

# Trouble in the Golden Triangle: The United States, Taiwan and the 93rd Nationalist Division

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Beginning in 1949, several thousand Chinese Nationalist<sup>1</sup> soldiers fled from mainland China into the so-called “Golden Triangle” of South-East Asia, made up of the northern parts of Burma, Thailand, Laos and Indo-China. At first, the United States saw these “irregulars” as a useful force in the containment of communism and provided support to them. But by 1953, Washington had come to consider them a threat to that very same policy. Removing them, however, was no easy task, largely because of the attitude of Taiwan’s leader, Chiang Kai-shek, who hoped to use them in his plans to return to the mainland. In 1953, and again in 1961, Washington had to use intense pressure to get Chiang to agree to the repatriation of the irregulars. By the time of the second withdrawal, American credibility, U.S.-Burmese relations and the entire containment programme had suffered serious harm.

## *Operation Paper*

The story of the Nationalist irregulars began at the end of 1949. As the Communists completed their conquest of the mainland, small groups of Nationalist (or Kuomintang, KMT) troops beginning in December entered both Indo-China and Burma from China’s Yunnan province. Those who entered Indo-China were quickly disarmed and interned by the French. The Nationalists who entered Burma settled near the village of Tachilek, in Kengtung state, which borders Thailand.<sup>2</sup> They joined up with remnants of the Chinese army that had fought the Japanese during the Second World War and had stayed in Burma after the war.<sup>3</sup> By March 1950, there were approximately 1,500 KMT troops in the area. These forces included remnants of the 93rd Division and the 26th and 8th Armies, the last led by General Li Mi.<sup>4</sup> All of them were placed under the command of General Li<sup>5</sup> and became known to foreign observers as the 93rd Division.

The Burmese had a more difficult time than the French in dealing with the irregulars. Burma’s prime minister, U Nu, ordered the irregulars to leave Burma or surrender. Li refused. Accordingly, Nu had his army

1. Although these forces over time included non-Chinese recruits, for purposes of simplicity I shall use the terms “Nationalists,” “KMT” or “irregulars” to refer to them.

2. Kenneth Ray Young, “Nationalist Chinese troops in Burma – obstacle in Burma’s foreign relations: 1949–1961,” unpublished dissertation (New York: New York University, 1970), pp. 50–51.

3. Letter, Nu to Eisenhower, 12 September 1953. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter cited as *FRUS*), 1952–54, Vol. XII, p. 135.

4. Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991), p. 163.

5. Maung Maung, *Grim War against KMT* (Rangoon: Nu Yin Press, 1953), p. 7.

attack the Nationalists, the latter of whom fled Tachilek for Mong Hsat. Already facing four other insurgencies, including two communist guerilla movements, the Burmese military was not strong enough to pursue the irregulars.<sup>6</sup>

For the United States, Li's men offered opportunities. To lose Indo-China, Thailand and Burma to communism, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and National Security Council warned during 1950 and 1951, "would place Japan in a dangerously vulnerable position and therefore seriously affect the entire security position of the United States in the Pacific." Moreover, it "would alleviate considerably the food problem of China and make available to the USSR considerable quantities of strategically important materials." When asked to provide suggestions as to how to combat the communist threat to the region, the JCS in April 1950 issued a series of recommendations, including a programme of covert assistance to local anti-communist forces. This proposal received additional stimulus following the Korean War and especially after Communist China entered that conflict. Shortly after the People's Republic's (PRC's) intervention, the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA's) Office of Policy Co-ordination (OPC) proposed a programme to divert the PRC's military from the Korean peninsula. The plan called for U.S. aid to the 93rd, followed by an invasion of Yunnan by Li's men. Interestingly, the CIA's director, Walter Bedell Smith, opposed the plan, considering it too risky. But President Harry S. Truman saw merit in the OPC's proposal and approved it. The programme became known as Operation Paper.<sup>7</sup>

For Operation Paper to work, Thailand's help was needed. The OPC wanted to use Thailand not only as a stopping point for supply operations into Burma, but also to provide diplomatic cover: in the case of discovery, OPC or other U.S. officials could disassociate the United States from the KMT's activities. Thai prime minister Plaek Phibunsongkhram – often referred to as "Phibun" – agreed to help: not only was there a long history of Thai–Burmese animosity, but assisting the operation would please Washington, which was giving economic and military aid to Bangkok.<sup>8</sup>

Operation Paper got under way in early 1951. Using planes provided by General Claire Chennault's company, Civil Air Transport (CAT), and working through two dummy companies – the Far East Film Company and the Southeast Asia Defense Supplies Corporation – the OPC directed the shipment of arms and supplies from Taiwan to Thailand. From Thailand, the planes flew over Mong Hsat and dropped supplies. Thai

6. *Ibid.* pp. 8–9; McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, pp. 163, 165; "Burma," *Time*, No. 61 (13 April 1953), p. 38.

7. Memorandum, Bradley to Secretary of Defense, 10 April 1950 and Annex to NSC 48/3, "United States objectives, policies, and courses of action in Asia," 2 May 1951. President's Secretary's File, National Security File (hereafter cited as NSF) – Meetings, Box 212, Harry S. Truman Library (hereafter cited as HSTL), Independence, Missouri. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, pp. 165–66; Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947–1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), p. 137.

8. Fineman, *A Special Relationship*, pp. 137–39.

authorities assisted the operation in other ways: for instance, the commander of the Thai police, General Phao Siyanon, arranged for a major police exercise in northern Thailand to provide cover for the operation. Meanwhile, through recruiting and the arrival of additional refugees from Yunnan, by April 1951 Li had over 4,000 men under his command.<sup>9</sup>

In May and again in June 1951, Li's troops invaded Yunnan province. Each time, the PRC army counterattacked and drove the Nationalists back into Burma with heavy losses. But rather than stop Paper, the CIA redoubled its efforts. American engineers helped the KMT build a large airstrip at Mong Hsat, thereby allowing transport planes to bring more supplies to the Nationalists. CAT also brought with it at least 700 regular KMT troops to Burma to reinforce Li's men, and, on the way out of Mong Hsat, transported opium, which the Nationalists had begun to cultivate as a way to make money.<sup>10</sup>

The State Department early on sought to eliminate the problems posed by the irregulars. As early as June 1950, Burma had asked the United States to put pressure on Taiwan to withdraw Li's forces.<sup>11</sup> Although U.S. diplomatic officers approached Nationalist representatives, they found little co-operation. For instance, Taiwan's foreign minister, George Yeh, told the American chargé in Taipei, Robert Strong, that he opposed asking the irregulars to lay down their arms. Strong noted, "there are doubtless internal reasons here for [Yeh's] attitude."<sup>12</sup> One of them was Chiang Kai-shek's desire to return to the mainland. For Chiang, Li and his men could help him achieve that goal.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that the State Department was trying to remove a force to which Truman had approved giving support is strong evidence that Foreign Service officers had no knowledge of Paper. Indeed, when he approved the operation, Truman reportedly ordered that senior U.S. diplomatic officials not receive information on it, including the American ambassador in Rangoon, David Key.<sup>14</sup> Hence, when in late April 1951 the British ambassador to Burma, Richard Speaight, told Key that the Nationalists were not only receiving assistance through Thailand, but that

9. *Ibid.* p. 140–41; Young, "Nationalist Chinese troops in Burma," pp. 52–53. For more on CAT's involvement with Li Mi, see William M. Leary, *Perilous Missions: Civil Air Transport and CIA Covert Operations in Asia* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1984), pp. 129–132; Bertil Linter, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency Since 1949* (Boulder: Westview, 1994), p. 104.

10. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, pp. 169–170; Young, "Nationalist troops in Burma," p. 56; Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, pp. 108–109.

11. Position Paper, "KMT troops in Burma," 5 March 1953. RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Records of the Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Box 4, National Archives (hereafter cited as NA), College Park, Maryland.

12. Telegram, No. 242, Strong to Secretary of State, 11 August 1950. *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. VI, pp. 249–250.

13. Future Secretary of State Dean Rusk and the Prime Minister to Australia, R. Gordon Menzies, agreed at a February 1961 discussion that the irregulars were part of "Chiang Kai-shek's preoccupation with a return to the mainland." See Memorandum of Conversation, 24 February 1961. *FRUS*, 1961–63, Vol. XXII, p. 15.

14. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 166.

“several private American citizens were also involved,”<sup>15</sup> the State Department contended otherwise. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Livingston Merchant informed U.K. Assistant Under Secretary of State Robert Scott that “the United States government had no hand in giving assistance to these forces and were moreover taking effective steps to deal with any American freebooters who might be engaged in this traffic.”<sup>16</sup>

Whether Merchant’s superior, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, knew of Operation Paper is uncertain. Acheson was present at discussions regarding the use of covert operations against China.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, given his close personal relationship with Truman, it is highly likely that he had been informed of the programme. Yet since mid-1950, the secretary of state had been working to remove the irregulars.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, either Acheson knew of the operation and did not inform his subordinates, or he too did not have the entire picture.<sup>19</sup>

American diplomatic officials learned the truth at the end of 1951. In November, Geoffrey Wallinger, the British ambassador to Thailand, raised the question of the irregulars with Phibun. For reasons yet unclear, Phibun told all, explaining that he had been approached by a U.S. intelligence officer “and asked to provide certain facilities to support Li Mi.” When Wallinger expressed his disapproval, Phibun responded: “Why are you surprised? Aren’t you just as interested in killing Communists as I am, or as the Americans are?”<sup>20</sup> Furious that he had not been informed of American involvement with the irregulars, Key resigned his post.<sup>21</sup>

By the time of the Phibun–Wallinger conversation, the president had come to the conclusion that the irregulars had to be removed. It was not simply because Paper was no longer a secret. It was also because the Nationalists threatened the very same containment policy they were

15. Air Pouch, No. 751, Key to Bangkok and Taipei, 2 May 1951. RG 59, Department of State Decimal File, 1950–54, Box 2856, NA.

16. Memorandum of Conversation, 13 September 1951. FO 371/92067, Public Records Office, Kew, London. Similarly, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Dean Rusk told Key that there was, nor ever would be, “any official or unofficial U.S. [Government] connection whatsoever” with the irregulars. Telegram, No. 182, Rusk to Rangoon, 22 August 1951. *FRUS*, 1951, Vol. VI, pp. 289–290.

17. William O. Walker III, *Opium and Foreign Policy: The Anglo-American Search for Order in Asia, 1912–1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 203.

18. See n. 16. See also Telegrams, No. 182, Acheson to Rangoon, 22 August 1951 and No. 853, Acheson to New Delhi, 20 October 1951. *FRUS*, 1951, Vol. VI, p. 306.

19. This author was unable to turn up any evidence at the Truman Library, the National Archives or in the volumes of *FRUS* to determine whether in fact Acheson knew of the operation and, if so, at what point. William Walker argues that Acheson was informed of the operation and purposely misled U.S. foreign service officers abroad. (See Walker, *Opium and Foreign Policy*, p. 203.) Yet the evidence he uses to back his argument is dated from early 1952, after the U.S. Foreign Service had become aware of the U.S. role in Paper.

20. Fineman, *A Special Relationship*, pp. 141–42; Memorandum by Merchant, 28 November 1951. *FRUS*, 1951, Vol. VI, pp. 316–17.

21. Robert H. Taylor, *Foreign and Domestic Consequences of the KMT Intervention in Burma* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1973), p. 37. Key told the historian William Leary that he was misled because it “would make it easier for me to hide the truth!” See Leary, *Perilous Missions*, p. 247, n. 15.

previously seen as helping reinforce. First, the irregulars had failed to arouse anti-communist opposition in China and had fled back into Burma. Accordingly, there was the ever-present possibility that the PRC might invade Burma to eliminate them (a concern shared by the Burmese government). While the Truman administration doubted that the PRC would in fact invade Burma, it concluded that in the absence of action by the West, Beijing would need only about 50,000 troops and a period of two to three weeks to take control of northern Burma. While the United States gave Great Britain primary responsibility for providing Rangoon with economic and military aid,<sup>22</sup> London's ability to furnish additional help was limited by the weak British economy and Whitehall's military responsibilities elsewhere. France, tied down in Indo-China, also could be expected to provide little aid in the event of a Chinese communist attack. It would thus be up to the United States to choose between accepting the fall of all or part of Burma to communism or taking military action. The former course would punch a hole in the containment policy; the latter would increase already-serious concerns raised by the Korean War over how to spend more on defence without increasing budget deficits and taxes, cutting spending on social programmes, and "imposing regimental governmental controls."<sup>23</sup> American intervention would also mean opening a new military front that could lead to world war.

Secondly, during 1950 and into 1951, U Nu threatened to raise in the United Nations the problems posed by Li and his men.<sup>24</sup> The United States at first tried to dissuade the Nu government from turning to the UN. Washington had been trying to protect Taipei's seat in the international body, which was also claimed by Beijing. But the Truman administration soon changed its mind. Officials in Washington argued that to permit the PRC's admission to the UN would be tantamount to rewarding aggression and would enhance the prestige of the CCP government. Yet it made little sense to try to stop Beijing's admission on the grounds that it would reward aggression when Taiwan could be accused of committing aggression against both the PRC and Burma. Removal of the irregulars would remove this potential problem. Accordingly, Acting Secretary of State James Webb in August 1951 told Key that given "previous efforts made by us with

22. Memorandum, Hare to Rusk, 1 July 1950. *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. VI, pp. 244–45; Telegram, No. 917, Key to Secretary of State, 21 June 1951 and NIE-36, "Prospects for survival of a non-communist regime in Burma," 1 August 1951. *FRUS*, 1951, Vol. VI, pp. 273–74, 283–84; Memorandum, McGhee to Acheson, 25 January 1950. RG 59, Central Decimal File, 1950–54, Box 4135, NA.

23. Paul Pierpaoli, Jr., does an exceptional job of describing the fears in America that military spending might reach such levels as to force Americans to choose between budget deficits, cuts in spending and higher taxes, or the creation of a "garrison state." See Paul G. Pierpaoli, Jr., *Truman and Korea: The Political Culture of the Early Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

24. Telegrams, No. 79, Acheson to Taipei, 28 July 1950; No. 94, Key to Secretary of State, 15 August 1950; and No. 235, Key to Secretary of State, 29 August 1951; Memorandum of Conversation, 8 August 1951. *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. VI, pp. 246–47, 250–51, 286, 290–91; Memorandum of Conversation, 30 April 1951. RG 59, Department of State Decimal File, 1950–54, Box 2856, NA.

Taipei” to remove the irregulars, as well as Li’s foray into Yunnan the month before, the White House would no longer oppose such an effort.<sup>25</sup> Burma’s foreign minister, Sao Hkun Hkio, eventually convinced Nu not to take action in the UN, arguing that the Soviet Union would make “political capital” of such a decision.<sup>26</sup> But this did not mean that Rangoon had given up the possibility of turning to the international body for ever.

With Paper no longer secret, and with it clear that the irregulars were not an effective fighting force, the CIA began to cut aid to them, though it did not discontinue all assistance until mid-1953.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, the irregulars impressed 8,000 local tribesmen into their numbers, bringing up their strength to 12,000 soldiers. Using the dwindling American help and his strengthened force, Li in August 1952 launched one more attack on China. Once again, it ended in failure, and the irregulars returned to Burma.<sup>28</sup>

Rather than give up and go back to Taiwan, the Nationalists began to spread out across eastern Burma. They forced Burmese officials out of the region and began to administer the area, forming a state within a state. The irregulars married local tribeswomen, thereby reinforcing their control over the region. To make money, they took over the local opium trade. Often with the help of General Phao, opium would travel from Burma to Thailand, where it would be exchanged for supplies and weapons shipped to Thailand from Taiwan.<sup>29</sup>

### *First Withdrawal*

By the end of 1952, it had become clear to Washington that the irregulars were no longer an asset but a liability. Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs John Allison wrote in early January 1953, “The KMT troops in Burma were presumably regarded at one time as of potential value either as the nucleus of a guerrilla force which could move into and operate in China or as a bastion of defense against a southward advance of Communist Chinese into Southeast Asia. As events have turned out, there is no indication that these troops will ever move into China for guerrilla warfare against Communist forces or even return to their homes.”

25. Negotiating Paper on China for Truman–Churchill Meetings, 2 January 1952. Presidential Security file, General File, Box 116, HSTL; Telegram, No. 213, Webb to Rangoon, 31 August 1951. *FRUS*, 1951, Vol. VI, p. 292.

26. Telegrams, Nos. 252 and 300, Key to Secretary of State, 4 and 21 September 1951. *FRUS*, 1951, Vol. VI, p. 292, 295.

27. In fact, by the spring of 1953, the irregulars had brand new American weapons, “including 77mm recoilless cannon, which were highly mobile in jungle situations.” See Taylor, *Foreign and Domestic Consequences of the KMT Intervention in Burma*, p. 38.

28. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “John Foster Dulles and the Taiwan roots of the ‘two Chinas’ policy,” in Richard H. Immerman (ed.), *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 245; McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, pp. 170–72.

29. Position Paper, “KMT Troops in Burma,” 5 March 1953. RG 59, Records of the Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Box 4, NA; McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, pp. 172–73.

In fact, he continued, they were now a detriment to U.S. interests. Not only were they “of less military value to the free world as a support to regional defense than the regularly organized Burmese Army,” but the communist opposition in Burma had been using the presence of the irregulars against the U Nu government. Additionally, if Rangoon were to devote full attention to defeating the Nationalist forces, then it would reduce the pressure on the communist guerrilla movements in Burma. Given the situation, Allison recommended the development of a programme to return the irregulars to Taiwan.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, the new administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower wanted to remove the presence of the Nationalists. The problem was Chiang Kai-shek. Between January and March 1953 Eisenhower administration officials made repeated approaches to Taipei. The new secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, shared his predecessors’ concerns that Communist China might invade Burma; in short, he argued that the irregulars were now a danger to the security of South-East Asia. Furthermore, there were reports that the Burmese government, in an attempt to get rid of the irregulars, might form a coalition with the Burmese Communists. “Such [an] eventuality,” wrote the secretary of state, “would be [a] most serious and real setback [to the] efforts [of the] United States [to] persuade [the] Burmese Government [to] remain [on the] side [of the] free world.” Finally, Burma was again threatening to raise the issue in the United Nations. The Soviet Union, Dulles argued, might try to use a debate in the UN to manoeuvre Rangoon toward the communist bloc. He accordingly ordered the U.S. ambassador in Taipei, Karl Rankin, to get the Nationalist leader to order Li to leave Burma. If Chiang tried to postpone such an order, “you are to state that too much is at stake to permit such [a] delay.”<sup>31</sup> Rankin carried out his instructions, but found the KMT head of state unwilling to budge. Chiang told Rankin that to remove Li and his men, “would be painful, particularly because of [the] effect on [the] Yunnan people who look to Li Mi for eventual salvation.” It would also remove the barrier they posed to a communist takeover of Burma.<sup>32</sup> Dulles was irate. Perhaps, he told Rankin, the United States “should take [a] new look [at the] whole Chinese situation to determine whether or not its present policies toward Formosa are sound.”<sup>33</sup>

The Burmese people were also angered by Chiang’s procrastination

30. Memorandum, Allison to Bruce, 9 January 1953. *FRUS*, 1952–54, Vol. XII, pp. 42–47.

31. Telegrams, No. 524, Matthews to Taipei, 30 January 1953; Nos. 597 and 628, Dulles to Taipei, 19 and 27 February 1953; and No. 1423, Smith to Rangoon, 10 March 1953. *FRUS*, 1952–54, Vol. XII, pp. 48–49, 53 and 60.

32. For U.S. approaches to Taiwan, see Telegrams, No. 524, Matthews to Taipei; No. 597, Dulles to Taipei, 19 February 1953; No. 616, Dulles to Taipei, 24 February 1953; No. 889, Rankin to Department of State, 26 February 1953; No. 628, Dulles to Taipei, 27 February 1953; and No. 913, Rankin to Department of State, 4 March 1953. *FRUS*, 1952–54, Vol. XII, pp. 48–49, 53, 58–59, 60 (including n. 2), and 63 (including n. 3). For Taiwan’s responses, see Telegrams Nos. 878, 941, 956 and 988, Rankin to Department of State, 22 February, 9 March, 12 March and 21 March 1953. *FRUS*, 1952–54, Vol. XII, pp. 56–58, 65–67, 70–71, 79–80.

33. Telegram, No. 700, Dulles to Taipei, 13 March 1953. *FRUS*, 1952–54, Vol. XII, pp. 71–72.

and the continued troubles the irregulars were causing for their country. In early March 1953, Albert Franklin, the first secretary of the U.S. embassy in Rangoon, explained to W. Wendell Blancke, the officer in charge of Burmese Affairs at the State Department, that the people of Burma believed that “the KMT operation in Burma has all along been supported and supplied by the United States, directly, or through our acquiescence in Chinese and Thai assistance.”<sup>34</sup> Stories in the American press, such as a February 1952 newspaper column by Joseph and Stewart Alsop charging that the CIA was assisting the irregulars, only served to reinforce this belief.<sup>35</sup> It is thus not surprising that Burmese Defence Minister U Ba Swe charged: “No amount of denial from the Americans [would] make the Burmese people believe that the KMTs in Burma ... could grow in strength and power without the connivance and the support of the American military authorities.”<sup>36</sup> U Nu himself continued to worry that if he did not do something, China might invade Burma, or he might find himself forced out of office.<sup>37</sup>

At the end of March, Nu decided to act. First, in protest against what he saw as half-hearted American efforts to remove the irregulars, he ended an Economic Co-operation Agreement between his country and the United States.<sup>38</sup> Secondly, he took Burma’s case to the United Nations. Although he had threatened to take such action in 1951, this time he refused to back down. Blancke explained that Nu reached the conclusion that not raising the issue in the UN would give the Communists in Burma “a still more favourable climate” for the creation of a coalition government. “Another reason for the decision to air the question in the UN,” he continued, “was the fear that Communist China might otherwise charge Burma, as a member of the UN, with conniving with the Chinese Nationalist Government against the [PRC].” The State Department considered approaching Rangoon to get it to delay its decision, but decided that doing so would only serve to anger the Burmese government.<sup>39</sup>

By 31 March, the day that the United Nations began to debate the Burmese resolution, Chiang – who had been warned by Rankin that failure to act might affect U.S. aid to Taiwan – finally gave in to the American pressure, agreeing to see the removal of as many of Li’s men as possible.<sup>40</sup> Despite Chiang’s acquiescence, the United Nations still

34. Letter, Franklin to Blancke, 3 March 1953. RG 59, Records of the Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Box 4, NA.

35. Telegram, No. 1525, Sebald to Department of State, 13 February 1953. *FRUS*, 1952–54, Vol. XII, p. 52.

36. Quoted in Young, “Nationalist Chinese troops in Burma,” p. 87.

37. Telegram, No. 1620, Sebald to Department of State, 26 February 1953. *FRUS*, 1952–54, Vol. XII, p. 60, n. 3; Position Paper, “KMT Troops in Burma”; Memorandum, Blancke to Rood, 27 March 1953. RG 59, Records of the Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Box 4, NA.

38. Telegram, No. 1773, Sebald to Department of State, 17 March 1953. *FRUS*, 1952–54, Vol. XII, p. 74, n. 2.

39. Memorandum, Blancke to Rood, 27 March 1953. RG 59, Records of the Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Box 4, NA.

40. Telegrams, Nos. 988 and 1013, Rankin to Department of State, 21 and 27 March 1953. *FRUS*, 1952–54, Vol. XII, pp. 79 and 85, n. 2.

debated the issue, passing in April 1953 a resolution which condemned the activities of Taiwan and the irregulars; called upon all nations "to refrain from furnishing any assistance to these forces"; and proposed ways to remove Li and his men.<sup>41</sup>

Following the passage of the UN resolution, a four-nation committee made up of American, Burmese, Taiwanese and Thai representatives was established to remove the irregulars.<sup>42</sup> In June, the committee agreed that Burma should cease an ongoing offensive against Li's troops. The Nationalists would then travel from Burma to Thailand and from there would return to Taiwan.<sup>43</sup> Yet Chiang continued to pose a problem, as he would not order Li to withdraw from Burma. Repeating the argument made by the Truman administration, Walter Bedell Smith, now under secretary of state, warned the Nationalist leader that if he did not order Li out of Burma, it could undermine American efforts to protect Taiwan's seat in the United Nations.<sup>44</sup>

Chiang's reluctance to order Li Mi to evacuate Burma angered the Nu government. Acting Foreign Minister U Kyaw Nyein argued in September that Taiwan had no intention of repatriating the irregulars.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, Taiwan would not accept a 17 September Burmese demand that no fewer than 5,000 irregulars leave Burma within 35 days of the signing of a repatriation agreement, estimating instead that about 2,000 would be prepared to return home. In protest, Burma withdrew from the four-nation repatriation committee.<sup>46</sup>

Taiwan was not totally at fault for the difficulties in removing the irregulars. The Nationalist government argued, correctly, that not all of the KMT forces in Burma would agree to return home. Some had been recruited locally and did not want to leave their homeland. Others now had families and wanted to remain with them. Finally, some irregulars were making profits from the local opium trade and thus sought to stay in the region.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the Burmese government, believing that Chiang would not uphold any repatriation agreement, continued its

41. For more on the U.N. debate, see Frank N. Trager, Patricia Wohlgenuth and Lu-yu Kiang, *Burma's Role in the United Nations, 1948-1955* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1956), pp. 10-12 and Young, "Nationalist Chinese troops in Burma," ch. 4.

42. Telegram, No. 1686, Smith to Rangoon, 25 April 1953 and "Editorial note." *FRUS*, 1952-54, Vol. XII, pp. 99-100, 100 (n. 3) and 104-105.

43. Draft Agreement, "Bangkok committee to evacuate Chinese Nationalist irregulars from Burma to Formosa," 22 June 1953. RG 59, Records of the Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Box 4, NA; Telegrams Nos. 2614 and 2624, Stanton to Department of State, 22 and 23 June 1953. *FRUS*, 1952-54, Vol. XII, p. 114 (n. 2).

44. Telegram, No. 985, Smith to Taipei, 28 May 1953. *FRUS*, 1952-54, Vol. XII, pp. 108-09. For more on the question of Chinese representation, see Rosemary Foot, *The Practice of Power: US Relations with China since 1949* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), ch. 2, and Victor S. Kaufman, "'Chirep': the Anglo-American dispute over Chinese representation in the United Nations, 1950-71," *English Historical Review*, No. 115 (April 2000), pp. 354-377.

45. Telegram, No. 234, Sebald to Department of State, 16 September 1953. *FRUS*, 1952-54, Vol. XII, pp. 138-39.

46. Telegram, No. 533, Donovan to Department of State, 17 September 1953. *FRUS*, 1952-54, Vol. XII, p. 14, nn. 2 and 3.

47. Young, "Nationalist Chinese troops in Burma," pp. 124-25; Walker, *Opium and Foreign Policy*, pp. 208-209.

military action against the irregulars. Under such conditions, argued the Nationalist leader, it was impossible to begin the removal of any troops.<sup>48</sup>

Eisenhower personally worked to end the impasse between Burma and Taiwan. At the end of September, he sent letters to both Nu and Chiang, urging them to commit themselves to achieving a repatriation agreement.<sup>49</sup> The following month, the Nationalist government publicly promised to remove 2,000 irregulars and their dependents from Burma, and to stop supplying them.<sup>50</sup> Although this was fewer soldiers than Rangoon wanted, the fact that it was announced publicly pleased the Burmese government, which agreed to a cease-fire. Over the next eleven months, to the surprise of the KMT government – and to the pleasure of the Burmese – over 5,700 troops (including Li Mi) and another 880 dependents left Burma for Taiwan. (However, there is reason to believe that some of these men were Burmese recruits who, after training in Taiwan, were to return to Burma and continue Nationalist efforts against China.<sup>51</sup>) The entire affair took its toll on U.S.–Taiwanese relations, Rankin commenting that nothing since the 1949 White Paper had so severely strained the ties between the two countries.<sup>52</sup>

### *Second Withdrawal*

For about six years after the 1953–54 removal, the question of the KMT irregulars was largely dormant. Between late 1954 and 1957, Burma launched a series of military campaigns to oust what remained of the irregulars. These attacks were not completely successful, but they did serve the purpose of forcing a large number of the Nationalists to flee into Laos. By November 1958, Burma reported only 1,350 of the irregulars within its borders.<sup>53</sup>

The situation began to change by late 1958. With the end of the 1957 military campaign, many of the irregulars began to return to Burma from Laos. They were joined by new recruits from Yunnan province, bringing their numbers up to over 2,300. By early 1960, they had established two new bases near the Laotian border at Keng Lap and Mong Pa-liao.<sup>54</sup>

More important was the beginning of the Great Leap Forward in mainland China. Designed to propel the PRC to communism, the Great Leap instead created chaos. Poorly contrived economic policies led to a

48. Telegram, No. 198, Rankin to Department of State, 29 September 1953. *FRUS*, 1952–54, Vol. XII, p. 153, n. 2.

49. Letters, Eisenhower to Nu and Chiang, 28 September 1953. *Ibid.* pp. 151–53.

50. See *ibid.* p. 165, n. 2.

51. Memorandum for the Files, 21 March 1961. RG 59, Central Decimal File, 1960–63, Box 1392, NA; Tucker, “John Foster Dulles and the Taiwan roots of the ‘two Chinas’ policy,” pp. 249–250; Young, “Nationalist Chinese troops in Burma,” p. 136. CAT assisted in the removal of these forces. See Leary, *Perilous Missions*, pp. 195–96.

52. Robert Accinelli, *Crisis and Commitment: United States Policy toward Taiwan, 1950–1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 128.

53. Young, “Nationalist Chinese troops in Burma,” pp. 139–140.

54. *Ibid.* p. 140. Young notes that it is not clear who led the irregulars at this point. At least three people were cited: Generals Li Li-ming, Lee Wiang-huang and Loh Shoh San. See *ibid.* p. 141.

sharp reduction in food production. Combined with a serious drought which began in 1960, starvation spread throughout the PRC. Although a full counting will never be known, an estimated 30 million people died between 1958 and 1962.<sup>55</sup>

Reports of China's difficulties led Chiang to believe that the time was ripe for an attack. Realizing an assault against the PRC from Taiwan would require at the very least American logistical support,<sup>56</sup> between 1959 and 1962 Chiang made several attempts to convince the Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy administrations of the importance of taking action. As he told Deputy Assistant Secretary of State J. Graham Parsons in 1959, "if at this critical juncture we fail to cooperate in measures of exploitation we will give the communists a new lease of life."<sup>57</sup> He found Eisenhower and Kennedy both unwilling to provide such assistance.<sup>58</sup>

But Chiang had not lost all hope: he still had what remained of the irregulars. Beginning in 1958, Washington received reports of a renewed interest by Taipei in the Nationalists still in Burma. Directly and through Thailand, KMT arms and personnel made their way into Burma. Some of this material was paid for with opium.<sup>59</sup> Combined with mainland Chinese who had recently escaped into Burma, by the winter of 1960 an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 irregulars were in that country.<sup>60</sup>

The Eisenhower administration again had reason for concern. In December 1959 and again in May 1960, Parsons explained to Yeh, who was now Taiwan's ambassador in Washington, that Taipei's "support of these units was prejudicial to free world interests in Southeast Asia." Furthermore, he "strongly urged" Taiwan to stop supplying the irregulars.<sup>61</sup> His approaches had no effect. A frustrated Secretary of State Christian Herter, who replaced Dulles in 1959, noted that "nothing short of drastic action" would get Chiang to stop assisting the irregulars. Frustration turned into concern when, in October 1960, U Nu signed an agreement with the Chinese Communist government, permitting the PRC to send soldiers 12

55. For more on this subject, see Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, Vol. II, *The Great Leap Forward* (London: Columbia University Press, 1983) and Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

56. Memorandum, Dulles to Eisenhower, 30 April 1956. White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, Subject Series, State Department Subseries, Box 1, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

57. Memorandum of Conversation, 2 May 1959. RG 59, Records of the Policy Planning Staff, 1957-61, Box 135, NA.

58. Memorandum, "President's Far Eastern trip, June 1960," 6 June 1960. White House Central File, Confidential File, Subject Series, Box 57, DDEL; Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 310-14; Telegrams, Nos. 410 and 424, Rusk to Taipei, 8 and 17 January 1962 and 569, Drumright to Secretary of State, 13 February 1962. NSF, Country File, Box 23, John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter cited as JFKL), Boston, Massachusetts.

59. Memorandum, Rusk to Kennedy, 20 February 1961. NSF, Country File, Box 21, JFKL; Young, "Nationalist Chinese troops in Burma," p. 141.

60. Despatch, No. 622, Yager to Department of State, 23 May 1961. RG 59, Central Decimal File, 1960-1963, Box 1392, NA; Young, "Nationalist Chinese troops in Burma," p. 141.

61. Memorandum, Martin to Steeves, 15 December 1960. RG 59, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Subject, Personal Name, and Country Files, 1960-63, Box 1, NA.

miles into Burma to help Rangoon drive out the KMT forces.<sup>62</sup> In December, the Burmese army began another attack against the irregulars; whether the PRC sent any soldiers into Burma to join this assault and, if so, how many, remains speculative. Whatever Communist China's position, the December offensive led to the death of 350 Nationalists; the remainder fled into northern Burma, Thailand or Laos.<sup>63</sup>

Even if the Chinese had not joined the Burmese in attacking the irregulars, the United States believed it had. With Beijing's threat to the region now greater than ever, it was all the more vital to remove the KMT soldiers. Herter therefore had his ambassadors in Taipei and Bangkok, Everett F. Drumright and U. Alexis Johnson respectively, explain America's desire that all aid to the Nationalists end.<sup>64</sup>

Washington's interest in removing the irregulars received additional impetus because of events in Laos. Since achieving independence in 1953, Laos had been in the midst of a near-constant civil war. By 1961, there were two major groups fighting, the government of Phoumi Nosovan and a communist guerrilla organization, the Pathet Lao. In mid-January, Herter learned that Chiang was thinking of offering the services of the irregulars in Laos to Phoumi. The secretary of state told Drumright to tell the KMT leader that such an offer would lead the United States to put pressure on him. Drumright, who admitted in later years that he tended to defend the interests of Taiwan, told Chiang of Washington's concerns, but refused to mention the possibility of putting pressure on Taipei.<sup>65</sup>

The Kennedy administration increased the pressure on Chiang. In February 1961, the new secretary of state, Dean Rusk, explained to Yeh that the irregulars not only "gave the Chinese Communists a pretext to intervene in Laos," but also threatened to undermine those segments of public opinion in Laos which opposed the Pathet Lao.<sup>66</sup> When Drumright

62. Telegram, No. 433, Snow to Secretary of State, 15 December 1960. *Ibid.*

63. Young, "Nationalist Chinese troops in Burma," pp. 145–46. According to contemporary reports, Chinese communist troops did intervene in Burma. See Telegrams, No. 830, Herter to Bangkok, 10 December 1960 and No. 433, Snow to Secretary of State, 15 December 1960, and Airgram, No. 622, Yager to Department of State, 23 May 1961. RG 59, Central Decimal File, 1960–63, Box 1392, NA. McCoy agrees, stating that along with 5,000 Burmese troops, three PRC divisions, totaling 20,000 men, attacked the Nationalists. See McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 176. Young contends that while an agreement had been reached between Rangoon and Beijing, China never sent military forces into Burma. He argues instead that Burma had more than enough troops to deal with the Nationalists on its own. See Young, "Nationalist Chinese troops in Burma," pp. 146–152. Frederick C. Teiwes argues that while there was a Chinese incursion into Burma, it had nothing to do with the irregulars, but with a long-standing border dispute between the PRC and Burma. See Frederick C. Teiwes, "Force and diplomacy on the Sino-Burmese border," in David S. Smith (ed.), *The Next Asia: Problems for U.S. Policy* (New York: Trustees of Columbia University, 1969), pp. 214–18.

64. Telegrams, No. 335, Drumright to Secretary of State, 21 December 1960 and No. 1113, Johnson to Secretary of State, 23 December 1960. RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File, 1960–63, Box 1392, NA.

65. Telegrams, No. 312, Herter to Taipei, 12 January 1961 and No. 394 Drumright to Department of State, 14 January 1961. *FRUS*, 1961–63, Vol. 86, nn. 1 and 2; Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945–1992: Uncertain Friendships* (New York: Twayne, 1994), p. 259 (n. 32).

66. Memorandum of Conversation, 3 February 1961. *FRUS*, 1961–63, Vol. XXII, pp. 6–7.

expressed Rusk's concerns to Chiang, the latter angrily declared that the United States "was blind to Chinese Communist forces in Burma and Laos and concerned only with [the] KMT irregulars, which were not part of the [Nationalist] armed forces and did not take orders from Taiwan."<sup>67</sup> (Given subsequent events, it became clear that Chiang in fact still had influence over at least some of these soldiers.)

As Washington continued the pressure on Chiang, Burma continued to put pressure on the United States. In January 1961, U Ohn, Nu's personal adviser, explained to U.S. Ambassador to Burma William Snow that the irregulars were being supplied with American arms. Furthermore, the continued presence of the Nationalists was diverting the attention of the Burmese army, thereby helping the Communists.<sup>68</sup> Rusk responded that if Taiwan was sending American equipment to Burma, it was in violation of the 1951 Mutual Defence Agreements signed between Washington and Taipei. Under those agreements, Taiwan could use U.S. military aid "only to maintain internal security or legitimate self-defence." The secretary added that the United States desired the removal of the irregulars.<sup>69</sup>

For Rusk, events took an unwanted turn in February. That month, the Burmese press reported the seizure of American military equipment following the capture of the irregular bases at Keng Lap and Mong Pa-liao.<sup>70</sup> The secretary of state was very concerned. He told Snow to inform the Nu government that any American equipment in Burma "is there totally without [the] knowledge and consent" of the United States. Furthermore, he asked for permission to have the U.S. army examine the material.<sup>71</sup> Burma agreed to have a U.S. military representative look over the equipment, but only as part of an international committee. James Barrington of the Burmese Foreign Office explained that Rangoon favoured a multi-nation grouping so as to put international pressure on Taiwan "and once and for all put a stop to a problem that has been going on for years."<sup>72</sup> Rusk agreed to the condition.<sup>73</sup> (In early March, the U.S. representative reported that while a fair amount of foreign equipment had been captured by the Burmese, very little of it was American in origin, and none of it was new.<sup>74</sup>)

Five days after the Burmese press report, the Burmese air force shot down a U.S.-made PB7 aircraft owned by the Nationalists which, Rusk informed Kennedy, "was apparently seeking to drop supplies to [the] irregular units still remaining in Burma." An agitated Rusk wrote to the

67. Telegram, No. 459, Drumright to Department of State, 7 February 1961. *FRUS*, 1961-63, Vol. XXIII, p. 87, n. 4.

68. Telegram, No. 490, Snow to Department of State, 12 January 1961. *Ibid.* pp. 84-85.

69. Telegram, No. 455, Rusk to Rangoon, 27 January 1961. RG 59, Central Decimal File, 1960-1963, Box 1392, NA.

70. Telegram, No. 569, Snow to Secretary of State, 15 February 1961. *Ibid.*

71. Telegram, No. 491, Telegram, Rusk to Rangoon, 16 February 1961. *Ibid.*

72. Telegram, No. 565, Snow to Secretary of State, 19 February 1961. NSF, Country File, Box 16, JFKL.

73. Telegram, No. 607, Snow to Secretary of State, 21 February 1961. RG 59, Central Decimal File, 1960-63, Box 1392, NA.

74. For more on the examination of this equipment, see: Telegrams, Nos. 621, 645 and 662, Snow to Secretary of State, 22 and 27 February, and 2 March 1961 in *ibid.*

president that this flight was made despite Drumright's representation to Chiang earlier in the month. The secretary admitted to Kennedy that American leverage "is in a practical sense very limited. This reflects the importance of the role that Taiwan plays in our strategic effort to contain Chinese Communist expansionist pressures." Yet, he added, "I do not conclude, however, that we are helpless in dealing with the situation," and recommended that if Chiang continued to refuse to yield to American pressure, Washington impose "a limited, selective cessation of military aid."<sup>75</sup>

Kennedy concurred. After discussions with his secretary of state, the two men agreed to send a strong telegram to Chiang, urging him to remove the irregulars. In a clear reference to American efforts to try to maintain international support for Taiwan, including its seat in the United Nations, Rusk warned that failure to act "severely limits any effective political help which [the United States] might be able to render to [Taiwan] in its difficult situation."<sup>76</sup>

Despite his desire to use the irregulars to his advantage, Chiang decided he could not risk angering his closest ally. On 28 February, Taiwan's acting foreign minister, Hsu Shao-chang, informed Drumright of Chiang's decision to withdraw the Nationalists from Burma and Laos and to request Thailand's help in achieving this withdrawal. Moreover, Taiwan would cut all ties with those irregulars who refused to leave.<sup>77</sup> On 14 March, Thailand agreed to help, and three days later the evacuations began.<sup>78</sup> During the next six weeks, just over 4,400 irregulars and their dependents left the region. Contemporary reports suggested that about 1,000 Nationalists remained in the Golden Triangle under the command of Generals Li Wen-huan and Tuan Hsi-wen.<sup>79</sup> (There is evidence, though, that Phoumi kept at least 2,000–3,000 of the irregulars in Laos and that some of them joined the Laotian military.<sup>80</sup>) A pleased U Nu wrote to the president, "I am confident that with the continuing co-operation between all those concerned, the KMT question will soon be eliminated in its entirety thereby putting relations between our countries on an even firmer footing than ever before."<sup>81</sup> Chiang saw things otherwise. Having failed to get American support for either an attack across the Taiwan Strait or from Burma, the Nationalist leader angrily wrote to the president

75. Memorandum, Rusk to Kennedy, 20 February 1961. NSF, Country File, Box 21, JFKL.

76. Telegram, No. 401, Rusk to Taipei, 22 February 1961. *FRUS*, 1961–63, Vol. XXII, pp. 12–13. (See also source note, p. 12.)

77. Telegram, No. 521, Drumright to Secretary of State, 1 March 1961. RG 59, Central Decimal File, 1960–63, Box 1392, NA; Telegram, No. 542, Rusk to Rangoon, 6 March 1961. NSF, Country File, Box 16, JFKL.

78. Telegrams, Nos. 1622 and 1675, Johnson to Secretary of State, 14 and 17 March 1961. RG 59, Central Decimal File, 1960–63, Box 2159, NA.

79. Despatch, No. 551, Yager to Department of State, 25 April 1961; Despatch, No. 18, Pickering to Department of State, 4 October 1961; and Airgram, No. A-118, Young to Secretary of State, 27 October 1961. RG 59, Central Decimal File, 1960–63, Box 1392, NA.

80. Telegrams, No. 1729, Johnson to Secretary of State, 24 March 1961 and Unnumbered, Barbis to Secretary of State, 21 June 1961. RG 59, Central Decimal File, 1960–63, Box 2159, NA; McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 349.

81. Letter, Nu to Kennedy, 29 April 1961. NSF, Country File, Box 16, JFKL.

in early 1963: "It would be of interest to you that our armed forces and people are of the view that my government wasted a good opportunity when it failed to act last year."<sup>82</sup>

### *Epilogue*

Following the removal of 1961, personal rivalries among the leaders of those troops who remained led the irregulars to break up into three separate groups: General Tuan's 1,800-man Fifth Army; General Li's 1,400-strong Third Army; and about 400 intelligence operatives who spied on China, under General Ma Ching-kuo. General Ma remained under the direct control of Chiang's son, Chiang Ching-kuo; hence he continued to receive financial support from Taiwan. For reasons not yet clear, Taipei cut funding to both Tuan and Li, forcing them to rely solely on opium for financial support. Tuan and Li were reinforced by the Nationalists in Laos, who in mid-1962 left Laos for the Thai–Burma border.<sup>83</sup>

Over the next few years, the Nationalists further increased their control over the region's opium production. By 1967, though, they faced a threat to their supremacy from a rising local warlord named Khun Sa. Seeing Khun Sa as a common threat, the irregulars forgot about their differences and united against him. In 1967, the Nationalists attacked a large caravan controlled by the warlord. In the ensuing "Opium War," the threat posed by Khun Sa was largely eliminated, thereby guaranteeing the Nationalists' continued monopolization of the local opium trade.<sup>84</sup>

A year after the Opium War, Chiang tried to regain control over all of the irregulars. In 1966, the Cultural Revolution began in China. Like the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution created chaos in the PRC. Once again, Chiang believed the conditions were ripe for his long-desired return. As before, he looked to both Washington and the Nationalist forces for help. The former proved unwilling to provide him with assistance.<sup>85</sup> The irregulars also proved unco-operative. To stage a suc-

82. Letter, Chiang to Kennedy, 15 March 1963. President's Office File, Countries, Box 113a, JFKL. Of course, one must question how many people in Taiwan actually supported a return to the mainland. As the Kennedy administration noted, the idea of returning to the mainland "means nothing to the Taiwanese majority." An increasing number of people on the island were "concerned with conditions of life in Taiwan rather than returning to the mainland which they do not know." Memorandum, "Guidelines of United States policy toward China," 15 November 1963. Papers of James C. Thomson, Jr., Box 15, JFKL.

83. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, pp. 349, 352.

84. For more on the Opium War, see *ibid.* pp. 333–34, 355–361; André and Louis Boucaud, *Burma's Golden Triangle: On the Trail of the Opium Warlords* (Hong Kong: Asia 2000, 1988), pp. 24–25; and Christopher R. Cox, *Chasing the Dragon: Into the Heart of the Golden Triangle* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1996), pp. 177–78. Cox notes that in the early 1980s, Khun Sa got revenge, attacking some of the irregulars' generals, severing their opium routes and appropriating the Nationalists' proxy army in Burma. See *ibid.* pp. 178–180.

85. CIA Intelligence Information Cable, 12 September 1966. NSF, Country File, Box 240; Intelligence Information Cable, 8 May 1967. NSF, Country File, Box 241; and Memorandum, Goldberg to Johnson, 9 March 1967. NSF, Memos to the President, Box 14, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library (hereafter cited as LBJL), Austin, Texas; Telegram, No. 901, McConaughy to Secretary of State, 20 September 1966. RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964–66, Political and Defense, Box 2007, NA; Tucker, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States*, p. 62.

cessful invasion of the mainland, Chiang first wanted to bring the Nationalists under a unified command. Accordingly, in June 1968, he sent General Lo Han-ching to meet Li and Tuan. Lo proposed putting the irregulars under his control; this would require Li and Tuan to relinquish their commands. Both refused.<sup>86</sup> It was not long afterwards that Richard Nixon was elected. Nixon's desire to improve relations with the PRC, combined with the irregulars' refusal to support an attack upon China, killed the Nationalist leader's aspiration to return to the mainland.

### *Conclusion*

Despite their relatively small numbers, to the United States, the Nationalist troops in Burma offered opportunities and posed difficulties disproportionate to their size. At first, Washington saw the irregulars as a useful force in the war against communism. Accordingly, the CIA and the president, without the knowledge of at least a majority of state Department officers, provided them with assistance, hoping that they could draw Chinese communist forces from Korea and help contain the PRC. In fact, the irregulars did far more damage to America's interests than to China. As John Garver has noted, they never posed enough of a threat to require Beijing to divert large forces from Korea to the Yunnan region. While they might have brought back information useful to U.S. intelligence agencies, their activities also increased Chinese communist "vigilance, which made conventional spying operations more difficult."<sup>87</sup>

Indeed, rather than advance American interests, Operation Paper severely damaged them. For one, it shook the United States' credibility in the eyes of its allies. American officials told the British that Washington was not giving assistance to the irregulars; Whitehall soon learned otherwise. Chiang Kai-shek, for his part, felt frustration with a White House that at first supported the Nationalist presence in Burma but then changed its mind.<sup>88</sup>

America's relationship with Burma suffered even more harm. Chiang and the British might be upset with Washington, but neither was about to break its alliance with the United States. Burma, however, had sought to maintain a position of neutrality in the East-West conflict. American officials hoped to draw Rangoon towards the non-communist world. They had good reason for this hope: Burma's relations with the communist bloc, particularly the PRC, were strained throughout the 1950s because of disagreements over the Sino-Burmese boundary line. But U Nu and his advisors had good reason to distrust the United States. Not only had Washington backed the irregulars through the Operation Paper, but the

86. Telegram, No. 3071, McConaughy to Department of State, 14 May 1968. *FRUS*, 1964-68, Vol. XXX, p. 675; Telegram, No. 6027, McConaughy to Secretary of State, 5 September 1968. NSF, Country File, Box 243, LBJL.

87. John W. Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), p. 162.

88. *Ibid.* p. 163.

White House seemed overly unwilling to get Taiwan to stop assisting them. Trapped between a United States which would not help him remove the Nationalists, and a China that might invade Burma if he did not do something about them, U Nu did what the White House least wanted: he turned to Beijing for help.

This turn to China represented the greatest damage Operation Paper caused for America's interests: it endangered the very containment policy it was supposed to buttress. The United States wanted a stable, unified, pro-Western Burma. But the irregulars' activities made it all the more difficult for U Nu to quell the various insurgent groups that threatened the stability and unity of his country. It was only because these groups were disunited that he was able to defeat them.<sup>89</sup> But the irregulars continued to pose problems, leading Nu to ask the communist bloc for assistance. For an operation that, at its base, was supposed to contain communism, Paper was nothing short of a failure.

89. *Ibid.* p. 162.