remained defiant, while the U.S. had less and less maneuvering space to effectively interfere in this conflict. Ambassador Sebald was convinced that the government in Rangoon had committed itself to military solution of the GMD problem: “I believe...that GUB [Government of the Union of Burma] has given up hope of full-scale evacuation through voluntary action of China [Taiwan]

¹⁵⁰ DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-13, 44892, *Informacija o razvoju ofanzive Burmanske armije protiv KMT* [Information about the development of the Burmese Army’s offensive against the GMD], April 8th 1954.

¹⁵¹ DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-13, 43288, *Ciphered telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma*, March 5th 1954.

¹⁵² This incident led to the further deterioration of Thai-Burmese relations. U Kyaw Nyein expressed to the U.S. ambassador his grievances with Thai conduct over the GMD issue, cross-border smuggling of weapons and narcotics, and indirect military aid to the KNDO. NARA, RG 59, 690B.92/4-2154, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Burma to the Secretary of State*, April 21st 1954.

¹⁵³ DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 45922, *Zabeleska o razgovoru ambasadora Krste Bulajica sa vrhovnim komandantom Burmanske armije generalom Ne Win-om, 7.aprila 1954* [Minutes of conversation between the ambassador Krsto Bulajic and the Commander-in-Chief of the Burmese Army General Ne Win, April 7th 1954].

¹⁵⁴ DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-13, 44892, *Informacija o razvoju ofanzive Burmanske armije protiv KMT*, April 8th 1954. Burmese press reported that communist troops had attempted to attack a train that was carrying “Yugoslav cannons and mules” to the frontline.

¹⁵⁵ DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 416762, *Zabeleska o razgovoru vodjenom na koktelu priredjenom od strane Vibhakora, sekretara indonezanske ambasade, 3.aprila 1954* [Minutes of conversation at the cocktail party given by the secretary of the Indonesian Embassy Vibhakor, April 3rd 1954]. After that, the Indian ambassador became even more curious about Yugoslav-Burmese military relations.

¹⁵⁶ *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 203, 206-208.

and considers military pressure [as the] only means attaining final solution...Firm decision has been made [to] attempt [to] settle KMT [GMD] problem militarily before monsoon breaks.”¹⁵⁷ A new offer for the sale of U.S. weapons to Burma was made in the hope of restoring confidence between the two sides. Yet Rangoon had lost its previous interest in this matter.¹⁵⁸ With Yugoslav weapons, Burmese leaders were no longer in desperate need of British or American procurements.¹⁵⁹ During the dry season of 1954-55, General Kyaw Zaw continued with massive operations against the GMD, forcing additional withdrawals by the nationalist forces.¹⁶⁰ The policy of no strings attached had ultimately paid off.¹⁶¹

The situation with the Burmese Communist insurgents was similar. The success of the government's offensive against the GMD, and the strengthening of the army's war fighting capabilities, had forced the “White Flag” communists and their patrons in Beijing to reconsider their attitude toward Rangoon. According to some clandestine intelligence reports, conveyed only to Yugoslav diplomats, the Burmese had strong indications that Liu Shaoqi (the CCP's No. 2) personally induced the “White Flag” faction to proclaim a united front policy with the government against the GMD and stop criticizing U Nu.¹⁶² Chinese officials claimed that Tito wholeheartedly supported all government actions against the communists “not only by paying lip service to them, but also generously rendering military equipment to fight the Burmese communists.” “Not even the Americans dared to do this, but Tito comfortably did it” —bitterly

¹⁵⁷ NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/3-954, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Burma to the Secretary of State*, March 9th 1954.

¹⁵⁸ *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, p. 217.

¹⁵⁹ *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 232-233, 234-241. The impact of Yugoslav arms shipments to Burma was evident when the British, who had previously refused to sell mountain artillery to the Burmese, decided to immediately offer a new allotment of guns. This offer was quickly rejected by the Burmese officials, who had already made inquiries about purchasing fighter airplanes, bombers, or training aircraft from Yugoslavia. DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 45922, *Zabeleska o razgovoru sa Thakin Chit Maung-om, parlamentarnim sekretarom Ministarstva odbrane, 3.aprila 1954* [Minutes of conversation with parliamentary secretary of the Ministry of Defense Thakin Chit Maung, April 3rd 1954].

¹⁶⁰ Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, pp. 151-153; National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), Ministry of External Affairs (hereafter MEA), F I-4/55-BC, *Annual Report from the Military Attaché in Burma, Report No.9 for the Period Ending 30 June 1955*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁶¹ Although a significant number of GMD troops remained dispersed in northern Burma, authorities in Taiwan had to officially disassociate themselves from these units and drastically reduce support for them. NARA, RG 59, 690B.9321/3-954, *Telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Taiwan to the Secretary of State*, June 16th 1954. Finally, after the signing of the border agreement and the treaty of friendship and non-aggression between Burma and the PRC in 1960, a joint operation of the Burmese and Chinese troops was conducted and the last remnants of the GMD were destroyed or forced to flee into Thailand or Laos. Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, pp. 201-202.

¹⁶² DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-13, 45625, *Ciphered telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma*, April 23rd 1954. Government was still not ready to negotiate and demanded full surrender of all Communist rebels.

concluded the Chinese diplomat.¹⁶³ [emphasis added] After Tito's official visit to Burma in January 1955, with a new shipment of weapons arriving to Rangoon, communist leaders claimed that "the government no longer appeared to be so eager to induce insurgents to return to the peace fold," while "this stern attitude of the AFPFL government could be attributed to Yugoslavia's offer of arms."¹⁶⁴ During a visit to Burma in July 1954, Zhou Enlai disavowed Chinese support of "White Flag." China he said, did not wish to interfere into internal affairs of other countries, saying that "revolution was not for export."¹⁶⁵

Yugoslav weapons had altered the power equation inside Burmese society and in the region. The *Tatmadaw* ultimately regained its confidence as a well armed and trained fighting force. This was the foundation on which further cooperation was to be built.

Distant Countries, Closest Partners: Marshal Tito and Weapons for Burma

The year 1954 proved to be seminal for many crucial international actors in Asia. It was the year that India and China proclaimed the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence," the Geneva Conference on Korea and Indochina was held, Zhou Enlai conducted his first official visits to India and Burma, Nehru and U Nu went to Beijing, Tito took a daring trip to India and Burma, the SEATO pact was formed, and the first preparations were made for the Bandung Conference.¹⁶⁶ In this year, international relations in Asia had entered into a distinctively different phase from the previous one.

For Yugoslavia, Tito's trip to India and Burma in December 1954 – January 1955 represented a radical expansion into a new sphere of international activity. Forthcoming

¹⁶³ CFMA, 105-00846-02(1), *Miandian yu Nansilafu de guanxi*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁴ NAI, MEA, F I-4/55-BC, *Annual Report from the Military Attaché in Burma, Report No.5 for the Period 1 to 28 February 1955*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁵ DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-75, 49498, *Ciphered telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma: Zhou Enlai's visit to Burma, July 5th 1954; Zhou Enlai nianpu I* [Zhou Enlai Chronology, vol. I] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1997), pp. 393-394.

¹⁶⁶ For more on significant changes in Chinese foreign policy and Zhou Enlai's role in these events see Jin Chongji (ed.), *Zhou Enlai zhuan III* [Zhou Enlai Biography, vol. III] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), pp. 1110-1156; *Zhou Enlai nianpu I*, pp. 356-429 *passim*; Xie Yixian (ed.), *Zhongguo waijiao shi*, pp. 115-130, 150-153; Yang Kuisong (ed.), *Leng zhan shiqi de Zhongguo duiwai guanxi* [Foreign Relations of China during the Cold War] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005), pp. 54-67; Kuo-kang Shao, "Chou En-lai's Diplomatic Approach to Non-Aligned States in Asia, 1953-60," *The China Quarterly*, no. 78 (June, 1979), pp. 324-338; Kuo-kang Shao, "Zhou Enlai's Diplomacy and the Neutralization of Indo-China, 1954-55," *The China Quarterly*, no. 107 (September, 1986), pp. 483-504.

normalization of relations with the Soviets and increased pressure from NATO for a more integrated role for Yugoslavia into the Western defense planning mechanisms, together with vociferous demands from the West for political and economic reform, forcefully compelled Tito to initiate his search for a viable foreign-policy alternative. Talks with Nehru, U Nu, and on his return back home with Egyptian leader Nasser enabled him to undertake a skillful maneuver of leapfrogging the limitations of European politics and claiming the role of an influential leader of the nonaligned world.¹⁶⁷ Tito's meetings with these historical figures represented "an intellectual catharsis of its own kind, through which Tito got rid of his Balkan selfishness and Eurocentric horizons, and over night he had become a citizen of the world and a world leader."¹⁶⁸ As one Indian diplomat pointed out, Tito was "the first great European statesman who came to Asia not as a representative of colonizers, but as a great friend of Asian nations."¹⁶⁹ Yugoslavia's arms shipments to Burma were an inseparable part of Tito's search for a new world role for himself and for the country he led.¹⁷⁰

The Burmese leadership's invitation to Tito to visit Burma came very early. In September 1953, Prime Minister U Nu extended an official invitation to Marshal Tito to visit Burma and this friendly call was reiterated again two months later in November.¹⁷¹ This invitation was conditionally accepted in January 1954, and all necessary preparations had to be made prior to

¹⁶⁷ For more on the impact of Tito's trip to India and Burma on the radical shift in the Yugoslav foreign policy see Ljubodrag Dimic, "Titovo putovanje u Indiju i Burmu 1954-1955: Prilog za istoriju Hladnog rata" [Tito's Trip to India and Burma 1954-55: Contribution to the Cold War History], *Tokovi istorije*, no. 3-4 (2004); Dragan Bogetic, "Titovo putovanje u Indiju i Burmu i oblikovanje jugoslovenske politike nesvrstanosti" [Tito's Trip to India and Burma and the Shaping of Yugoslavia's Policy of Nonalignment], *Istorija XX veka*, No. 2 (Beograd: ISI, 2001). The Indian Embassy in Belgrade also shared this perspective, claiming that Nehru's talks with Tito and India's concept of *Panch Sheel* had substantially influenced Yugoslavia's overall foreign policy shift toward active neutralism. NAI, MEA, F 62-R&I/55(s), *Monthly Report of the Embassy of India in Belgrade for the Period Ending 28th February 1955*, pp. 3-5.

¹⁶⁸ Darko Bekic, *Jugoslavija u Hladnom ratu*, p. 674.

¹⁶⁹ DASMIP, PA, 1955, f-9, 41835, *Zabeleska o razgovorima na veceri kod atašea francuskog poslanstva u Rangun u g. Godfeja* [Notes of conversations at the dinner given by the attaché of the French Embassy Mr. Godfey], November 23rd 1954.

¹⁷⁰ At about the same time that Yugoslav arms shipments to Burma started, Belgrade initiated military cooperation with Egypt. See Aleksandar Zivotic, "Jugoslovensko-egipatski vojni odnosi 1953-1956" [Yugoslav-Egyptian Military Relations, 1953-56], *Tokovi istorije*, no. 1-2 (2007), pp. 154-168. Overall value of these arms shipments was just over 2.8 million U.S. dollars.

¹⁷¹ AJBT, KPR, I-2/4-2, *Zabeleska o zelji burmanske vlade da drug Marsal poseti Burmu* [Information about the desire expressed by the Burmese Government for comrade Marshal to visit Burma], December 2nd 1953. When this news was leaked to the public, India and Pakistan became highly agitated about extending their own invitations to Tito to visit these two countries.

the December visit.¹⁷² The true significance of this visit for the Burmese leadership was clearly demonstrated by PM U Nu himself when he inquired with the Yugoslav ambassador “when President Tito plans to come here, so that, accordingly, he [U Nu] could fix his visit to China.”¹⁷³ Relations with Yugoslavia topped the Burmese foreign policy agenda, even bypassing some of Burma’s most important and crucial neighbors.¹⁷⁴ Indian Prime Minister Nehru, also invited Tito to visit India before traveling to Burma through his sister Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, who personally conveyed this invitation to Tito. However, in October Nehru avoided admitting this to Zhou Enlai, claiming instead that the Yugoslav President insisted on a visit to India and that eventually he had to concur.¹⁷⁵ The influence of the Yugoslav factor on Burma’s and India’s relations with China became more and more evident.¹⁷⁶

While preparations for Tito’s visit to Burma were still in their initial stages, Burmese officials approached the Yugoslav Embassy in Rangoon again asking for new shipments of weapons, especially B-1 cannons, ammunition, and horses. Under the impression of first military gains in their struggle against the GMD and other rebel units, the Burmese Army wanted to purchase as soon as possible 20 B-1 cannons with spare parts, 30,000 high-explosive grenades, 5,000 AT grenades, 1,000 82mm grenades, 3,000 grenades for rocket launchers, 115 horses, and machines for maintenance, production of spare parts, and shell production for the B-1 cannons.

¹⁷² DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 42494, *Zabeleška o razgovoru ambasadora K.Bulajića sa predsednikom vlade U Nu, 2. januara 1954* [Minutes of conversation between the ambassador Bulajić and PM U Nu, January 2nd 1954].

¹⁷³ AJBT, KPR, I-2/4-2, *Zabeleška o razgovoru ambasadora K.Bulajica sa predsednikom vlade U Nu, 6. septembra 1954* [Minutes of conversation between the ambassador Bulajic and PM U Nu, September 6th 1954].

¹⁷⁴ During his December visit to Beijing, U Nu was reassured by Mao Zedong that China would not instigate any anti-government activities within Burma, radical elements among the overseas Chinese would be dissuaded from any interference into Burma’s internal affairs, while any kind of Communist organization among them would be disbanded. Regarding the BCP Mao advised his guests to reopen negotiations with them and try to reach a mutually acceptable solution. See *Mao Zedong wenji VI* [Collected Works of Mao Zedong, vol. 6] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1999), pp. 374-383.

¹⁷⁵ Compare the texts of AJBT, KPR, I-3-a/38-3, *Zabeleška: Drug Predsednik primio je g-du Pandit 28.VI, nesto pre 12 sati, u svojoj vili na Brionima* [Minutes: Comrade President received Mrs. Pandit in his villa on the Brioni isles on June 28th, just before noon] and *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru 27 (Second Series), 10 October 1954 – 31 January 1955* (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 2000), p. 43.

¹⁷⁶ According to newly declassified documents from the Yugoslav/Serbian and Chinese archives, Tito’s trip to India and Burma constituted the main driving force behind the rapid Sino-Yugoslav rapprochement in 1954-55 and it did not depend that much on the status of Soviet inroad toward Yugoslavia (though important), as it was widely held in the past. See author’s paper “In the Shadow of Peaceful Co-Existence: The Unknown History of the Sino-Yugoslav Recognition, 1954-1955,” presented at the conference “Decision-Making in the Cold War—Between “Total Wars and Small Wars:” Studies in the Societal History of the Cold War,” Institute for Social Research, Hamburg, September 2008.

The overall value of this shipment was just over one million U.S. dollars.¹⁷⁷ Also, at the request of the Burmese leadership, three Yugoslav officers were to travel to Burma as artillery instructors.¹⁷⁸ The rapid expansion of Yugoslav-Burmese military cooperation and the substantial changes of the battlefield situation forced the U.S. to reconsider their policies of not selling arms to Rangoon.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, soon after this new arms deal, some Burmese politicians were even considering initiating negotiations to sell Yugoslav weapons to the Vietminh.¹⁸⁰

The Indian military attaché in Rangoon wrote to New Delhi that “Marshal Tito was accorded an extremely cordial welcome...practically all the resources of the [Burmese] Government and the Army were concentrated on making his visit a success; there was a lavish exchange of Burmese and Yugoslav decorations.”¹⁸¹ Indeed, he was given a welcome unequalled by that of any other foreign dignitary visiting Burma. Some of the Burmese newspapers were even comparing Tito to Aung San, father of independent Burma, as an expression of the utmost prestige the Yugoslav President enjoyed in this country: “Marshal Tito has often been referred to as the Aung San of Yugoslavia, and in turn *Bogyoke* [General Aung San] has been called the Tito of Burma.”¹⁸² Even some of the operations against the GMD were temporarily delayed in order to gather additional troops to Rangoon and uphold order and security during the visit of the esteemed guest.¹⁸³

During his talks with U Nu, Tito emphasized the multifaceted approach to the Yugoslav-Burmese relationship, especially in its economic and military spheres, and its promotion through intense advocacy of “active peaceful co-existence” and “overcoming bloc divisions.” As an elder

¹⁷⁷ DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 411031, *Zabeleska o razgovoru sa permanentnim sekretarom Ministarstva vojske Maung Maung-om, na dan 12.jula 1954. Prisutni U Hti Han, direktor nabavki, U Ba Than, potpukovnik, Lt.commander Barber, major Tun Shwe i još nekoliko oficira* [Minutes of conversation with the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defense Maung Maung, July 12th 1954. Also present director of procurements U Hti Han, Lt. Colonel U Ba Than, Lt. Commander Barber, Major Tun Shwe, and few other officers].

¹⁷⁸ Arhiv Vojske Srbije (hereafter AVS) [Archives of the Army of Serbia], Arhiv Jugoslovenske Narodne Armije (hereafter AJNA) [Archives of the Yugoslav People's Army], fond GS-10, kutija 375 (hereafter k) [box], fascikla 1 (hereafter f) [folder], document 1498, *Telegram from the Yugoslav military attaché in Burma*, October 23rd 1954. In August 1954, Yugoslavia's first military attaché to Burma Ilija Radaković took over his new post.

¹⁷⁹ *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. XII, part II, East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 234-241.

¹⁸⁰ DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 414793, *Zabeleska o razgovorima na prijemu kod indijskog otpravnika poslova u cast indijskog Predsednika Vlade gospodina Nehrua, na dan 16 oktobra 1954 godine* [Minutes of conversation at the reception given by the Indian charge d'affaires in the honor of Indian PM Nehru, October 16th 1954].

¹⁸¹ NAI, MEA, F I-4/55-BC, *Annual Report from the Military Attaché in Burma, Report No.4 for the Period 1 to 31 January 1955*, p. 1; CFMA, 105-00846-02(1), *Miandian yu Nansilafu de guanxi*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁸² Hugh Tinker, *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Years of Independence*, p. 362.

¹⁸³ NAI, MEA, F I-4/55-BC, *Annual Report for the Year ended 31 December 1955, Appendix "A,"* p. 2.

statesman, Tito advised his Burmese counterparts to strengthen their military capabilities, develop their defense industry, and effectively train military personnel, since this was the only way for smaller nations to overcome the challenges of the superpower confrontation. U Nu agreed, indicating that he was ready to push forward military cooperation with Yugoslavia, although he was vague about the positive results of the use of the Yugoslav made weapons.¹⁸⁴

Tito was well aware that Burma was still pursuing a policy of military independence from any country. In order to achieve its goal, Rangoon was willing to diversify their sources of weapons procurement.¹⁸⁵ Tito intended to use his personal charm and his visit to win over Burma's officer corps. During his meeting with Burmese officers, Tito gave first-hand advice how to reorganize military units and create smaller divisions and brigades while simultaneously encouraging independence in command and emphasizing maneuverability.¹⁸⁶ As a means to firmly position his country inside the Burmese military establishment, Tito decided to give, as a gift, the full equipment for one whole brigade of the Burmese Army.¹⁸⁷ The West were upset that the weapons were taken from the military assistance previously rendered by the U.S. and Great Britain to Yugoslavia, but this reaction was immediately denounced by the Yugoslav Foreign Secretary Koca Popovic.¹⁸⁸ Foreign military missions in Rangoon, particularly the Indian mission, were alarmed by the developments, making attempts to actively gather intelligence regarding this gift.¹⁸⁹ The Chinese also had "to admit that Tito's clique, indeed, has influence

¹⁸⁴ AJBT, KPR, I-2/4-2, *Zabeleska o razgovorima koji su vodjeni na brodu „Mindon,” 14.I 1955 izmedju Predsednika FNRJ, Marsala Josipa Broza Tita i Predsednika burmanske Vlade U Nua* [Minutes of conversation between the Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito and the Burmese Prime Minister U Nu on the ship "Mindon," January 14th 1955], pp. 4-7. Very probably, PM U Nu just wanted to point out to his guests his own desire to renegotiate the price of the future purchases or to trade rice surplus for guns.

¹⁸⁵ Yugoslav diplomats had information that Burma was considering buying AA guns from Switzerland, airplanes from Israel and Britain, tanks from the U.S., and some smaller items from Japan. AJBT, KPR, I-3-a/15-5, *Nasa saradnja sa Burmom na vojnom polju* [Our cooperation with Burma in the military sphere].

¹⁸⁶ AJBT, KPR, I-2/4-2, *Razgovor sa predstavnicima Burmanske armije, 11.I 1955* [Conversation with the representatives of the Burmese Army, January 11th 1955].

¹⁸⁷ AJBT, KPR, I-2/4-2, *Joint Statement of His Excellency the President of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia Marshal Josip Broz Tito and the Honorable Prime Minister of the Union of Burma U Nu*, January 17th 1955. Yugoslavia gave full equipment for the brigade consisting of 3,000 men: 700 pistols, 2,600 rifles and submachine guns, 126 heavy machine guns, 36 machine guns, 24 82mm and 4 120mm mortars, 90 grenade launchers, 6 AT 50 mm cannons, 6 AA 20mm cannons, 4 B-1 76mm cannons, 300 horses, 45 motor vehicles, 230 different carts, and 2 sets of ammunition for all these weapons. AVS, AJNA, GŠ-10, k-375, f-2, 304, *Telegram from the Yugoslav General Staff to the military attaché in Burma*, March 7th 1955.

¹⁸⁸ AJBT, KPR, I-2/4-2, *Press conference of the Yugoslav Foreign Secretary Koca Popovic in Rangoon*, January 17th 1955.

¹⁸⁹ NAI, MEA, F I-4/55-BC, *Annual Report from the Military Attaché in Burma, Report No.5 for the Period 1 to 28 February 1955*, p. 1; *Annual Report for the Year ended 31 December 1955*, p. 7.

over the Burmese ruling class.”¹⁹⁰ Even the Americans were again contemplating giving military assistance to Burma in the form of a gift. The Burmese, however, remained reluctant to accept this kind of help from the U.S.¹⁹¹ Equipment for the brigade was finally handed over to the Burmese side in October 1955 and it was solemnly received by Minister of Defense U Ba Swe and other high-ranking members of the military and government.¹⁹² The Indian military attaché reported to his superiors that this gift was the largest introduction of new equipment into the Burmese Armed Forces in 1955.¹⁹³

With all previous arms shipments and particularly with this new gift of weapons for one brigade, Yugoslavia gained firm ground among politicians and military men in Rangoon. Even when it came to purchasing some new equipment, it became evident that Yugoslavia was gradually squeezing other competitors out of the Burmese arms market.¹⁹⁴ An Israeli military attaché had to publicly admit that they would lose the bid for 120mm mortars to Yugoslavia and he readily suggested that Yugoslavia, Israel, and Burma should make a joint venture of producing torpedo boats. However, this was rejected by the Yugoslav military attaché, Radakovic.¹⁹⁵ In the end, the Israeli attaché had to acknowledge that he did not know “whether

¹⁹⁰ CFMA, 105-00846-02(1), *Miandian yu Nansilafu de guanxi*, pp. 3-4, 7. As one can see from this report, the Chinese were very closely monitoring any new developments in the military field of the Yugoslavia-Burma relationship. Their data were generally correct, which could suggest that they had informants inside the Burmese Army.

¹⁹¹ *FRUS*, 1955-57, vol. XXII, Southeast Asia (1989), pp. 2-3, 6-7.

¹⁹² DASMIP, PA, 1955, f-9, 414992, *Telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma*, October 12th 1955.

¹⁹³ NAI, MEA, F I-4/55-BC, *Annual Report for the Year ended 31 December 1955*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ In 1954 one Burmese military mission visited Israel, while during the 1950s Burma had successively tried to copy Israeli national service scheme and defense structures. Also, during the same period Burma purchased in Israel 30 second-hand Supermarine Spitfire airplanes. Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, p. 154; William Ashton, *Myanmar and Israel Develop Military Pact*,

www.burmalibrary.org/reg_burma/archives/200008/msg00005.html. Councilor Simic was officially informed that only a survey mission was sent to Israel and the Burmese military did not have any need to send a similar delegation to Yugoslavia (it had been there in 1952). Nonetheless, the Burmese had demanded that a Yugoslav expert group should be sent to Burma for a longer period of time. DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 411031, *Zabeleska o razgovoru sa Maung Maung, stalnim sekretarom Ministarstva vojske, 21 juna 1954 godine* [Minutes of conversation with the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defense Maung Maung on June 21st 1954]. However, during Israel's War of Independence in 1948, Yugoslavia acted as an intermediary for the purchase of Spitfire airplanes from Czechoslovakia. Most of these airplanes were flown to Israel via Yugoslav airfields, while some of them were even painted in Yugoslav Air Force colors. Perhaps, some of the Spitfires later sold to Burma were those that Israel had previously got through Yugoslavia. Col.(ret.) Dr. Shaul Shay, *The Israeli-Yugoslav Relations, 1947-1955*, published in a volume *Balkanski pakt 1953/1954* [The Balkan Pact, 1953-54] (Beograd: Institut za strategijska istrazivanja, 2008), pp. 297-300.

¹⁹⁵ AVS, AJNA, GS-10, k-375, f-2, 1764, *Telegram from the Yugoslav military attaché in Burma*, August 4th 1955. Yugoslav officials were well aware that the Israelis could not compete with them on the Burmese market, thus the torpedo boat proposal was just put forward as a last-stand attempt to preserve current positions.

he would stay longer or not, since the Burmese were not that interested in [Israeli] assistance.”¹⁹⁶ Several 120mm mortars were bought in March 1955 for 95,000 U.S. dollars.¹⁹⁷ Yugoslavia was also starting to open the Indonesian market for its military industry.¹⁹⁸ Similar relations were also being established with India, closely following Yugoslavia’s full support behind India’s stance over the issue of the liberation of the Portuguese colony of Goa.¹⁹⁹

In the aftermath of Marshal Tito’s visit to Burma, many foreign observers noted that substantial changes had occurred in the field of Yugoslav-Burmese relations. In a report to New Delhi, India’s military attaché noticed that “Yugoslav influence in the Burmese Armed Forces appears to have increased considerably,” while one of his contacts in the *Tatmadaw* told him that “the Burmese authorities had a special regard for the Yugoslavs...who had been most helpful, particularly in generously providing at short notice, equipment for mountain artillery regiment, which was urgently required by the Burmese Army.” This contact also emphasized the reasons for general satisfaction among Burma’s military men with the treatment they received from Yugoslavia: “When the Burmese approached the Yugoslav military attaché for these guns, he had ascertained that they were available and arranged for them to be shipped without delay and had told the Burmese not to worry about payment, as the terms would be generous and could be finalized later.”²⁰⁰ Compared to British delays constantly changing terms, there is little wonder that Burma’s military leadership were keen to continue cooperation with Yugoslavia.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ AVS, AJNA, GS-10, k-375, f-2, 2791, *Telegram from the Yugoslav military attaché in Burma*, December 19th 1955.

¹⁹⁷ AJBT, KPR, I-3-a/15-5, *Pregled vojnih odnosa sa Burmom* [Survey of military relations with Burma].

¹⁹⁸ Commander of the Indonesian Navy Admiral Subijako and General Si Ma Tu Pang both expressed their undivided interest in purchasing B-1 cannons and torpedo boats from Yugoslavia. AVS, AJNA, GŠ-10, k-375, f-2, 2614, *Telegram from the Yugoslav military attaché in Burma*, November 24th 1955. During the period 1954-57, Yugoslavia had exported to the Indonesia military materials worth more than 2.5 million U.S. dollars (ammunition, cannons, flamethrowers, torpedo boats, amphibious vehicles etc.). After that a credit arrangement for the purchase of additional parties of boats and other weapons was concluded worth more than 24 million U.S. dollars. AJBT, KPR, I-3-a, Indonesia, *Beleska o isporukama vojnog materijala Indoneziji* [Notes on arms shipments to Indonesia], October 11th 1958.

¹⁹⁹ Besides giving full backing to India’s case in the UN and maintaining close ties with Indian rebels in Goa, Yugoslavia was also approached by Indian diplomats to provide patrol speed boats which could be used to enforce the naval blockade of Goa. Indians were desperate to acquire these boats, since “the English are putting obstacles before them and they cannot purchase them [the boats] in other countries.” AJBT, KPR, I-5-b, India, *Molba Indije da im nasa RM ustupi izvestan broj patrolnih camaca* [India’s request to our Navy to lend them a certain number of patrol boats]. Tito personally gave specific instructions to examine this case. In 1957, an agreement was finally reached to sell India the first lot of patrol boats. AJBT, KPR, I-5-b, India, *Zabeleska o razgovoru nacelnika VI odeljenja J. Petrica sa otpravnikom poslova indijske ambasade Lukoze-om 13.III 1957* [Notes of conversation between the head of the 6th section J. Petrić and the Indian charge d’affaires Lukoze, March 13th 1957].

²⁰⁰ NAI, MEA, F I-4/55-BC, *Annual Report from the Military Attaché in Burma, Report No.6 for the Period 1 to 31 March 1955*, p. 8. Indian intelligence also had strong indications that Yugoslav military instructors were “in charge

The Burmese desire to substantially increase the significance of this kind of military cooperation was more than evident during the two month visit of the high profile military delegation to Yugoslavia (May-June 1955). The head of this delegation was Chief of Naval Staff Commodore Than Pe.²⁰² The main goal of this mission was to acquaint themselves with the Yugoslav military industry, shipbuilding capacities, and military education system. The Burmese were also interested in discussing the possibility of jointly constructing a shipyard as well as factories for mortars, ammunition, and river gunboats.²⁰³ The tangible results of this visit was the signing of another arms contract for mortars, rifles, machine-guns, and ammunition worth more than one million U.S. dollars.²⁰⁴ The Indian military attaché reported to New Dehli the contents of this new shipment of weapons arriving in Rangoon from July to September 1955.²⁰⁵

Burmese visits to Yugoslavia sought to reinforce the lessons about building a strong and modern military. Yugoslavia, with its extensive experience from WWII guerrilla warfare and history of facing foreign aggression, together with Israel, was seen as a specific role model that set concrete examples from which Burma could learn. In the 1955 mission report, Yugoslavia

of the artillery supporting the offensive against the KMTs.” At the moment, declassified Yugoslav documents cannot corroborate this hypothesis.

²⁰¹ The Yugoslav ambassador later explained to the Defense Minister U Ba Swe why Yugoslavia demanded some hard currency payments for the purchased weapons. However, he stressed that Belgrade was ready to do these deals also through clearing arrangements. DASMIP, PA, 1955, f-9, 414992, *Ciphered telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma*, October 8th 1955. In June 1954, Yugoslavia was ready to export to Burma special pumps they needed to maintain cannons in jungle conditions during the offensive against the GMD, even if Burma did not have necessary funds to immediately pay for these items. DASMIP, PA, 1954, f-14, 48147, *Zabeleska o razgovoru druga Laze Latinovica, nacelnika V odeljenja, sa burmanskim otpravnikom poslova U Khin Maung Gale i vojnim izaslanikom Maung Tin na dan 16 juna 1954 godine u 13h* [Minutes of conversation between the head of the 5th section comrade Laza Latinovic with the Burmese charge d'affaires U Khin Maung Gale and military envoy Maung Tin, June 16th 1954, 13.00h].

²⁰² The Indian military attaché was convinced that the primary task of this mission was “the question of procurement of military stores from Yugoslavia.” NAI, MEA, F I-4/55-BC, *Annual Report from the Military Attaché in Burma, Report No.7 for the Period 1 to 30 April 1955*, p. 10.

²⁰³ AVS, AJNA, GŠ-10, k-375, f-2, 744, *Telegram from the Yugoslav military attaché in Burma*, April 5th 1955. The level of mutual understanding reached after this visit was more than evident when the Burmese side concluded a contract with one West German company over building a munitions factory and Minister of Defense U Ba Swe asked Yugoslav diplomats to “help them [Burmese] and give them advice if it was good what they were doing or not since, due to lack of experience, others could trick them.” [emphasis added] The Yugoslav ambassador promised that some Yugoslav officers coming to Rangoon with the weapons for the brigade could help them. DASMIP, PA, 1955, f-9, 415881, *Zabeleska o razgovoru sa U Ba Swe na dan 5 oktobra 1955* [Minutes of conversation with U Ba Swe on October 5th 1955]. In 1956, West Germans agreed to build a factory on the outskirts of Rangoon to produce G-3 automatic rifles and ammunition. Andrew Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces: Power Without Glory*, p. 140.

²⁰⁴ AJBT, KPR, I-3-a/15-5, *Nasa saradnja sa Burmom na vojnom polju*.

²⁰⁵ NAI, MEA, F I-4/55-BC, *Annual Report from the Military Attaché in Burma, Report No.10 for the Period ending 31 July 1955*, p. 7; *Report No.11 for the Period ending 31 August 1955*, p. 9; *Report No.12 for the Period ending 30 September 1955*, p. 12. Indian intelligence sources reported that more than 600 crates were unloaded at the port of Rangoon, loaded with rifles, mortars, and ammunition stacks.

was identified as the country most similar to Burma in the terms of population, geography, and geopolitics. A particular emphasizing was placed on the fact that Yugoslavia was, in Rangoon's opinion, "the best prepared nation to defend its independence [...] for its size and population."²⁰⁶

The 1955 deal with Yugoslavia was also closely scrutinized by Burma's giant neighbors—China and India. A certain feeling of anxiety could be sensed in their reports.²⁰⁷ The Indian military attaché provided a particularly insightful summary of the official exchanges: "It is evident...that most cordial and friendly relations have been established between the Armed Forces of the two countries and that a number of Burmese consider the Yugoslavs as their best friends."²⁰⁸

The confidential report made by the Chinese Embassy in Rangoon mirrored the assessment of their Indian counterparts, providing an elaborate explanation for the specific relationship that had developed between the *Tatmadaw* and the Yugoslav People's Army:

Generally speaking, Burmese-Yugoslav military relations are very close and delicate. Burma not only has a growing appetite for Yugoslav arms and ammunition, but also this is even more evident in the field of education and training in the Yugoslav Army. For example, almost every year the Burmese Army sends officers to Yugoslavia for education...A lot of Burmese officers, especially those who believe in socialism, nurture good feelings toward Yugoslavia. Some of them even say that Burma and Yugoslavia have many things in common. The Yugoslav military attaché is very popular with the Burmese Army.²⁰⁹

During the two year period when the Yugoslav-Burmese military relationship skyrocketed, a number of Burmese soldiers and army personnel were trained and educated in Yugoslav civilian and military schools: two army doctors spent a year at the Military-Medical Academy in Belgrade; three officers, 13 NCOs, and privates finished artillery courses to operate B-1 cannons; two naval officers were educated at the Oceanographic Institute; two or three soldiers were invited to pass parachutist courses and study the production of Yugoslav

²⁰⁶ Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, p. 177.

²⁰⁷ CFMA, 105-00907-01(1), *Miandian yu Nansilafu de junshi guanxi*, p. 2; NAI, MEA, F I-4/55-BC, *Annual Report from the Military Attaché in Burma, Report No.7 for the Period 1 to 30 April 1955*, p. 10.

²⁰⁸ NAI, MEA, F I-4/55-BC, *Annual Report from the Military Attaché in Burma, Report No.11 for the Period ending 31 August 1955*, p. 8.

²⁰⁹ CFMA, 105-00907-01(1), *Miandian yu Nansilafu de junshi guanxi*, p. 3. In September 1955, General Ne Win led a large military delegation to China, where they visited munitions factories and army training facilities. *FRUS*, 1955-57, vol. XXII, Southeast Asia, pp. 24-25.

parachutes; six soldiers were sent to finish civilian flying courses.²¹⁰ The Burmese Government also wanted its pilots to get training on jet propelled aircraft.²¹¹ However, since these aircraft were part of the U.S. military assistance package to Yugoslavia and were subjected to certain restrictions under the bilateral defense agreement, the Yugoslav side had to postpone this decision for a certain period of time.²¹² Burmese pilots were sent to attend civilian flying courses in order to avoid problems with the Americans.

In total, during this initial phase of the Yugoslav-Burmese military cooperation (1953-55), the Burmese Government purchased weapons and different kinds of military equipment from Yugoslavia for more than 4,5 million U.S. dollars, although this was not the final sum.²¹³

Conclusion

By the successful visit of Prime Minister U Nu to Yugoslavia in June 1955 and Yugoslavia's decision to purchase 50.000 tons of rice annually for five years, Yugoslav-Burmese relations were put on a steady track of mutual assistance and lasting friendship.²¹⁴ Tito's trip to India and Burma further opened important prospects for Yugoslav foreign and economic policies. As one Burmese official confidently concluded, the developments demonstrated to all other major players in Asia how they should treat developing nations and accordingly develop political

²¹⁰ AJBT, KPR, I-2/4-2, *Jugoslovensko-burmanski vojni odnosi* [Yugoslav-Burmese military relations].

²¹¹ In 1954-55, Burma acquired eight de Havilland Vampire T-55 trainers from the RAF. These aircraft were first jet airplanes introduced into the Burmese Air Force, so their pilots needed advanced training to effectively operate them. Andrew Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces: Power Without Glory*, p. 206. Although these airplanes were bought in Britain, Burma eventually decided to send its pilots to Yugoslavia to pass through necessary flying courses.

²¹² AJBT, KPR, I-5-b, Burma, *Zabeleska o sastanku održanom u Pravnom savetu DSIP-a po pitanju obucavanja u FNRJ avijaticara iz Burme* [Notes on the meeting of the Legal Council of the State Secretariat for Foreign Affairs on the issue of training Burmese pilots in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia], January 13th 1956.

²¹³ AJBT, KPR, I-3-a/15-5, *Nasa saradnja sa Burmom na vojnom planu*. Of course, the gift of weapons for the whole brigade was not included in this sum, which means that the overall figure would have been much higher.

²¹⁴ AJBT, KPR, I-3-a/15-5, *Poseta Predsednika Vlade Burmanske unije U Nu-a Jugoslaviji, 6-16. VI 1955* [The visit of the Burmese PM U Nu to Yugoslavia, June 6th to 16th 1955]; on the Indian perspective of this event see NAI, MEA, F 62-R&I/55(s), *Monthly Report from the Embassy of India to Yugoslavia for the Month of June 1955*, pp. 1-2 During the negotiations between two economic delegations, both countries agreed that Yugoslavia, besides purchasing 50,000 tons of rice annually and selling goods to Burma for the same amount, would also render necessary technical assistance to the long-term development of Burma's industry, establish mutual chambers of commerce, and further expand Burmese orders of ships made in Yugoslav shipyards (2 ships every year). The head of the Burmese delegation stated that in every competition of foreign companies for Burmese goods, Yugoslav companies would be given an advantage. AJBT, KPR, I-5-b, *Završni izveštaj o pregovorima sa burmanskom delegacijom* [Final report on the negotiations with the Burmese delegation], October 1st 1955. However, due to existing problems with the Burmese economy, these trade agreements often faced many obstacles. Nevertheless, Yugoslav companies were given indeed preferential treatment in Burma.

and economic relations with them based on equality.²¹⁵ Neither the political upheaval in Burma in 1958-59 nor Ne Win's coup d'état in March 1962 disrupted the general mood of mutual confidence that had been established during the early years of intensive military cooperation. Extensive bilateral military cooperation endured throughout the Cold War period.

The global implications of Yugoslavia's "leap to Asia" were closely monitored in many world capitals.²¹⁶ The Soviet Union especially had begun to scrutinize Tito's activities in Asia after this seminal trip, inviting U Nu and Nehru to also visit Moscow before or after their official visits to Yugoslavia in June-July 1955. During tenuous talks between Yugoslav and Soviet delegations in Belgrade (May-June 1955), Khrushchev had to openly admit that Soviet knowledge about India and Burma was rather limited, (with regards to Burma Khrushchev even said "we are not that well acquainted with the situation in Burma") while he had to put up with Tito's criticism that Moscow and Beijing had made serious mistakes by supporting marginal Communist groups against legitimate governments in New Delhi and Rangoon.²¹⁷ Khrushchev's words were largely in accordance with the assessment coming from a former Soviet diplomat in Rangoon Aleksandr Kaznacheev: "Our knowledge of local conditions was often superficial, and sometimes we were unable to understand properly the trends of political struggle and grasp incipient changes in time."²¹⁸

When Khrushchev and Bulganin officially visited Afghanistan, India and Burma in December 1955, they were following in Tito's footsteps.²¹⁹ Through Tito and his strong personal bonds with leaders like U Nu, Nehru, Nasser, and Indonesian President Sukarno, Khrushchev was becoming aware of the advantages in dealings with leaders from the Third World, even if

²¹⁵ DASMIP, PA, 1956, f-10, 4227, *Telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma*, December 23rd 1955.

²¹⁶ Many officials in the West were disenchanted by the results of Tito's trip to India and Burma, considering this as a dangerous move aimed at subverting U.S., British, or French positions among the developing countries. This kind of disappointment was expressed both in private contacts and through major Western newspapers. Dragan Bogetić, *Jugoslavija i Zapad 1952-1955*, pp. 183-184.

²¹⁷ AJBT, KPR, I-3-a, *Poseta drzavno partijske delegacije SSSR na celu sa Nikitom Sergejevicem Hruscovom – Tok konferencije jugoslovenske i sovjetske delegacije* [The visit of the Soviet state-party delegation headed by Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev – the course of the conference between Yugoslav and Soviet delegations], May 27-28th 1955, pp. 24-26, 29-30; AJBT, KPR, I-3-a/15-5, *Zabeleska o razgovorima izmedju Predsednika FNRJ Marsala Josipa Broza Tita i Predsednika Vlade Burmanske unije U Nu-a, koji su vodjeni u Belom dvoru u Beogradu 10 juna 1955 godine* [Minutes of conversation between the President of FPRY Marshal Josip Broz Tito and the Prime Minister of the Union of Burma U Nu, held at the White Palace in Belgrade, June 10th 1955], pp. 10-11.

²¹⁸ Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, p. 169.

²¹⁹ *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, vol. 3: Statesman, 1953-1964* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), pp. 723-724.

not communists.²²⁰ Aware that his policies and relations with countries like Burma had a major impact on the new Soviet thinking about the developing world, Tito said that

[While] I cannot be a prophet regarding their [Soviet] motives... I can say that in the activity of peace-loving nations and in the results of this activity...they have seen the yearnings of these peace-loving nations...Most certainly, this was one of the major factors that made them think that a new policy should be pursued, different from the previous one, and especially different from the one pursued by Stalin.²²¹

Tito's trip to India and Burma ushered in a new era in the history of the Third World during the Cold War. "Active peaceful co-existence" became the highly cherished slogan of the decade among the nonaligned countries. The "spirit" of the Bandung Conference that immediately followed this event in April 1955, generally contributed to the heightened profile of the developing nations in world politics. Yugoslav arms shipments to Burma were firmly laid at the foundation of this new political course. During these crucial years, nonalignment made a steady transition from a passive political concept to an active struggle for the new pattern of international relations. The Yugoslav-Burmese relationship stood at the very core of this major foreign policy revolution of the mid 1950s. The key to this astounding success was interwoven with the dynamic personality of Josip Broz Tito and the outstanding diplomatic and military service he had shaped. "Tito's ideas fell on receptive ears; he struck the right note with the right audience at the right moment in time," Alvin Rubenstein suggested.²²² The decisive influence Tito had on the policies of Asian leaders like U Nu and Nehru was very obvious from the private statement made by U Thant, one of U Nu's closest aides and future UN Secretary General: "Marshal Tito is strong and shrewd. Nehru and U Nu above all appreciate his ability to accurately assess relations and situations in the world and based on this determine [his] actions. They [Nehru and U Nu] have full confidence in the Marshal's assessments and judgments."²²³ [emphasis added]

²²⁰ ASCG, CK SKJ, 507/IX, 119/I-45-90, *Informacija Hruscova i Bulganjina upucena CK SKJ o razgovorima koje su vodili sa Nehruom prilikom posete Indiji; informacija o rezultatima puta drugova Hruscova i Bulganjina u Indiju, Burmu i Avganistan* [Information from Khrushchev and Bulganin sent to the CC LCY on the talks they had with Nehru during the visit to India; information about the results of comrade Khrushchev's and Bulganin's trip to India, Burma, and Afghanistan]. Tito was also informed in detail on the course and results of this visit in the letter personally sent to him by Nehru. AJBT, KPR, I-1/361, December 23rd 1955.

²²¹ AJBT, KPR, I-3-a/15-5, *Zabeleska o razgovorima izmedju Predsednika FNRJ Marsala Josipa Broza Tita i Predsednika Vlade Burmanske unije U Nu-a, koji su vodjeni u Belom dvoru u Beogradu 10 juna 1955 godine*, p. 2.

²²² Alvin Z. Rubenstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, p. 117.

²²³ DASMIP, PA, 1955, f-9, 416756, *Ciphered telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma*, November 28th 1955.

Yugoslavia and its president had become the bulwark and the intimate of the nonaligned. Burma, together with India and Egypt, was placed at the very top of this group.

* * *

So was Yugoslavia's policy toward Burma important in the grander Cold War history? Did these two small countries have any influence on the general tendencies of the Cold War in Southeast Asia? One might think that the topic of Yugoslav-Burmese political and military relations in the early 1950s was understudied because this issue was not relevant for international affairs at the time it occurred or for international historiography many years later. Yet the evidence presented suggests otherwise. Rather than lack of importance, it was lack of sources that kept this story in the dark for so long.

The relevance of the relationship can be judged on three different levels: local, regional, and global. On the local level, the greatest beneficiary of military cooperation between the two countries was the Burmese Armed Forces. Besides 30 airplanes acquired in Israel and some heavy weaponry previously purchased from Great Britain, the overwhelming number of armaments utilized in the battles against domestic insurgency and GMD units were manufactured in Yugoslavia.²²⁴

Yugoslav influence was not limited to arms shipments, but also through the rapid development of strong organizational ties between the two armies. Belgrade thus gained a rare and privileged insight into the inner working of the Burmese military.²²⁵ With this state of affairs, the strength of the Yugoslav leverage over the *Tatmadaw* was continuously gaining prominence. Ever since those years, General Ne Win became the closest associate of Yugoslav officials regarding the further evolution of bilateral contacts. This proved to be true during Tito's second

²²⁴ In the last years of that decade, the *Tatmadaw* purchased some guns and ammunition from the U.S. and Great Britain for its Army, while a number of airplanes was also acquired from the British. With regards to the Burmese Navy, in the 1950s some vessels were provided by the British and Americans, but in 1958 the Burmese also purchased 10 Y-301 class river gunboats from Yugoslavia and later with the assistance of Yugoslav technicians, Burma was also producing a number of its own vessels. Andrew Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces: Power Without Glory*, pp. 159-162, 184-185, 205-206; Andrew Selth, "Burma's Maritime Strategy," pp. 294-295.

²²⁵ For example, Burmese military leaders copied the formula for constructing a Historical Section and a national army museum from Yugoslavia. Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, p. 176. Military-Historical Institute (Vojnoistorijski institut) of the Serbian/Yugoslav Army was one of the oldest institutions of its kind in Europe (founded in 1878, reorganized after the WWII) and with its long standing tradition of military-historical research it stood as a genuine role model for the Burmese Army.

visit to Rangoon in January 1959, when the Yugoslav President finally realized that the maverick General was the man with whom he should do real business, not then retired former PM U Nu.²²⁶ Something similar repeated itself immediately after the March 1962 coup d'etat when the military took over the prerogatives of power from the civilian government.

The local impact of the Yugoslav factor can be also observed through ideological influence Belgrade had on the emergence and transformation of the Burmese socialist model pursued by Rangoon authorities well before and after the period analyzed in this paper. Yugoslavia's inseparable link between the socialist model of development and policy of active neutralism remolded the mindset of many leading figures in the Burmese government, thus contributing to the fundamental reshaping of many leading features of Burma's inner or foreign policies. A significant number of Burma's highest officers, many of them leaning toward socialism, found in Yugoslavia an edifying example of how a country should follow its own path of internal development and, at the same time, build strong defense institutions outside the strategic umbrellas of the superpower blocs.²²⁷

In the regional context, gradual restoration of internal cohesion and the increased international profile of the Burmese Army had substantially influenced Burma's relations with all of its neighbors. During the peak years of the insurgency, Burma was almost written off as an entity by many officials in surrounding countries and it had become a battleground for the competing interests of regional powers like China, India and Thailand. However, with the massive rearmaments program provided by Yugoslavia, the *Tatmadaw* managed to cope with many of these rebel groups, driving them out from a number of strategic areas into less populated and more remote mountainous and jungle regions. The failure of those proxy groups deprived their sponsors of their opportunity to expand their influence into Burma, or to gain leverage over the government in Rangoon. By acquiring necessary military aid and political backing from regionally detached sources like Yugoslavia, Burma regained confidence, strengthened its

²²⁶ AJBT, KPR, I-2/11-3, *Zabeleska o jugoslovensko-burmanskim razgovorima 9 januara 1959 godine u Rangunu* [Minutes of the Yugoslav-Burmese conversations held in Rangoon, January 9th 1959].

²²⁷ Chinese intelligence sources reported in 1958 that Yugoslav advisors in the Burmese Army were very influential and present on all levels of command, sometimes even assisting the Ministry of Defense in making annual military reports. Some of these instructors were also giving lectures to their Burmese counterparts about Yugoslavia's rich experience in waging guerrilla warfare. As Chinese analysts concluded, besides Yugoslav advisers, there were also some officers coming from the U.S. and Australia, but none of them were as numerous or popular as the Yugoslavs. CFMA, 105-00907-01(1), *Miandian yu Nansilafu de junshi guanxi*, p. 2.

regional posture, and more or less stabilized state sovereignty over much of its territory, thus performing a crucial transition from an object to a subject of regional affairs.

Chinese and Indian sources presented here have corroborated the importance of the Yugoslav-Burmese relationship in the regional context, especially with respect to its military dimension. As we have seen, the Chinese and Indian Embassies in Rangoon closely monitored all political, economic, and military exchanges between Yugoslavia and Burma throughout this period, labeling them as a relationship of the “highest importance and sensitivity.” Beijing and New Delhi were aware that a small and distant European country had a more decisive influence among Burma’s politicians and military men, while the Yugoslavs were considered by the Burmese as “closest among friends.” With the increase in Yugoslav military assistance to the *Tatmadaw*, India lost the ability to exert influence over the security situation in Burma by posing as the only alternative to Britain and the U.S. for weapons procurements. Meanwhile, the reorganized and rearmed Burmese military managed to push the BCP further underground, eventually causing significant changes in the Chinese policies toward its southern neighbor.

The general relevance of the overall Yugoslav-Burmese cooperation on the regional level was already evident when, under the impression of the rising political, economic, and military presence of Yugoslavia in Rangoon, India decided to actively engage Belgrade in world affairs, unexpectedly invited Tito to come for an official visit, and try to win his support for its concept of peaceful co-existence. Yugoslav involvement in Burma, increased Belgrade’s status in the eyes of the Indian government.²²⁸ On the other hand, Beijing was also forced to consider Yugoslavia’s actions in a much different context from the ideological one they had relied upon since 1948-49. Without these successful elements of the proactive policy Yugoslavia had waged in Burma and the region, neither India nor China, would have deemed it necessary to forge any kind of constructive relationship with Belgrade in the mid 1950s or even establish official diplomatic relations at the level that they did.²²⁹ Even Thailand, Burma’s old adversary and

²²⁸ After Tito’s visit to India and Nehru’s two ensuing visits to Yugoslavia in 1955-56, the Indian PM had placed his relationship with Yugoslavia at the very top of his foreign policy priorities that he pursued with regards to Europe, nonaligned countries etc. In November 1956, Nehru publicly stated in front of the Indian Parliament (Lok Sabha) that “Yugoslavia is a country with which we exchange our appraisals of the world situation more frequently than with any other country.” [emphasis added] Jawaharlal Nehru, *India’s Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches, September 1946 – April 1961* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2004), p. 581.

²²⁹ When in 1956 the unresolved border question had again come to the forefront of Sino-Burmese relations, interim PM U Ba Swe confidentially asked Marshal Tito to use his influence in Beijing or Moscow and act as a mediator on this issue. AJBT, KPR, I-1/139. However, when the bilateral Sino-Burmese border talks eventually began in Beijing in October-November 1956, the head of the Burmese delegation former PM U Nu, besides his Chinese counterparts,

America's staunchest ally in the region, was influenced by these events and pushed even harder to expand diplomatic and economic relations Belgrade. In this period, Yugoslavia reemerged as an important factor among the nonaligned nations in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia and, later, Cambodia. Yugoslavia's dynamic and multifaceted partnership with Burma had already transcended the boundaries of regional politics.

On the global level, the main features of Yugoslav-Burmese military cooperation were firmly interwoven with the simultaneous emergence of the sensitive mechanisms of nonalignment. On the local and regional levels, the rising relevance of the Yugoslav arms shipments to Burma was associated with the specific definition of Burma's identities. On the global level, Yugoslav-Burmese relations were closely interconnected with Yugoslavia's search for its new foreign policy orientation. On the other hand, this new political course of nonalignment adopted by both countries often clashed with the strategic interests of the superpowers.

Burma's relevance for the early Cold War in Asia has been largely neglected or generally omitted by the international historiography. All major studies of the wars in Indochina have basically confined themselves to Vietnam and its immediate neighbors, ignoring the influence this international crisis had on Burma. This paper, and the newly declassified documents from the Yugoslav, Chinese and Indian archives, places the relationship between Rangoon and Belgrade firmly in the international context.

Had Burma been irrelevant to the global Cold War, why did the Truman administration plan to use its territory for subversive activities against the People's Republic of China? Or why did the Eisenhower administration attempt to preserve Western leaning Rangoon as a strategic buffer against communism in Southeast Asia? Why did Zhou Enlai court so many Burmese officials to placate their intransigence and guarantee the stability of China's southern boundaries? Why did Khrushchev hurry to go there and offer almost unconditional Soviet assistance in 1955? Why was the U.S. so desperately pressing for resumption of economic or military aid to Burma in 1956-57?²³⁰ With Yugoslavia's rising influence in Burma and Burma's growing independence

met only with the Yugoslav ambassador in China Vladimir Popovic and informed him about the course of negotiations. DASMIP, PA, 1956, f-10, 419117, *Ciphered telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in China*, November 4th 1956. In this episode we can also witness the amazing depth of mutual confidence that had developed between Yugoslavia and Burma during previous years.

²³⁰ According to some confidential conversations between Burmese officials and the Yugoslav Embassy in Rangoon, there were some strong indications that the Chinese side reopened the border question in 1956 to foil any attempts

in foreign affairs, the U.S. started pushing their own offers of military and economic assistance, in order to rescue fledgling British positions in Burma or to replace them with their own political and military influence.

Yugoslav-Burmese military cooperation had a major impact on the strategic plans of the superpowers, and foremost on U.S. power projections. The U.S. foreign policy establishment was disturbed by the prospect that one communist country (although much friendlier to U.S. policies than the Soviet bloc) could exert such influence outside the region where its own foreign policy priorities were firmly based. Through huge economic and military assistance to Yugoslavia during the 1950s, the U.S. clearly acknowledged the enormous strategic importance of Yugoslavia. However, nobody in Washington, D.C. had even remotely contemplated that Yugoslavia, hampered by its unfavorable strategic position and limited political, economic, and military resources, would initiate a daring foreign policy breakthrough in Burma, and, through Burma, in India, Indonesia, and Cambodia, which could influence U.S. policies in Southeast Asia. This was one of the earliest examples of how a minor power, conscious of its own strategic significance, could pursue a policy in another region, despite the wishes or intentions of a superpower. The kind of audacity Tito demonstrated would eventually serve as a popular role model for similar, but less considerate mavericks, in the developing world such as Sukarno, Nasser, Sihanouk, Nkrumah, and even Castro.

Even though the Eisenhower administration had decided to withdraw its support for the GMD troops in Burma independently, swift and largely unexpected Yugoslav military assistance foiled many political and military plans for the region previously proposed in either Washington, D.C. or Taipei. Authorities in Rangoon, emboldened by the modern Yugoslav weapons, launched a series of intrusions that seriously harmed the fighting ability of many nationalist units in Burma. After the 1954-55 offensives, although a certain number of GMD soldiers remained inside some remote areas in the Burmese countryside, their significance as a fighting force had been destroyed. U.S. and Taiwanese strategic planners were ultimately forced to exclude them from any future subversive actions in the Asia-Pacific region.

made by General Ne Win to get economic or even some military assistance during his visits to the U.S. and Great Britain. DASMIP, PA, 1956, f-10, 47908, *Telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in Burma*, May 12th 1956. On the other hand, Chinese officials also approached their Yugoslav colleagues in Beijing and explained them that Burma intentionally made such a fuss about the border issue with China in order to get new loans from the Americans. DASMIP, PA, 1956, f-47, 415773, *Ciphered telegram from the Yugoslav Embassy in China*, September 15th 1956.

Without Yugoslavia's emergency military aid the ability of the Burmese Army to carry out military action would have been limited. Earlier military action by *Tatmadaw* had failed and few believed at that time that Rangoon had enough force to effectively tackle the problem of GMD troops on its territory. The unexpected Burmese offensive in 1954 compelled Taiwanese authorities to repatriate even larger numbers of soldiers and their families than previously agreed. Yugoslavia's active position in Burmese affairs had ultimately brought down a major CIA operation in Southeast Asia in the 1950s.

What did Yugoslavia hope to gain by forging political and military ties with Burma? Was partnership with Rangoon just a random choice or the result of a careful decision? Was Tito, by creating strong mutual bonds between nonaligned countries, just looking for an opportunity to challenge the primacy of the great powers or did he hope to subvert the bipolar world order by establishing something that resembled a "third bloc?" While additional research is necessary, this case study of the Yugoslav-Burmese strategic partnership of the 1950s inside the framework of the early global Cold War and the emergence of the phenomenon of nonalignment, provides some preliminary answers.

As the above discussion suggests, Burma was not a random choice for the Yugoslav leadership, but a major component of a new foreign policy line that had been evolving in Belgrade ever since 1952. Together with India, a de facto great power among neutral countries and a birth place of the principles of co-existence, Burma became a primary target of Yugoslavia's search for an independent role on the global stage. Even as Belgrade was taking the role of a revolutionary proxy in the late 1940s, countries in Southeast Asia were recognized as a bulwark of the new world that was gradually filling in the gap existing between two dominating blocs. Ostracized from the East as a heretical or pressured from the West for political concessions, the developing world was unmistakably recognized by Tito as a field in which he could fundamentally redefine the position of Yugoslavia inside the deeply divided Cold War system. Burma, therefore, constituted one of the most important stepping stones on this road to the paramount position of the undeniable leader of the nonaligned nations.

Initially Belgrade desired to claim a new position in international affairs by forging a comprehensive alliance with India. However, many politicians in New Delhi did not share Yugoslavia's enthusiasm for the direct linkage between European and Asian issues into a common nexus. Acting from New Dehli, Yugoslav diplomats discovered another country which

shared many similar historical, political, and economic problems with their country. Yugoslav foreign policy had concluded that any strengthening of its influence inside Burma would ultimately have far-reaching consequences not only for the position of Belgrade in Asian affairs, but also on its general standing in international relations. After Belgrade laid the foundations of the Yugoslav-Burmese strategic partnership, major Asian countries initiated, independently, serious foreign policy discussions with Yugoslavia. Tito's stature in the global context was thus recognized. The superpowers also discovered, through Yugoslavia's actions, that countries like Burma could represent crucial pieces of the strategic jigsaw puzzle that ultimately covered the Third World.

The unexpected success of the bilateral Yugoslav-Burmese political and military cooperation was founded on the fact that for both countries, exchanges never represented a danger to their independence or sovereignty. Since both Belgrade and Rangoon were subjected to constant pressures from the blocs they respectively faced on their borders, ties between Yugoslavia and Burma were largely viewed as a "safety valve" for certain issues that could be successfully resolved through consultations or direct assistance. Burma also proved itself as a successful testing ground for the ideological influence Yugoslavia had attempted to exert among the developing nations. Belgrade's ideological projections were considered solid proof of political independence from both blocs, a possible role model to many rising nations, and an integral part of the sustainable world role sought by Tito and his comrades.

The global implications of Yugoslav nonaligned policies are complex in their own right. Tito never pursued a policy of setting up a "third bloc," the global structure that would eventually encompass many of the nonaligned and developing countries. Tito, like Nehru, always disavowed any intention of creating such an enterprise. Unlike India, however, Yugoslavia never had the relative great power status that New Delhi had been accorded, or any firm security guarantees from the superpower blocs. The way out was to be active and present in world affairs, have numerous international links, and eventually become something like a global mediator in matters of peace, security, and development.

Tito was a revolutionary who, under duress, became a *realist* statesman. He was well aware that the nuances of the superpower confrontation and the intricacies of the world order they represented offered grand opportunities for the Third World to establish itself as an area

where the views of the superpowers could be moderated and the suspicions of the nonaligned allayed.²³¹

Unlike Mao, who viewed the developing world as the “intermediate zone” where the ultimate showdown between imperialism and communism (led by China) would take place--a staging ground for the charge of the world’s deprived against the bastions of capitalism--for Tito the only way this “gray zone” of international politics could survive the calamities of the Cold War conflict and gain corresponding advantages from that system was to assume a balancing posture in world affairs.²³² In order to achieve these goals, this group needed strong leadership and some structural mechanisms for the definition and discussion of certain fundamental principles of their global involvement.

Eventually, as Tito persuasively embraced the idea of the Five Principles in 1954, he consciously transformed them into a new doctrine for the developing world that he personally labeled as “active co-existence.” He thought that the causes of peace, security, cooperation, and economic progress had to be achieved, not by just sitting idly between the blocs and avoiding all confrontations, but by engaging the superpowers through creating mechanisms of international cooperation that could compel both superpower blocs to cope more seriously with the problems of the developing world. This leverage could then disturb the sensitive balance of power that existed between Moscow and Washington in the Third World. This was Tito’s comprehension of the Nonaligned Movement’s international role. The military relationship with Burma closely followed this kind of pattern of foreign policy conduct.

²³¹ During his talks with Ne Win in 1959, Tito explained what kind of position nonaligned states should take in world affairs: “We think that it is correct that these countries maintain good relations with both the East and the West. Orientation toward only one side could be harmful. In our own interest, it is best to preserve certain balance in these relations. . . It is important for us to be fully aware what are their [superpowers] true aims and not to let them succeed in their intentions.” AJBT, KPR, I-2/11-3, *Zabeleska o jugoslovensko-burmanskim razgovorima 9 januara 1959 godine u Rangunuu*, pp. 8-9.

²³² For more on Mao Zedong’s foreign policy theory and the role of the developing countries see Ye Zicheng, *Xin Zhongguo waijiao sixiang: cong Mao Zedong dao Deng Xiaoping* [Foreign Policy Thought of New China: From Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2001), pp. 128-138.

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