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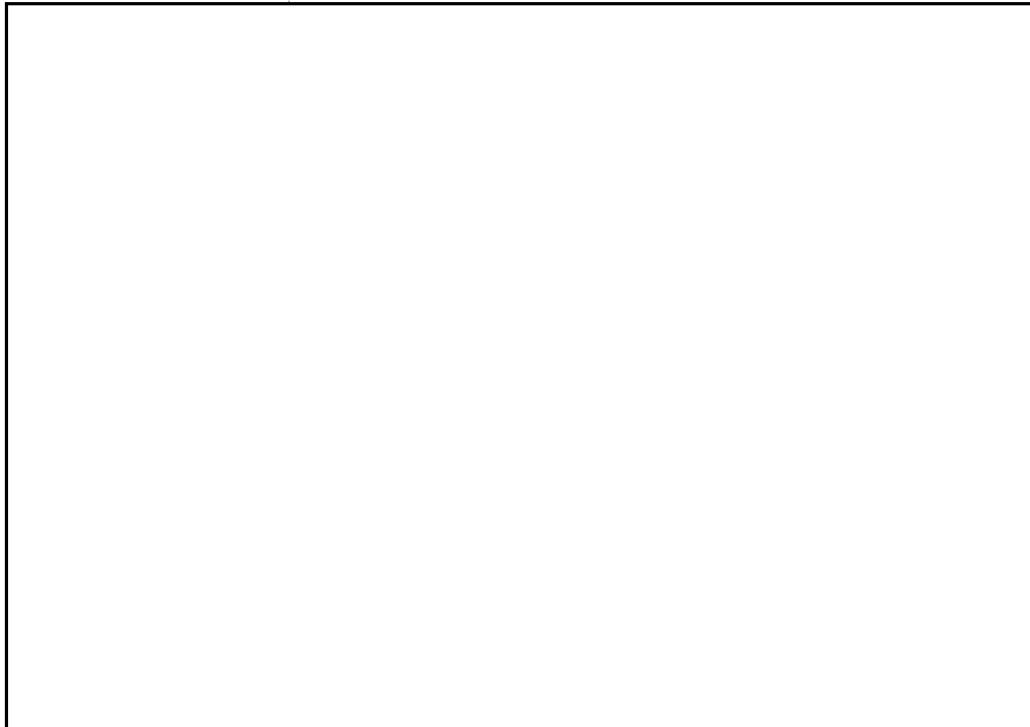
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2. BELGIUM SEEN REDUCING MILITARY SERVICE TERM

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The Belgian government may follow West Germany's example and reduce the compulsory military service term to 12 months, according to Ambassador Alger in Brussels. Several Belgian defense officials have told Alger that Belgium might be unable to maintain its 18-month service period beyond 1 January. Prime Minister Van Acker is quoted by Belgium's NATO representative, De Staercke, to the effect that Belgium "must be the first" to follow the German lead if attacks from the Social Christian opposition are to be avoided in the 1958 elections. De Staercke considers the prospect of a general reduction in military service a more serious threat "to NATO and to peace" than the Suez question.

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Comment Political competition on the military service issue is likely in view of the fact that a promised reduction in the service term helped the Socialist-Liberal coalition in the 1954 Belgian elections. Current Belgian proposals for a reduction in force goals are attributable in part to this promise.

The Norwegian government, which is under similar pressure, is certain to make some move toward reduction of the term of service prior to the parliamentary elections next fall, and Denmark would follow Norway's example. The Dutch fear that similar pressures will develop in the Netherlands.

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**3. RESIGNATION OF MINC PORTENDS RETURN OF
GOMULKA TO POLISH POLITBURO**

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The resignation of Hilary Minc as vice premier and politburo member removes the last member of the former ruling triumvirate of Bierut, Berman, and Minc which purged the nationalist Communist leader, Wladyslaw Gomulka, in 1948. It is probably a prelude to Gomulka's return to the politburo, which may be announced at the central committee plenum reportedly scheduled to be held on 15 October.

Various reports have indicated that negotiations have long been in progress between Gomulka and politburo members concerning his return to participation in party affairs, and Gomulka reportedly was demanding the removal of Minc as one of the conditions for his return. Gomulka has widespread popularity among the Polish people as one who opposed Polish subservience to Moscow and pressure for collectivization. His strength stems from his popularity with the lower echelons of the party, and he will probably be a strong proponent of policies designed to improve the Polish standard of living and continue the liberalization program.

Gomulka was reinstated as a party member by the seventh plenum of the Polish United Workers Party in July, although he had never fully recanted his opposition to party policies and his refusal to condemn Tito in 1948. The Polish regime may feel that in recalling him it would demonstrate its stability and would convince the people that it is adopting more liberal policies.

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5. BURMA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND THE USSR AGREE ON PAYMENTS ARRANGEMENT

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Burma, the USSR and Czechoslovakia signed a protocol on 9 October providing for "convertibility of currency" in trade relations with each other, according to a TASS announcement. This agreement, which Rangoon has been seeking for some time, will probably go a long way toward overcoming Burma's dissatisfaction with its barter trade with the Soviet bloc.

During the first half of 1956 the USSR absorbed approximately 40 percent of Burmese exports to the bloc. Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, was the source of over 50 percent of Burma's imports from the bloc while taking almost nothing in exchange. The currency convertibility agreement will permit Burma to use its credits with the USSR to obtain goods from Czechoslovakia.

This is the first time the USSR is known to have made such an arrangement with a non-Communist country, which attests to the importance Moscow attaches to its economic offensive in Burma.

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