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John L. Christian

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landing fields have been made unusable for planes. They are even protected against parachute troops by sharpened bamboo poles stuck into the ground.

The longer the Dutch defenders are able to delay a Japanese attack on Java, the better are the chances of beating the aggressors off, because delay will give

the United Nations time to bring more planes, naval forces, tanks, and troops into Java.

It is quite possible that Java will become one of the starting points of operations designed to dislocate the Japanese from those areas in southeast Asia that have fallen into their hands since December 7, 1941.

Burma: Strategic and Political

By JOHN L. CHRISTIAN

FOR more than a century after the first annexation of Burmese territory by Britain in 1824, the "land of pagodas" was regarded as the Cinderella of the India Empire, useful principally as a supplier of rice, oil, teak, and lucrative appointments in the various Imperial Services. Burma vegetated under the *Pax Britannica* in her quiet backwater on the eastern shore of the Bay of Bengal, a sort of arcadian land well removed from the alarms and excursions of war. Protected in her coastal district by Britain's undisputed supremacy in the Indian Ocean and on her northern and eastern land frontiers by malarious and inaccessible hill tracts, the country was described by Sir George White as "...one vast military obstacle."

Burma in Transition

Due to long association (1824-1937) with India as a province in the old British Indian Empire, Burma was regarded erroneously by the western world as Indian in character. Spiritually, the Burmese cling to Buddhism, the Indian religion that has almost disappeared from the land of its birth. Ethnologically, they are the first Mongolians encountered in an eastward journey along Asia's southern coast. Politically, the country cut its ties with India in April 1937, and subsequently has enjoyed economic development and a political status described by Sir Arthur Page, former Chief Justice of Burma, as having "all the powers of self-government except the title."

But Burma was not long to enjoy a period of peace in her transition from authoritarian to representative government. Three months after Burma's separation from India the Sino-Japanese war broke out and by the end of 1938 the country found itself the focus of considerable attention in the world press as a result of the construction of the Burma Road. During the century 1830-1930 official and commercial interests made numerous efforts to develop a trans-Burma trade with western China. Despite a brief spurt during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, only casual frontier trade resulted from the completion of the Lashio Branch of the Burma Railways in 1911 and the estab-

lishment of efficient steamer service on 1,000 miles of the mighty Irrawaddy from Rangoon to Bhamo, 40 miles from the Chinese frontier. In 1936, the last year of normal Sino-Burmese trade, the total value of merchandise passing through Bhamo to China was only Rs. 96,000 (U.S. \$32,000).

During October and November 1941, new interest was focussed upon Burma by the visit to London and Washington of U Saw,¹ Premier of Burma. The Premier was accompanied by U Tin Tut, the first Burman admitted (in 1920) to the sacrosanct Indian Civil Service and who has recently held various important official posts, including that of Vice-Chancellor of Rangoon University. U Saw was reported in the press as having been disappointed in his efforts to have Prime Minister Churchill implement the Atlantic Charter by supporting Burma's desire for full and immediate dominion status.

U Saw's Disappointment

U Saw commented upon leaving London for Washington early in November 1941: "The discussions with Prime Minister Churchill have not fulfilled the high hopes of my countrymen, but I leave your shores with no bitterness." The Prime Minister of Burma spent about a month in the United States, somewhat longer than he had expected due to the attack upon Pearl Harbor on December 7 and the return to San Francisco of the trans-Pacific Clipper on which he had taken passage. In his final interview with the American press before his departure for Burma via Canada and Australia (as reported in the *New York Times* of December 29, 1941), U Saw again indicated disappointment over his failure to secure immediate and complete dominion status for Burma, but he stated that he was "still hopeful."

Meantime came Prime Minister Churchill's statement that the famed third article of the Atlantic Charter governing the future of states and nations under the Nazi yoke does not apply to "regions the

¹ This article was written before news was received of U Saw's arrest. Possible reasons for his flirtations with the Japanese will be discussed in the next issue of the *Far Eastern Survey*.

people of which owe allegiance to the British Crown." And that is the most recent word on the probable future course of constitutional development in Burma. The Japanese attack upon southeast Asia struck immediately thereafter and both air and overland attacks against the cities and territory of Burma followed in swift succession.

Burma's Political Structure

Brief description of Burma's present political structure may perhaps dispel the current impression that the country is a Crown Colony. Actually, Burma has advanced further than India, its former partner, along the path of representative government. Although the Governor of Burma, at present Sir Hugh Dorman-Smith, is easily the most important single factor in the government of Burma under war conditions, the Constitutional plan under which Burma has operated since 1937 transfers to the Burmese Premier and his cabinet very extensive powers of government. Under the Instrument of Instruction, issued anew to each governor, that executive's powers are so limited that in practice Burmese Ministers have effective control over almost the entire internal administration. The Ministers actually exercise executive authority. Although the Government of Burma Act states that all executive action shall be in the governor's name, it is the Ministers who actually exercise this power. Thus all orders are issued in the form that "The governor is pleased to direct . . ." but this is a matter of form only as the Ministers issue the orders; the governor himself may be, and usually is, quite unaware of the context in ordinary matters.

In short, the actual authority rests with the Premier and seven other cabinet ministers whose continuance in office is dependent upon support by the House of Representatives of 132 members. The usual features of British parliamentary government are operative in Burma, with a Senate of 36 members acting as an upper house of limited powers. The governor's extraordinary powers are restricted in the main to the army, foreign affairs, and the control of the backward hill tracts that surround Burma proper. He does have, it is true, power to veto bills, but he has never yet exercised this power. Likewise, he has power to "certify" a bill that has been rejected by the legislature or to "promulgate" a governor's act without consulting the legislature, but the first power has been exercised only twice, while the power to "promulgate" has not once been used. Thus even during the present war the Burmans' fear that the emergency would result in curtailment of legislative functions and expansion of the executive power has not materialized.

It should be mentioned that the preservation of law and order and the control of the police are responsibilities of the legislature and are under direction of

Burmese ministers. During 1938-41 there was definitely less censorship of the press, more personal freedom, and less evidence of the police in a Burma at war than in neighboring "neutral" Thailand. For example, not until June 1940 was a ban issued prohibiting the broadcasting at public gatherings of propaganda or news bulletins from German or Italian radio stations, and then the communiqué stated that there were no strictures upon private reception of German or Italian broadcasts.

There were persistent reports during November and early December 1941 that Japan contemplated an attack upon the Burma Road either through Thailand or across the 130-mile stretch where the frontier of Burma marches with that of occupied French Indo-China. Therefore, some examination of the strategic area about Burma and the measures for its defense is indicated, particularly in view of Japan's sudden thrust through Thailand in December.

Communications in Burma

First, there is no railway nor modern highway in French Indo-China or Thailand within 300 miles of any point on the Burma Road. The intervening country is one of the least known and most malarious areas in all Asia, utterly impassible to any mechanized equipment in force. In brief, the Burma Road cannot be blitzkrieged, least of all by an attempt to reach in overland through Thailand or Burma. Conditions are little better on the Chinese side. A recent official Chinese report of the area between Burma and the French Yunnan Railway complained that ". . . human carriers and pack animals are the only available means of transportation . . ."

One of the first points attacked in the Japanese invasion of the Malay Peninsula was Victoria Point at the extreme southern tip of Burma. This outpost, entirely without railway or highway connection with the remainder of Burma or with Siam or British Malaya, is of value because of its radio station and secondary airport of the Imperial Railways. It lies at the Burma outlet of the proposed Kra Canal, in which Japan has been interested for decades and which was discussed in the *Japan Chronicle* of November 10, 1941.

Mere occupation of this site and attacks upon other parts of the Tenasserim district of Burma could not "cut" communication between Burma and Singapore as has been reported in the press on this side. There has never been land communication between Singapore and Rangoon, both cargo and passengers going by sea only. Japanese occupation of Penang is quite another matter, and Japanese vessels in the Indian Ocean or occupation of the Nicobars or the Andamans would be a most serious threat to Singapore and Rangoon, as well as to Calcutta, Madras, and Colombo.

At the end of November 1941, the government

of Burma announced the organization of 300 air observation stations stretching from Tenasserim and Burma's Arakan coast on the Bay of Bengal to her long northern and eastern frontiers that march with those of China, Indo-China, and Thailand. Twenty-four of these stations are within a 50-mile radius of Rangoon and presumably went into action during the first week of war with Japan. Rangoon had two air raids in force within ten days of war; there was an attack by more than 100 planes on Christmas Day, and there have been numerous sporadic attacks on other parts of Burma. British and American volunteer airmen of the international air patrol defending the Burma Road parried these attacks.

British on the Offensive

The British in Burma carried the fight to the enemy by destroying early in January the Thai airport at Raheng, less than 200 air miles from Rangoon, and on January 7 announced damaging attacks upon military objectives, including the airport, in Bangkok. Indeed, during the first ten days of January there were three punishing raids upon Siam's old capital and additional raids upon Mehsod and Rahang in an effort to destroy these Thai airports within easy reach of Rangoon. American pilots participated in these raids which destroyed numbers of Japanese planes and large quantities of petrol.

Japan's initial successes did not necessarily presage continued easy progress in the direction of Rangoon. The only highway from Thailand to Burma is a dry-season road leading north from Chiangmai and Chiangrai in Thailand to Kengtung in the Southern Shan States of Burma and thence by an old military cart road to Taunggyi, the administrative and military center of the Shan States more than 400 miles from Rangoon. The total distance from Bangkok to Rangoon by this route is some 1,300 miles. Incidentally, many Europeans and Americans escaped from Thailand by this route when Japan moved in. There is no bridge over the Salween, which is crossed by a native ferry at Takaw between Kengtung and Taunggyi.

In addition to her inaccessibility, Burma's climate is a formidable obstacle to overland invasion. The entire length of the Thailand frontier is poisonously malarious everywhere below 4,000 feet. Moreover the mountainous areas that separate the two states are subject to torrential rainfall during the monsoon season, *i.e.*, from May to October, with rainfall of 200 inches in much of this region of thick jungle, dirt roads, and cart tracks. An extensive campaign involving use of mechanized equipment is unthinkable during the rains.

What defense, other than natural, does Burma have? Although recent detailed information is lacking, it is known that there were in 1939 only 5,374 troops in

the entire country. Of these 1,807 were Europeans and 3,517 were Asiatics of the Indian Army. These troops are in addition to the 12,000 officers and men of Military Police and the Burma Frontier Service. Since the outbreak of the European war, these troops have been repeatedly and considerably reinforced with seasoned European and Indian units. It was announced in November 1941 that the Burma Frontier Force and the Military Police, formerly under control of the Governor and the legislature respectively, were incorporated in the force of the Major-General Commanding in Burma as a part of the imperial army under Sir Robert Brooke-Popham of Singapore (since replaced by General Sir Henry Royds Pownall). Now the Burma Army, having been from April to December 1941 under the command of Singapore, has been returned to the India Command of which it had been continuously a part since 1824.

Burma's Land and Air Forces

Military forces in Burma are believed to be of a type particularly suited to the terrain and climate of the country. Including recent reinforcements, Burma has a land force of not less than 50,000 men of all arms. The air force is equipped with Brewster-Buffalo fighters and numerous bombers of the R.A.F. At Mingaladon, ten miles east of Rangoon, Burma has the largest airport in the entire Orient. In addition, there are numerous civilian and military airports in other parts of Burma, including suitable waters for seaplanes. The huge flying boats of the British Overseas Airways anchor in the Rangoon River, and the great Irrawaddy provides safe landing for flying boats through the center of Burma proper as far as Bhamo, less than 40 miles from the Chinese frontier.

Service in the armed forces in Burma is entirely voluntary for the Burmese; there is no conscription. European British subjects of military age were registered at the beginning of the war and placed in appropriate services as needed. The Burman traditionally has little adaptability for the disciplines of military life (the personnel of the Military Police and the Frontier Force was largely Gurkha from Nepal as Burmans would not enlist), but now that the Japanese have been joined by Thai troops the Burmese may be counted upon to join up in resisting their ancient foes. Many Burmans are winning commissions as reserve officers in the army in Burma, in which promotion now is only from the ranks. After some delay a Burma volunteer air unit and a naval volunteer reserve force were organized. A majority of the officers in the latter force are natives of Burma.

Rangoon dockyards have completed five naval vessels for coastal patrol and mine sweeping. Workshops of the state-owned Burma Railways and of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company are entirely capable of turn-

ing out large numbers of artillery shells, as they did in the first World War.

Burma has had its internal difficulties during the decade just ended; for example, there has been evidence of the development of a Nazi complex among Burmese extremists. On several occasions nationalist leaders have in public or private expressed admiration for the Hitlerian system, probably with only a vague understanding of the aims and methods of totalitarianism. This manifestation sprang from anti-British sentiments. The Nazis are in conflict with the British: therefore the opponents of British power in Burma professed in some instances to be Nazis. Shortly after the beginning of the war, an Anglo-Burman was arrested for possessing numerous swastika flags and pictures of Hitler.

Internal Politics

During the decade 1925-35 there was considerable admiration of the Soviet system for similar reasons, and some Burmese nationalists claimed to be Communists. Several Wunthanu (nationalist) organizations had photographs taken with the hammer and sickle flag as a background, although it is doubtful that a single Burman has ever visited Russia or knows the Russian language or has a competent knowledge of Soviet political philosophy. During 1940 and 1941 communism was replaced by totalitarianism as a rallying ground for the intellectuals and theorists among the anti-British elements. It should be added that neither totalitarianism nor communism has ever been a basic motivating factor among any appreciable number of the few Burmese who have political consciousness.

Current Burmese politics are connected intimately with, and complicated by, the entire imperial scene in southeast Asia. Burmans have been hitherto extremely provincial and naive, a situation well illustrated by the quaint suggestion made by Dr. Ba Maw, predecessor of U Saw as Prime Minister of Burma, as to Burma's course in the event of a German victory. Ba Maw proposed that the Nazis be requested to give "home rule" to Burma and that, if Hitler refused, Burmans "would then demand that the Germans return home"—a proposal widely approved by Burmese nationalists as a workable alternative for the prospect of Nazi domination. Unfortunately, no such idealistic solution is possible for political problems, even in arcadian Burma.

Although the western powers owning territory in southeast Asia have long since abandoned plans for further conquests, they are confronted with two important problems in the area: first, according some recognition to the nationalistic aspirations of colonial peoples in the region and, second, protection of European interests from expansionist aims of indigenous Far Eastern states, *i.e.*, Japan and Siam. These two

problems present two additional complexities, particularly in Burma and India. First, provision of suitable measures of defense for teeming populations—mostly agricultural and pacific in outlook—against aggression from their mechanized fellow-Orientals, the Japanese. Second, the unwillingness of important minorities to submit to majority rule, a reluctance which immensely complicates all advances in self-government in Burma. It is quite true that minorities in Burma are potentially less formidable than in India, but it is by no means certain that such will always be the case. Karen, Chin, Kachin, Shan, and other minority groups in Burma account for one-third of Burma's 15 million people. Politically most important may be the two million Indians and the hundreds of thousands of Chinese. In many cases the only political concept of the more primitive hill tribesmen is one of antipathy for the 10 million Burmans who now wield political power.

Curiously enough, the power of the Burmese majority is upheld by civil and military police which are recruited almost entirely from Indians, Gurkhas, Karens and the tribesmen of upper Burma. That is, the ultimate sanction of the civil government of the Burmese majority rests upon a police and military force composed of representatives of the minority groups. Efforts to persuade Burmans to volunteer for the services have been only slightly successful. For example, during the 1914-18 war, sundry military units were recruited in Burma, but only Kachin, Karen, and Chin units were retained to the end of the hostilities; the Burmese units could not be kept up to strength by voluntary enlistment and were abandoned.

British Reservations on Independence

Therefore, the question arises: Could the majority party, composed almost entirely of Burmans, maintain internal peace and a measure of security against external aggression if the protecting hand of the British were withdrawn? U Saw's demands for complete independence for Burma at some fixed date were refused by L. S. Amery, British Secretary of State for India and Burma. He reasoned that it was impossible to forecast postwar conditions, including the growth of internal confidence and political capacity in Burma to the point where the five million minority in Burma would entrust themselves to the rule of the Burmese majority.

Burma's relations with neighboring Thailand have presented a difficult problem, particularly since November 1941. For a century prior to that time relations between the two countries had been cordial, thanks to the *Pax Britannica* which had ended the quarrels of the ancient rivals. For the past year there has been suspicion in Rangoon and London that Bangkok's relations with Tokyo had gone somewhat beyond

proper limits, that there was actual collusion against French Indo-China, and that possible joint action was planned against Burma and British Malaya. Recent discoveries of petrol dumps in Siam arranged at intervals along the line of Japanese advance toward Singapore have given credence to these suspicions and led to retaliatory attacks against Thai cities, airports, and communications during January 1942. It was noted that Thailand offered scarcely token resistance to the Japanese advance.

Thailand Complicates the Problem

Thailand, with a population equal to that of Yugoslavia, has a not negligible army and air force, and her neighbors have long been aware of rising Thai irredentist sentiment. Moreover, the Japanese attack upon Kuomintang China, whose spokesmen have repeatedly proposed the entry of Burma and Siam into a federal union with China, was regarded as extremely helpful to Thailand which for the past decade has taken energetic economic measures against its Chinese population. For these reasons it is certain that the appointment of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek as Allied commander in "such portions of Indo-China and Thailand as may be available to the United Nations" will arouse serious misgivings in Thailand, as it would in Burma. Imperial and Allied forces in Burma were, however, placed under Lieutenant-General Hutton, formerly Chief of Staff to General Sir Archibald Wavell, as a part of the army in India. General Hutton's force includes an undetermined number of Chinese troops (probably not less than 50,000) who passed through upper Burma and are believed to be deployed in the remote areas along the Thai frontier.

Tokyo radio news during December 1941 circulated patently inaccurate reports of an invasion of northern Thailand from Burma, and alleged that Chinese, British, and Burmese troops (there are no Burmese troops) had reached Chiengrai, 40 miles inside Thailand from Burma. British sources promptly denied any invasion from Burma or fighting anywhere between Thai troops and Empire forces based upon Burma.

At the moment, Burma's great value to the democratic powers lies in its unequaled position as a base from which to launch a flank attack upon the Japanese in Thailand and Malaysia. Rangoon, with the largest airport in the entire Orient, is less than 400 miles by air from Don Muang, Bangkok's modern airport, and is thus well positioned for air strafing of Japanese communication lines to the Malayan front. Moreover, Rangoon has the advantage of ample supplies of aviation petrol refined in the great Syriam works of the Burma Oil Company. In addition, Burma's seaports front on the Indian Ocean and thus are invaluable

as a supply route to China and the front which must eventually be used to destroy Japan's land forces.

That the Allies have already recognized Burma's prime importance is evidenced by the presence of an Allied air force in Rangoon, at stations along the Burma railways, and north over the course of the Burma Road. These forces already have made bombing by Japanese planes so costly to Nippon that by mid-January mass attacks upon Burma were abandoned. There are numerous American commissions and investigators in the Burma area: the Haas Medical Commission to the Yunnan-Burma Railway, Daniel Arnstein, John H. Hall, an American oil company engineer who recommended a 700-mile oil pipe line for the Burma Road, Madison Hall, Baltimore engineer whose report resulted in sending 10,000 tons of lend-lease asphalt for the Burma Road, some 250 American pilots and mechanics for the Burma Road air force, and selected motor transport technicians for the highway itself. There is already a joint Sino-British commission at work on problems arising from the Burma Road, and China has indicated her desire to turn over the entire management of the road to an international body, preferably one headed by an American.

These facts indicate increased awareness of the vital importance of the Burma route and the potential Burma front. In short, Burma is certain to become a vital eastern salient of the democracies and possibly an area of great international activity.

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