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Failure of Democratic Consolidation: The Three Year Interlude of Military Rule (1958-1962) in Burma

Zaw Thein

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FAILURE OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION: THE THREE YEAR INTERLUDE
OF MILITARY RULE (1958-1962) IN BURMA

by

Zaw Thein

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Thesis Committee:

Jim Butterfield, Ph.D., Chair
Emily Hauptmann, Ph.D.
Mahendra Lawoti, Ph.D.

FAILURE OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION: THE THREE YEAR INTERLUDE OF MILITARY RULE (1958-1962) IN BURMA

Zaw Thein, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2014

Many scholars believe that the period between 1948 when Burma won Independence and 1962 when the military took over the country from the elected civilian government as the parliamentary democracy era. During this era, there was a three-year interlude where the military leaders ruled the country as the Caretaker Government- a euphemism for the three-year military interlude.

My argument is that this interlude happened due to the growing strength of the military as an institution and the decline of political parties in Burma. The strength of the military institution was due to the civil war that broke out just after the Independence as well as the invasion of the Kuomintang in the early 1950s and due to the cunning manipulation of Ne Win commanding-in-chief who aspired to be the country's strongman. Nu, Prime Minister and the leader of AFPFL (Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League) party, failed to predict this military takeover, was also responsible for the decline of political parties and so were the other political leaders who squabbled over the trivial matters instead of focusing on policies and politics. The ruling AFPFL party split into two, Nu-Tin and Swe-Nyein parties in 1958 which destabilized the country.

I also argued that since the abolition of monarchy in Burma in the 19th century, the country lacked strong institutions and the Burmese politics was mostly based on personalities of the leaders like Aung San, Nu and Ne Win. The interim Caretaker Government was the outcome of the clash of military with the fragmented and feeble political parties. Being dissatisfied with the military government and its heavy-handed policies, the Burmese voted landslide for the Nu-Tin party in the 1960's election against the Swe-Nyein party supported by the military.

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Zaw Thein

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Burma, which shares border with the two giant neighbors China and India, belongs to what Samuel Huntington called the second wave of democratization (The Third Wave 1991 p18). The ideas of democracy were brought to our country by the British colonialists whose country was democratized according to Huntington in the first half of the seventeenth century in the first wave and never looked back. Democracy once planted in England took root, bloomed into flowers and seems to thrive forever, come shine or rain. Not our country who inherited the good as well as bad legacy from the British, who ruled as its master for more than a century after the three Anglo-Burmese wars. The good legacy we inherited from the British raj was democratic ideas and a parliamentary government; the bad legacy was civil war and a devastated economy. The bad legacy was substantially downsized but could not wipe out entirely toward the end of 1950s. Unlike its colonial masters, Burma did not succeed in making the seed of democracy take root and turn into a fully-bloomed plant. Democracy was nipped in the bud by a military coup in March 2, 1962 in what Huntington called the reverse wave of the second democratization. It's important to note democracy as the dominant political thoughts is not imposed by coercion in Burma or in India who shared the same fate of being colonized by the British since 1820s. It was nursed and cherished by the founding fathers like Aung San, Nu and others and enshrined in the first constitution. However, the military dictatorship forced upon the country in 1962 has so strongly institutionalized that it wiped out the 14-year-old democratization process with the likelihood that it will

stay with the Burmese people for a long time to come. As one of the paramount principles in the 2008 constitution – the third constitution – states clearly that military must always play the leading role in national politics. The dominance of the military in the Burmese politics is an ongoing theme of some Burmese scholars (Mary Callahan 1991, David Steinberg 1981, Josef Silverstein 1977). Yet few paid attention to the three-year interlude of the military rule in the period of 1948-1962 when Burma had a democratic government elected by the people in free and fair election. Some call that interlude the caretaker government; some simply dubbed it a mini-coup. It's about this period that I'd like to examine and explain in my thesis. Why did the then military leaders succeed in staging a coup? How did it transpire? Why did they return the state power and go back to the barrack only to return after two years and launched a major coup that seems to last forever in Burma?

Out of three major research approaches practiced in empirical political science – behavioralism, rational choice institutionalism and historical institutionalism – I'm familiar with the first approach through reading literature, and I learnt the second as a student in the foundations of comparative politics class and the last as a student in the democratization and institutional design class. As far as I know the behavioralists collect statistical data from interviewing as many people as possible individually, put them together to account for the patterns of behavior they are trying to explain based on the assumption that individuals as individuals act autonomously. Though they focus on problems like historical institutionalists they rely too much on social surveys and statistical analyses implemented on the answers of random samples of independent individuals. Those surveys and analyses are good for the current situation and the

aftermath; they are not relevant in explaining events transpired before that and many epochal events in the past could not be explicated using those data. Overarching social questions like social movement or civic engagement could be rarely explained by single data source and one technique of empirical analysis. It is pretty obvious that we cannot use behaviorialism research design in our quest for answer to why the military was able to hold power for three years with the consent of the elected government. The establishment of the caretaker government is not the whim and fancy of a group of military officers who snatched away the state power at the last moment. It was a historical event which is the result of the cumulative effect of interactions between institutions and personalities that had been going on for a long while and that had foretold everything that took place in 1962 and its aftermath. As Paul Pearson and Theda Skocpol contend, “most research in the behavioral tradition uses surveys that offer snapshot in time. And when surveys are repeated to offer a longitudinal series, it is rare indeed for behavioral analysts to consider changing institutional contests, critical junctures, or path-dependent large-scale processes as causally relevant to the changing modes of individual behavior they probe (2002, p705).”

Rational choice institutionalism, ‘a comparative statics methodology yielding testable hypotheses’ (Kenneth A Shapsle, Jan 2005) is how political actors utilize institutions to further their own interests while negotiating the institutional constraints which impact the actors’ behavior. It originated from the study of American congressional behavior in the late 1970s taking advantage of the neo-classical economic theory explaining the geneses of institutions, the political actors thereof and the outcomes of their strategic interactions. According to Hall and Taylor, there are four notable

features in RCI: “First, the political actors have a fixed sets of preferences or tastes, behave in the best way to achieve those preferences strategically; second, they tend to see politics as a series of collective action dilemmas; third its significant emphasis on the role of strategic interactions between political actors and the institutions in the determination of the political outcomes; and finally RCI developed an effective approach to determine the genesis of institutions (1996 ,p944).” If I were exploring and examining the Burmese military institution only and how and why its grip on the state power sustained, RCI could have been arguably the best theoretical approach. It would be as justifiable as the study of American Congress as a significant paradox is observed in the old institution as congressional outcomes actually show considerable stability while there was interaction of the multidimensional characters and issues and the complex personalities and preferences of the lawmakers. The Burmese military, a relatively new institution in the modern Burmese history, has been run by self-enhancing key actors since the late 1950s so much so that they seized the state power in 1962, set up military dictatorship and never handed it back to the civilian government. As my thesis involves multiple institutions – the government, the military, the political parties – there were political actors who were all far from rational and consistent. In his autobiography, Prime Minister Nu explicitly and unequivocally portrayed his character: ”Because his heart was expanded out of proportion to his brain, what most people would regard as trivial or inconsequential would affect Maung Nu profoundly. In such a situation, before the brains had chance to size it up and determine its trivial or fruitless nature, Maung Nu was wont to speak out or to act. And since his words and actions sprang out of a resolve to disregard consequences, a decision once made was not easily alterable. It was only after it was carried out, when

the brain had had time to weigh and assess, that the error would become apparent to him and Maung Nu would be seized with contrition. He would then make a firm resolution to reform, but, with heart the master of his mind, no matter how much he tried he could not overcome the tendency to act first and think afterwards. Thus there was to be a profusion of errors first and recriminations afterwards, a pattern that was not restricted to the period when he was thirteen or fourteen but was to persist into adulthood. If there was any change, it was this: the proclivity to act hastily according to the dictates of the heart was there, but it would be tempered by lessons that the wisdom of advancing years was to bring (1975, p 18). My reason for quoting at length about Nu's character is that he and General Ne Win are the two key political actors in the parliamentary period (1948- 62) whose actions and reactions make and break the course of the country's history.

It is exceedingly difficult to analyze the transformational crisis that happened in the modern Burmese history (1958-1960) by utilizing rational choice institution research approach, as it depends too much upon the game theory which becomes indeterminate and unmanageable when the number of actors involved increases. And it is obvious that game theory is not effective in explaining critical junctures or slow-moving historical macro-processes. As Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpal point out: "The fact that many macro-processes take considerable time to play out presents a further difficulty, since game theory generally requires that all the relevant actors, preferences, and payoffs be established and fixed simultaneously at the beginning of a game. In short, there are real obstacles in rational choice theory to serious consideration of many key aspects of historical processes (2002 p705)." Rational choice theory is basically relevant in providing explanation to the institutions like American congress where the political

actors operating rationally in well-defined contexts with identifiable choices and transparent results. Furthermore, the key political actors and their choices and preferences are there in the first place to be examined as in the case of congress in rational choice analyses whereas in reality other major actors appear unexpectedly bringing new preferences and new choices in different contexts which the rational choice theory finds it hard to cope. Pierson and Skocpol warned of using the rational choice institutionalism: “Big question, broader contexts, and long-term transformations recede ever farther from view, and political science risks cutting itself off from concerns important to broad audiences.(2002 p717).” Peter Hall has this to say about the HI approach: “Whether conducted from a rationalist or sociological perspective, the research done by historical institutionalists in recent years has greatly advanced our understanding of institutional change. Scholars working in this intellectual tradition have arguably done more than any other group to develop realistic formulations about how economic and political institutions change over time (2010 p219).”

Where other approaches look at an isolated setting with limited actors, historical institutionalism takes a sweeping view at an entire organizational and institutional configuration. Where others examine and analyze history in chunks, the historical institutionalism pays close attention to the long-term political processes together with its critical junctures. In deciphering the three-year rule of military in modern Burmese history, it entails that the gradual strengthening-up of military since the days of pre-colonial period until its apex of power in 1962 coup as well as the parliamentary system with all its paraphernalia of political parties and political actors must be examined in all their entirety. The formidable comparative advantage of

historical institutionalism is the macroscopic analysis of historical processes highlighting on institutions and organizations together with myriad key political actors. Hall and Taylor (1996, 937) contend that the group theories of politics and structural-functionalism have a huge impact upon historical institutionalism. The group theorists argue that politics after all is conflict over scarce resources in humanity. They examine the political inequality which is the outcome of the conflict between the institutional organization of the polity and its economic structures. The structural functionalists argue that the institutional organization of the polity and political economy play a major role in structuring collective behavior and producing their outcomes. Both group conflict theories and structural functionalism is influential in helping historical institutionalism define the state as a complex of institutions capable of structuring the character and outcomes of group conflict and the institution as the formal and informal procedures, norms, and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy such as constitutions, bureaucratic rules and regulations, trade unions laws and banking procedures. Pierson and Skocpol state that the three important characteristics of historical institutionalism scholarship in contemporary scholarship are: “firstly, dealing with a broad interesting historical issue for public as well as scholars; secondly, taking the time factor seriously and thirdly, examining larger contexts and hypothesizing the combined effects of institutions and processes (2002 p695).” Hall and Taylor argue that there are four features in historical institutionalism: “First, historical institutionalists view the relationship between individual behavior and institutions in broad sense; second, they highlight the political inequality; third, they emphasize the importance of path dependency and critical junctures in the historical macro processes; fourth, they balance

the importance of the institutional analysis and the contributions of such factors like ideas to better understand the political outcomes (1996 ,p938).”

Instead of looking for some political equilibrium and their outcomes, historical institutionalists base their inquiry on path analysis or path dependence process. Path dependence is a pivotal causal element in historical institutionalism and critical junctures are catalyst in many a path dependent processes. Capoccia and Kelemen define critical juncture as “relatively short periods of time during which there is a substantially heightened probability that agents’ choices will affect the outcome of interest (2007, p348).” They go on to explain that by “relatively shorter period” they mean that the time horizon of the critical junction must be shorter than that of the path-dependence process it initiates; by “substantially heightened probability” they mean the choices made by the political actors during the critical juncture is more probable than those made before or after the critical juncture. It also means that the critical juncture creates a situation that is qualitatively different from other historical developments that take place before or the after. In modern Burmese history, the four distinct historical developments that are indicative of the unconsolidated democracy – the civil war, the split of the ruling political party (AFPFL), the rise of the military institution, and the three-year rule by the military- the last development has all the qualities of a critical juncture which initiated the path dependence lock-in of long-lasting military dictatorship in the country after the temporal separation of two year in 1962. On the other hand, some institutional analyst like James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen would not necessarily agree with my hypothesizing of the three-year military rule as critical juncture. They argue that “when institutions are treated

as causes, scholars are too apt to assume that big and abrupt shifts in institutional forms are more important or consequential than slow and incrementally occurring changes.

Gradual changes can be of great significance in their own right; and gradually unfolding changes may be hugely consequential as causes of other outcomes (2010, p 2-3).” Though their theory of gradual institutional change have based on ideas developed in the field of historical institutionalism their focus is on accumulation of endogenous developments rather than exogenous shocks that creates institutional transformation. They argue that” gradual changes can be of great significance in their own right, and gradually unfolding changes may be hugely consequential as it causes of other outcomes (2010, p3). Though the gradual development of the decline of political parties and the rise of military institutionalism in the modern Burmese history are important indicators that democracy was unstable and unconsolidated all the developments reached their climax when the military could grab from the legitimate elected government in the broad daylight. And after two years of temporal separation the democratic institution was caught off-guard and its political power abruptly transferred to the military leaders in a bloodless uneventful coup.

In the Burmese politics from the time of its independence from the British in 1948 to the day of the military coup in 1962, the country’s one and only prime minister was Nu. During the three year interlude of the military rule, Nu himself who transferred the power in 1958 and it was to Nu that the power was transferred again after the election in 1960. It is important to know how he would interpret the meaning of democracy. My proposition is that the way he looked at the definition of democracy would give us a leading clue in why the military could intervene as the caretaker government in the late

1950s ending up as the country's long-lasting military dictators. The nearly universally accepted norms of a democratic country was put forward by Robert Dahl "highly inclusive and extensively open to contestation (1971, p8)." In all the elections held in the country no body was denied of the franchise. All eligible citizens could be the members of the parliament. Even though no one could boldly said the citizens had completely unimpaired opportunities under Prime Minister Nu due to the civil war, there had been tremendous leeway to "formulate their preferences, to signify their preferences and to have their preferences weighed equally in the conduct of the government." Like India, Indonesia, Pakistan and South Korea, Burma belonged to the second wave of democratization with the full democratic institutions. There was no liberalization period as the democratization begun immediately with the departure of the last colonial governor general in January 1948. As Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan claims, the new de facto government headed by Nu "has the authority to generate new policies, and the executive, legislative and judicial power generated by the new democracy does not have to share power with other bodies de jure (1996,p3)." Before the Burma Communist Party went underground in March 1948, democracy was "the only game in town." With the complete transition, the next crucial question to be asked to the Nu's regime is: Is the democracy in post-independence Burma on the way towards consolidation?

Using the criteria configured by Linz and Stepan, Burma in the 1950s was in the right direction marching toward consolidated democracy. Linz and Stepan categorically claim that "Democracy is a form of governance of a state. Thus, no modern polity can become democratically consolidated unless it is first a state. (1996, p7)" They went on to say that" without the existence of a state, there cannot be a consolidated modern democratic

regime. (p7)” The “stateness” issue was solved in Burma when the Independence architect General Aung San signed a pact with the ethnic leaders in February 12, 1947 that they all agreed to live together as a nation. As a functioning state did Burma meet the five conditions laid down by Linz and Stepan for a democracy to be called consolidated? I would argue by the Linz and Stepan standards Burma was well on the way toward a consolidated democracy in the brief period just after the Independence. Linz and Stepan demanded that firstly, conditions must exist for the development of a free and lively civil society. Burma during the first democratic period (1948-1962) was a hotbed of lively civil society groups such as writers’ clubs, trade unions, religious organizations, entrepreneurial cooperatives, lawyers associations etc. Steinberg claimed: “Civil society did develop under civilian Burma. It seems to have been basically an urban phenomenon, except for the religious groups that continued in the villages but were also prevalent in the cities, many of which were socially extended, agglutinated villages. Professional and other organizations were formed and flourished in an era where considerable space did exist between the state and the society (2001, p105).” Secondly, Linz and Stepan argued that there must be relatively autonomous and valued political freedoms. Nu and his democratic associates embedded in the tradition of liberal democracy in the colonial days under the British were staunch supporters of political plurality. So much so that there was a leftist political party that had covert relation with the underground Communist Party. When the ruling party headed by Nu split in 1958 an opportunity was created to have a two strong party system as the splinter group was led by Nu’s former colleague and Deputy Prime Minister Kyaw Nyein. The third argument made by Linz and Stepan was there must be a rule of law to ensure legal guarantees for citizens’ freedom. The

democratic rule of law was the order of the day in the democratic period (1948-1962). Nu as well as no one from the executive and legislative component of power interfered in the conduct of the legal institution which was the center of competent legal counselors and autonomous judges. The fourth argument was there must be a state bureaucracy that is usable by the new democratic government. The almost all cabinet members of Nu's newly formed government were more politicians than able administrators. But they inherited well-oiled bureaucratic machine from the British which was headed by experienced ICS a revered breed of technocrats in those days. When the civil war which broke out just after the independence shook the country to its core it was those bureaucrats that kept the government running when their political masters were fighting for the country's survival. Finally, Linz and Stepan argued that there must be an institutionalized economic society. By economic society, Linz and Stepan meant the economy that was not centralized where the state decided everything – price, labor, supply and distribution – nor was a totally free market where the “invisible hand” of the market was the sole arbiter of the economy. The post independent economy in Burma was that kind of economy which Linz and Stepan argued because fascination of almost all politicians of Nu's generation with the socialist ideas and the hatred of monopolistic capitalism which they identified with British colonialism was shared by the majority of the Burmese politicians with the result that almost all of them preferred regulated economy. Michael Charney in his *A History of Modern Burma* wrote: “Regardless of the government's unfortunate economic starting position, Nu and many of his associates viewed unbridled capitalism as a serious obstacle to reinvigorating the economy (2009,p81).” David Steinberg wrote in his *Burma: A Socialist Nation of Southeast Asia*

that “The Burmese wanted a planned welfare state with a strong emphasis on the cultural uplift of the people (1982, p66). The five arenas of a consolidated democracy were there in the post-independence democratic Burma; the civil war that engulfed the entire country just after the independence was put under control and was simmering down. Nu’s regime also passed the two crucial tests set by Adam Przeworski in his article What makes democracy endure?. Przeworski argued that “economic factors are not the only one that matter for the durability of democracy. Indeed, international conditions predict regime survival better than does the level of development.” During his tenure of premiership, the cold war was in its infancy. Communist China was struggling to build its own country and had good relations with Burma. India, another big neighbor, was Burma’s elite ally and provided contingency help in subduing insurgency. The second wave was at its apex; it exhausted itself, according to Huntington, only in the early 1960s (p19). Przeworski in testing Juan Linz’s hypothesis demonstrated that parliamentary democracies were more durable than presidential ones. He says: “To summarize, the survival of democracies does depend on their institutional systems. Parliamentary regimes last longer, much longer, than presidential ones (1996, p6). The institutional system under Nu was parliamentary as Przeworski contended that “countries that emerged from colonial domination after the Second World War typically inherited parliamentarianism from the colonizers (p6). Democratization under the Nu’s regime had all the qualities espoused by political theorists like Linz and Stepan and Przeworski and should have thrived and consolidated. But the state power was grabbed away from the Nu’s regime by the military for three years and after two years it was overthrown. Why did that happened? What problems did the Nu’s regime confront that led to its decline and then its downfall?

In the empirical context of Burma, the country's democracy was snuffed out by the military she was so proud of. The Burmese army was born out of the country's independence movement. It was led by its founding father, General Aung San until he joined the post WWII politics. He had been the student activist and political leader before he left for Japan to organize a national army. That might be one of the reasons why Nu and his colleagues did not expect the military would be their undoing. Though many scholars anticipated that military could undermine, erode and uproot democracy in newly-independent countries only few realized that the institution could be the most crucial agency in destabilizing and deconsolidating democratic regimes. While Linz and Stepan as well as Przeworski hypothesized about how democracy consolidates, they did not warn the future democracies how they could be deconsolidated in a single sweeping movement by their own scheming military. Valerie Bunce in her *Comparative Democratization* did not recognize the military intervention as a major threat. She accepted the fact that "that it is very hard to draw firm conclusions about what compromises, if not terminates, the democratic experiment as there are simply different constraints and different strengths in different places (2000, p720)." Nonetheless, when she generalized the threats posed to democracy, she argued that it was "popular discomfort with conflict and by an illiberal middle class in Asia, it was state weakness and the discord between political content and socioeconomic content in Africa (2000, p720)." She did not suggest the military intervention as a causal mechanism in the democracy's demise. O'Donnell and Schmitter did admit that political democracies are usually brought down by conspiracies involving few actors (1986, p18)." On the other

hand they assumed that “in no case that the military intervened without important and active civilian support (1986, p31).”

It was Terry Lynn Karl in her *Dilemma of Democratization in Latin America* (1990) that came closest in explaining what happened politically in Burma in late 1950s when the military was preparing to bring down the house of democracy in one single deadly blow. In her middle-range specification of democracy, she defined that democracy is a political concept involving such dimensions as contestation for political office, participation of the citizenry, accountability of the ruler over the ruled and finally civilian control over the military (1990 ,p2). She also claimed that the last dimension set her definition apart from Dahl’s classic interpretation of the polyarchy. Though her generalizations were made in the Latin American context, they are generally true to the cases in Southeast Asian countries especially the last insight: the civilian control over the military. U Nu must have taken for granted that military would never think of stabbing its political masters in their back. After all, the military institution in Burma was born out of the Independence struggle consisting of all the citizenry and the institution’s leadership had worked closely together with the politicians. Nu might have expected his armed forces leaders to “possess a sophisticated understanding of civilian control and actively promote it, for in the process of policy and decision making, senior officers must abstain from insinuating their own preferred policy outcomes or outmaneuvering civilian authority even when they can get away with it. (Richard Kohn 1997 p146)” And obviously Nu and his political colleagues were not aware of what Huntington prescribed in his seminal *Third Wave*: “Clarify and consolidate the chain of command over the armed forces. Remove ambiguities or anomalies, making clear that the civilian head of

the government is the commander of the military (1991,p252).” Nu and his colleagues steeped in the tradition of the British parliamentary democracy might have believed that even though the entire military institution was always not loyal and committed to the country and the cause of democracy the handful of important leaders must be. With regard to the preconditions for democratization in contemporary Latin America, Karl had this to say: “Thus, the search for a set of identical conditions that can account for the presence or absence of democratic regimes should probably be abandoned and replaced by more modest efforts to derive a contextually bounded approach to the study of democratization (1990, p5).” Democratic leaders should in their endeavor to transform their country toward democracy and consolidate it so that it could be handed down from one generation to the other the best way to do it is “a contextually bounded approach.” Nu did make tremendous effort to democratize and to generate democratic deepening in Burma:” Nu made two brave attempts to help democracy take root in his country. Nu said ,”the first was the formation in 1950 of the Society for the Extension of Democratic ideals..... Nu’s second spirited effort to revise and promote the ideals of democracy, through an unassailable National Foundation, will be discussed in a later chapter (1975 p224).” In these two chapters on his attempts to deepen democracy in Burma, he did not say anything about the importance of the civilian control over the military; he failed to realize that the civil war and the Kuomintang (KMT) aggression in the northeast had turned the once lean and hungry Burmese army into a Leviathan threatening the freedom of the country and the value of democracy. Unlike the immediate post-WWII period, the Burmese army in the late 1950s was more aggressive and autonomous: the new army in the new context. U Nu and his colleagues ignored the fact that context is everything.

In Chapter 1, I explained why I used the historical institutionalism as my research approach and why it was a better strategy than other two approaches – RCI and BI. I also examined some concepts of democracy and democratization processes in the literature pointing out that only few scholars argue clearly and definitely the importance of civilian control over military in the survival of democracy. I argued that the fact the Nu's government downplayed the growing strength of the Burmese military led to the caretaker government and ultimately to the military coup in 1962. In Chapter 2, I will describe the politics in Burma from 1945 when the Japanese withdrew to 1948 when Burma became independent in some detail following the discussion of how politics in the modern and Western sense came into existence in the feudalistic country. The period was important as the sequel to the Burmese struggle against colonialism first and then the Japanese army, which was the precursor to the civil war and the rise of the Burmese military. In Chapter 3, the theme is the civil war which has been going on in this land of multi-ethnicity until now. The first three years of the civil war was so huge and horrendous in scale that Nu's government was called by the foreign press as the Rangoon (Yangon) government as only 10 % of the country was in the hands of the government. The might of the military increased with the intensity of the civil war. On top of that, the remnant Kuomintang troops with the help of the CIA were entrenching in the northwest of Burma preparing to invade mainland China. In Chapter 4, the growing strength and power of the military is discussed. The military under the leadership of Ne Win was changing from a localized army into a modern institution interacting with the international organizations which posed a challenge to the democratic government. The split of the ruling party AFPFL is the core of Chapter V. In reverse proportion to the

rising military, the political institution was weakened by the internal bickering and U Nu's impulsive behavior. The rise of the military and the decline of the politicians climaxed in the three year rule of the military which was called by some scholars as the caretaker government and by some scholars and U Nu ,in his autobiography, as a coup. Chapter 6 is all about the caretaker government – its paramount leader, General Ne Win and its unpopularity the majority of the people. In Chapter 7 - Conclusion, I summed up the views of some historians and political scientists over the three year military rule adding my own views. Many feel that the three-year military rule is prelude to the 1962 overthrow of the legitimate Nu's government. I discussed briefly about the two year interval when the reelected Nu's government was spearheading its effort to revise the constitution with the active participation of the ethnic leaders when the chief-of-staff of the army, General Ne Win, seized the state power seemingly effortlessly on the grounds that the country is facing the danger of disintegration imposed by some ethnic leaders with their proposition of federalism.

Chapter 2: Tumultuous Pre-Independence Politics (1945-1948)

The politics before Burma achieved Independence in January 4, 1948 was dominated by Aung San who was assassinated together with his cabinet members by his political rivals in July 19, 1947 at the age of 33 at the apex of his career. Though died young, Aung San's influence as a national and political leader still impacts and affects millions of people – Burmese as well as ethnic nationals - up to this moment. Even though he was a student leader, a political leader and the founder of the Burmese military he had never wielded empirical state power; he was organizing the first democratic government after the Constituent Assembly election on 9 April 1947 when he got killed; such was his moral authority that all country's leaders after him – dictators or democrats – recognize his name and legacy. Aung San caught the attention of the country as a leading member of the Rangoon Students' Union in 1936. Since then he dominated the Burmese political arena until his untimely and violent death. Burmese politics has been dominated by great personalities be they heroes or villains. The parliamentary democracy period from 1948 – 1962 was led by Nu, a close associate of Aung San. It is too early to say how history will judge his role in the Burmese history. The one-party state period 1962 – 1988 was controlled with bloody hands by Ne Win, an ex-general and also a colleague of Aung San. The military dictatorship period 1988 – 2010 was controlled with bloodier hands by Senior General Than Swe, a protégée of Ne Win. One of the primary reasons the country's politics was dominated by personalities than by politicians and their

politics might be better explained by the frail institution of politics itself that came to the life of the multitude of the Burmese people only in mid-19th century in the days of colonialism. The word politics whose equivalent in Burmese was nang-gan-yei was coined only in that period. Before that, the Burmese called politics as the affairs of state and they were happy to leave it in the hands of the king and his court. Steinberg pointed out that, “it seems evident that the magical nature of the ruler (the Burmese king was sometimes known as an “embryo Buddha”) produced highly personalized rule and concepts of authority (2001, p37). It was the British raj who unveiled to the educated handful the wonders of democratic politics. The democratic ideas that slowly sank into the mind of the Burmese intelligentsia were not without some obstructions. These obstructions were created by none other than the British themselves - the apostles of democracy - who did not practice what they preached. The skepticism of democracy as effective political ideas had taken root among the most Burmese since the colonial days. My hypothesis is that the skepticism was uprooted only in the 1988 student-led democracy upheaval after 26 years under the totalitarian rule of Ne Win. This skepticism helped explain why communism and fascism found ardent followers in the colonial days and some influential intellectuals still have sentimental attachment to communism. Aung San himself was one of the founders of the Burma Communist Party; his strong patriotism and shrewd political insight prevented him from being deeply committed to communism. The pre-independence politics could not be separated from the dynamic personality and pragmatic politics of Aung San. And the pre-independence politics has been haunting the contemporary Burmese political landscape ever since the country became an independent nation.

Politics in Burma Before WWII

Burma had been a kingdom since 11th century AD. The last Burmese dynasty (1752-1886), named the Konbaungsetl, was founded by Alaungpaya, a great warrior king. His descendants became the terror of their neighbors. According to D.G.E. Hall, “they reduced Chingmai, burnt Ayuthia to the ground, rolled back invading Chinese armies, conquered Arakan, ravaged Manipur, Kachar and Jaintia, and finally gained control Assam. Expansion and conquest were the keynotes of Burmese policy up to 1824 (1998, p87).” Burma fell under British rule in three wars. While the British became a global power with the most powerful navy roaming and looting with impunity in the late 19th century, court intrigues and obsolete feudalism had weakened Burma which Hall called “a sort of Arcadian backwater (1998,p147).”¹ The first war (1824-6) was originated in a border dispute and British occupied the provinces of Tenasserim, Arakan, and Assam, the first two provinces were the provider of trade revenue to the king. The second war (1852-3) arose out of a series of minor incidents and the entire lower Burma fell into the hands of British leaving the country with no access to the sea. The pretext created by the British for the last war (1885-6) was a dispute between the Burmese officials and the Bombay Burma Trading Company over illegal logging. The British believed that the annexation would give them access to huge Chinese market and

¹ The last dynasty of the Burmese Kingdom founded by Alaung paya in 1752. The British occupied the country during the reign of the last and eleventh king, Thibaw.

exploitation of Burma's rich natural resources. The pacification of Burma took longer than expected - almost ten years as the Burmese Army refused to surrender and carried on widespread guerrilla. Aung San's grandfather was one of the rebel leaders and later was captured and beheaded. In 1826 when the British assumed the task of ruling Arakan and Tenasserim, they were separately administered under the direct supervision of the Governor-General of India but Arakan was transferred to the Government of Bengal (Hall 1998, p138) The revenue system was overhauled and the British Indian penal code replaced the old Burmese system; the commissioner and his assistants became the sole judge in every court. While the local administrations were performed by the government appointees replacing the hereditary and tradition village chiefs, the higher civil service became more and more centralized after the Indian style. Though the Buddhist Religious Order was not as powerful as before, it was the monastic schools provided by the Buddhist monks and lay schools supervised by the British education authorities that existed side by side offering education to the Burmese students. More Anglo-vernacular schools were established as the demand for clerical workers arose for the government jobs and the European businesses. One of the Anglo-Vernacular schools, Rangoon Government High School, founded in 1873 became Rangoon College in 1884 and began to prepare students for the degrees in India. Gradually but assuredly the conquered Burmese people were dragged into the modern life style of the 20th century not out of goodwill and volition by the colonialists but out of exploitative intentions.

The Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) in the fashion of YMCA was founded in 1906 with the objectives of promoting Buddhism, education and culture. There had been some associations in the same vein they were more religious. YMBA's

patrons were from Rangoon College – Ba Pe, Maung Gyee, Ba Yin, Sein Hla Aung and their friends. It was not a threat to the British Government; their conferences begun with “God save the King” and ended with the prayer for the long life of the British Monarch. Soon the associations spread across the country drawing people from the educated as well as the government officials. But it provided a venue for the young intellectual to talk about various issues; the most important among them was politics - more in English than in Burmese. The first newspaper Thuriya (The Sun), published in 1911, gave full support to the YMBA activities. It was the WWI that shook the Burmese from political lethargy. According to Dr. Maung Maung: “Britain, having to rely on manpower and material resources of the empire, felt compelled to promise an “increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible self-government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.” Burma – an administration unit of the Indian empire since annexation, and a province under a Lieutenant-governor – was vitally interested (1969, p 6). The YMBA sent a delegation to London in 1919 and again in 1920 to negotiate with the British politician for more autonomy. In 1920, the General Council of Burmese Association (GCBA) was founded under the leadership of the YMBA with the aim of promoting national cause. The GCBA had a greater appeal to the whole nation. In December, 1920, students of the Rangoon College staged a strike in protest against the Lieutenant-Governor Sir Reginald Craddock’s proposal to establish a residential university on the pattern of Oxford and Cambridge. The strikers believed that program would prevent impoverished students from having access to tertiary education. The strike was a success and the Rangoon University which was opened in 1922 had no requirement

for the students to be residential. The GCBA gave its full blessing to the strike and helped later to establish a Council of National Education (CNE) to build a system of national schools across the country and a national college in Rangoon. One of the professors who taught the Burmese history and literature was Thakin Kodaw Hmaing aka U Lun who later became a mentor to Aung San and Nu. Burma became a Governor's province in 1921 under a Dyarchy system and few cabinet posts such as education, public health and local government were handed over to the Burmese politicians. Whether or not to accept the government posts under the dyarchical system split the GCBA into three splinter groups in 1920. Meanwhile the influx of cheap Indian laborers and poor crops adversely affected the peasants who made up 80% of the country's population. One splinter group encouraged the peasants not to pay the taxes and some listened to the advice. That led to a peasant rebellion led by a member of the splinter group called Saya San who turned into a legendary revolutionary in the modern Burmese history. The rebellion was crushed and Saya San was hanged though his legal team did all they could to defend him. Two of his lawyers were Dr Ba Maw, a French-trained politician and Thakin Mya, a socialist both of whom played a leading role in the country's independence movement.

1930 was one of the tumultuous years in pre-independence history. There were racial riots: first, between Indians laborers and their Burmese counterparts over the wages; then between the Chinese ethnic minority and the Burmese in Rangoon. With the peasant rebellion still waging in Central Burma, the ardent patriotism flared up. People are dissatisfied with the old politicians who were ineffective in negotiating more autonomy and more willing to work hand in glove with the colonial government. Against this background was born a political party called the Do Bama Asi Ayone (Our Burma

Association). In those days the British officials preferred to be called with a title in Burmese “Thakin” before their names – the title which most probably would be “Lord” in English. That was the way the royal Burmese officials were called by the Burmese subjects. The members of the newly-founded DBAA put the title “Thakin” before their names sending the message to all and sundry that they were the true lords of their land. The British highly resented the DBAA members whereas the Burmese appreciated them as true patriots. The Simon commission sent by the British Government studied the diarchy system in India and Burma suggested that Burma be separated from India. To be or not to be separated from India became a point to moot in the political and social life of the country. Politicians as well as the leaders of civil society actively and fiercely took part in the argument of national scale out of which emerged two political leaders who would have great impact in the course of Burmese history per se. One was Dr Ba Maw, urbane and intellectual, he was a barrister-at-law and a doctor of philosophy from the University of Bordeaux. Another was U Saw, ambitious and demagogic, he was a self-made millionaire and a lower grade pleader. Both belonged to the Governor’s legislative council. A new constitution that separated Burma from India was constituted with the Government of Burma Act in 1935. Both of them came to the national limelight after the separation issue together with some Rangoon University students whose fates were intertwined with the two ambitious veteran politicians.

The Split between the AFPFL and the Burma Communist Party (BCP)

The early 1930s saw the gradual rise of DBAA as more militant and organized party. Its party anthem composed by a member (himself a noted musician) with the contribution of lyrics by the DBAA leadership aroused the latent nationalism to its

highest and later became the country's national anthem. The leadership was made up of educated young men like Thakin Ba Thaung and Thakin Ba Sein as well as the Burmese scholar like Thakin Kodaw Hmaing, whose activism, literary contributions and patriotic fervor attracted a multitude of ordinary citizens as well as the student leaders from the Rangoon University. The membership of the student leaders launched the DBAA into the center of the national focus. The Rangoon University had established the student union (RUSU) in 1931 as a forum to express and discuss the student issues. Before 1934, the union was under the control of the students who were apolitical and manageable by the universities authorities. In 1935-36 academic year students reflecting the mood of the country took over the reins. Among them were Nu, Aung San, Kyaw Nyein, Ohn, Thein Pe, Hla Pe, and Rashid who were full of ideas to change the status-quo. Nu became the president of the RUSU and Aung San its magazine editor. Both read widely and contributed to the journals and literary magazines. They arranged debates and lectures, and invited prominent personalities and politician like Thakin Kodaw Maing, Dr. Ba Maw and U Saw to deliver speeches. Than Tun, a student from the teacher Training College was also an active participant and became a member of these revolutionary students. Majority of the university students were resentful of the highhandedness of some university officials. When Nu gave a speech critical of the immoral behavior of these authorities and Aung San published an article satirizing them, both of them were expelled from the university. That was the origin of the strike of 1936 which Angelene Naw in her *Aung San and the Struggle for Burmese Independence* described as "a landmark in the nationalist movement because it provided Burma with a generation of nationalist leaders who would guide the Burmese people in their fight for freedom against

the British (2001 ,p28).” The university strike which became a major issue in the Governor’s legislative council and the front page news of the local papers fostered the unity of the youth of the country. Although the students received short of all their demands Nu and Aung San as well as those who were expelled from school were reinstated. The leadership qualities of both Nu and Aung San were tested and lifted them up into national prominence. Aung San became the vice president of the RUSU in 1936; in 1938, he was elected as the president of both RUSU and ABSU (All Burma Student Union). In October 1938, he joined the DBAA dragging along Nu with him. Soon other student leaders Thein Pe, Than Tun, Hla Pe joined their ranks and were warmly welcomed by Thakin Kodaw Hmaing and other DBAA leaders. Aung San and Nu were soon elected as general secretary and treasurer of the party.

The general strike of 1938 – its equivalent in the Burmese calendar is 1300 – was a turning point in Burmese history, waking up the entire country that something serious must be done to be freed from the colonial yokes. The strike of 1938 or the Revolution of 1300 was the apex of several strikes, riots, demonstrations. The workers from the BOC oilfields from Chauk in the mid-country marched to the capital, Rangoon, to air their grievances publicly and the 20,000 cultivators from the city of Waw also joined in their march to show solidarity. The two RU students, Ba Hein and Ba Swe, were arrested when they gave a fiery speech to the marchers. The RU students sieged the Secretariat, the center of the British government, to protest the arrest and one of them was killed when the police on horsebacks tried to break the demonstration. The unity between the workers, peasants and students were forged in the Revolution of 1300. Angelena Naw wrote: “While older leaders such as Thakins Kodaw Hmaing and Mya delivered speeches

and were visible up front, Aung San and the younger members drew the guidelines and demands for the strike from behind the scene. Without their leadership, the strike would not have lasted as long as nor achieved such success (2001, p43).” Word spread round the country that when the strikes are over, the armed struggle must begin. The young political leaders came to realize that the non-violent resistant would not dislodge the colonialist from power; only by violent means the usurpers be vanquished.

The first congress of the Burma Communist Party was held secretly in August, 1936 electing Aung San as its general secretary. Ba Hein, Thein Pe and Hla Pe were there. The two prominent communist leaders Thakin Than Tun and Thakin Soe were not the founders of the party. It was Dr. Thein Maung, an associate of Dr. Ba Maw, who brought back some Marxist Books from London after a conference there. The Marxist literature was popular with young political leaders as they were impressed with the idea of classless society where there is no exploitation of man by man and where man gets according to his needs. Dr. Maung Maung wrote:” Socialism, Communism, Marxism, all these were interchangeable terms in their minds, and all meant national independence as the essential foundation on which a society of affluence and social justice would be built (1969, p54).” Aung San with the exceptional qualities of the potential leader did not become a full-fledged Communist as he went underground and soon went to Japan with a friend called Thakin Hla Myaing on 8 August 1941 to seek help from them to build a national army. More comrades joined him and they were intensively trained on Hainan Island by the Japanese Army whose ulterior motive was to conquer China using Burma as the back door. The WW II came to Burma when Japanese air force attacked an airfield in Tavoy in southern Burma. Rangoon was bombed on 23 and 25 December. Those who underwent

rigorous training under Japanese army - all told thirty young patriots - were later known as the “Thirty Comrades” who made up the nucleus of the Burmese Independence Army. On 12 December 1941, the thirty comrades and their advisor Col Suzuki set up headquarters in Bangkok and organized the Burmese Independence Army with the Burmese expatriates there. The BIA with the assistance of the Japanese Army marched into Burma in January 1942 and got to Rangoon in March. The thirty comrades gathered from different groups of political persuasions had socialists, communists and conservatives among the group, the BIA soldiers themselves reflecting their leaders’ political loyalties. The socialists and the communists were trying to recruit new members out of the BIA; the rivalry was intense but the supreme leader, Aung San’s neutral stance prevented the rivalry from messing things all up. The credit must be given to the underground Communist party for educating and agitating the people to drive the Fascist Japanese from the country. Though the Japanese government invited the Burmese politicians to Tokyo to form an independence government in August 1, 1942 under the premiership of Dr. Ba Maw, it was the Japanese Army and its military police - Kempeitang - who called the shots. The people suffered a lot as the Japanese Army prepared to invade both China and India. There were the communist cadres underground organizing the people to rise up against the Fascist Japanese. The Dr. Ba Maw government agreed to work together with the socialists and the Burmese Army to drive the Japanese out of the country. They made contact with the Allied forces which infiltrated into the northern Burma and were waging guerilla warfare with the local ethnic militias. In September 1942, the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL) was formed with Thakin Than Tun from the Burma Communist Party (BCP) as the general

secretary and Aung San as its military commander. A communist leader, Thakin Thein Pe, was in Calcutta, India as a liaison between the AFPFL and the allies. When the Burmese rose up against the Japanese Fascists in March 27, 1945, it was the joint effort of the communist guerillas and the Burmese army that brought the prompt success in the Allies' endeavors to reoccupy Burma, which impressed even the skeptical mighty allied commanders. The communists came out of the war more organized and popular, more powerful and stronger than ever in rivalry with other political parties. Around the world, the communism was in quick ascendant as the Soviet routed the Nazis in the Western front and the Chinese communist party was soon to crush its nemesis, the Kuomintang. The post-WW II Burma found the AFPFL fighting in two fronts – one against the British Governor -General and his exiled government who came back from Simla, a hill station in India and the other against the more self-assured BCP. The Governor-General brought with him a white paper plan which envisaged Burma under direct administration of the governor wielding his emergency powers before the independence was considered. But the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Southeast Asia, Lord Louis Mountbatten, a shrewd strategist nudged the new British administration in Burma in such a way that the Aung San-Atlee agreement was signed in London on January 20 between the AFPFL delegation led by Aung San and the British Prime Minister, Clement Atlee. According to the agreement, elections would be held for a Constituent Assembly and the Governor's Executive Council would be filled from the AFPFL whose members in greater number (six out of nine) would act as the provisional government until a constitution was adopted. On the other hand, Aung San was not so lucky in dealing with his communist compatriots on. When he became the deputy head of the newly formed Governor's

council in September 1946 he did not include Than Tun in his cabinet. Socialist leader Thakin Mya was given the home ministry. William C. Johnstone in his Burma's Foreign Policy wrote: "When Aung San refused Than Tun's pleas for greater communist representation in the Council, he declared a general strike against the AFPFL government. AS responded by expelling the Burma Communist from the AFPFL and members of this group from positions occupied in the trade union organizations (1963,p30)." Though Aung San and Than Tun worked in unity militarily and politically in the anti-Fascist resistant the new empirical context pushed them in a confrontational way: the context of the victorious communist ideology against the rising nationalism. There was also the rivalry of two strong personalities: Aung San the aggressive strategist and Than Tun the introvert tactician. The result that is the split between the two powerful political parties had the impact of a tsunami – the distant earthquake turned into a deadly flood later on – the split in 1946 fostered the wildfire of communist revolt in 1948 which has resonated into 21st century.

The Panlong Agreement

As the British's policy of divide and rule was the most effective in sowing the seed of discord in multi-ethnic society, misunderstanding between the Burmese majority and the ethnic minorities came into sharp focus when the struggle for total independence from the British came to its final chapters. A sharper focus of Aung San's political skills came into view when he persuaded the important leaders of the ethnic groups to come to the negotiation table and reached an agreement with them to be partners in the negotiation for total independence. The British colonialists had stipulated rules and regulations that separated not only one ethnic group from another but within the same

ethnic group itself. When Prime Minister Atlee invited the AFPFL to discuss the transfer of power on 20 December 1946, both sides understood the pivotal issue would be the ethnic problems or the question of the Frontier Areas. As Aung San was under pressure from the communists as well as the ultra-conservative like U Saw who were taking advantage of the demand of the entire nation of total freedom immediately at all costs , the agreement he reached with the ethnic leaders was ad hoc in essence not thoroughly thrashed out with visionary foresight and strategic wisdom. The civil war that broke out just after the Independence was the consequences of the Panlong Agreement whose foundation was laid in a hurry. The ethnic insurgents almost always finger the Panlong Agreement whenever they are asked for the reason of the armed struggle. The Agreement compelled the central government to include in the 1947 constitution that the Shan State and the Kayah State could secede after 10 years of the promulgation of the constitution. Also included in the Panlong Agreement was that all the ethnic peoples has the equal rights and opportunities. It was the Burmese Army - the least democratic institution in the country - that interacted mostly with the ethnic minorities and its heavy-handed behavior that generated the hatred and resentment of the minorities.

After the British conquest, all the ethnicities were administered in different ways unlike the way the major group ,the Burmese, were administered. Whereas the Kachin tribes in the hilly northern parts were under the rule of the Shan in the days of the Burmese Kings, the British treated them as the two different entities. U Maung Maung in his *Burmese Nationalist Movements (1940-1948)* states: “Races could only mix in the towns bordering the hill areas, which from time immemorial had been trading centers – town like Myitkyina, Bhamo, Katha, Mohnyin and Mogaung. These towns also served as

administration headquarters and also constituency areas of municipal and district councils and the Burma Legislative Council (1990, p274).” The missionary established schools in those areas where they spread the Christian gospels and racial hatreds. The first move was made by the British in February 1946 to persuade the tribes in hill areas not to join the independent Burma in a conference led by H.N.C. Stevenson, the director of the Frontier Areas Administration (FAA) attended by Burmese politicians and ethnic leaders. He did not succeed. U Maung Maung wrote: “However the leaders of the Shan States People’s Freedom League and the Youth League had been very active and had actually built up a momentum of public opinion for independence together with Burma (1996,p279). On 8 February Aung San met with the ethnic leaders as well as the people’s representatives in Panlong, a small town in the Southern Shan States, in a conference which was also attended by the British officials. Aung San explained to them that Burma would be independent within a year as the result of the London talk and that they could struggle for their independence on their own or joined with the Burmese in achieving the independence. If they chose the latter he was ready to sign an agreement with them. He promised to make the agreed terms into a law so that they had the guarantee for the future, and told them to have no fear of Burma (U Maung Maung 1990, p282). The Panlong Agreement was successfully concluded in 12 February 1947 between Aung San on behalf of the Governor’s council and the hill peoples the Shans, the Kachins and the Chins. Most probably the most important clause in all the nine clauses of the Agreement is no. (vii) which states that citizens of the frontier areas enjoy the rights and privileges which are regarded as fundamental in democratic countries. Empirically, the Panlong A was between the Burmese majority and the ethnic peoples in the Northern Frontier Areas

– the Shans, the Chins, the Kayahs, and the Kachins but spiritually it encompassed all the ethnic minorities like Karen, Mons and Rhakhines who reside in the low lands. And all the minorities oftentimes accuse the Burmese that they fail to abide by the spirit of Panlong. The ethnic conflict is still raging in Burma and the ethnic groups are demanding a new Panlong conference between the Burmese majority and the ethnic minorities.

The Assassination of Aung San and His Cabinet

Aung San and his cabinet were assassinated at 10:20 am on July 19th, 1947 by the machine gun wielding assassins sent by his political rival, U Saw in the Secretariat, the center of colonial power, in downtown Rangoon. Who and how he was killed was not so important as to why he was killed. Some called Aung San the Architect of Burma's Freedom and Independence and it was no exaggeration. While he was alive since the days he became a college student he was obsessed with the country's freedom. In every movement he made, as a RUSU leader, a DBAS leader, the founder of the BIA and the political leader of the post WWII Burma, he tirelessly campaigned and fought for the noble cause of country in different contexts and terrains inspiring and setting an example to his countrymen. Most of his time was so much in the eye of the public - as a student union leader, a political activist, a soldier and a political leader - that if his official biography were written by his friends, relatives and family the most complete story of his life as well as the country would have come out of it.. Whereas there was a multitude that adored and followed him, there were quite a few who felt that their vested interests were threatened and their prospects dimmed. U Saw was one of the latter. Ambitious and ruthless, he perceived Aung San as a usurper who was stealing his lawful throne. The

power behind U Saw was a clique of arch-conservatives in Whitehall like Churchill and some scheming xenophobic British intelligence officers in Burma who would like to preserve the empire and throw as many obstacles as possible on the way of the freedom fighters. Churchill's personal animosity toward Aung San was legendary. Michael Charney in his *A History of Modern Burma* (2009) pointed out that Winston Churchill continued to deride Aung San, even after his assassination, as a "traitor rebel leaders," the organizer of a "Quisling army," and a man guilty of "great cruelties" against loyal Burmese during the war. Only when the British Army advanced into Burma did AS, "whose hands were dyed with British blood and loyal Burmese blood," conveniently switched to the Allied side (ibid, p68). The primary reason U Saw wanted to see Aung San dead was to grab his job as the new leader of Burma. The primary reason behind the British schemers was insidious and snow-balling. They knew very well that nobody could replace AS who was a charismatic savior to his people with hero-worshipping tendency. The involvement of low-level British involvement in the assassination could not be concealed from the incriminating evidences. On 15th Aung San and the acting Home Minister reported to the Governor the discovery of issue by the Burma Ordnance Depot of 200 Bren guns with 800 spare barrels to persons unknown some weeks ago (U Maung Maung 1990,p316). Nu also reported to the Governor an issue by Advance Ammunition Depot of the Burma Command of a great quantity of ammunition to strangers (ibid). All these news published in the local newspaper raised the public concern. A huge cache of arms and ammunition were found in U Saw's house in the search after the assassination and Major Vivian, Arms advisor to Burma Police was arrested for providing the false document to U Saw's men so that they could collect those arms supplies. Newspapers

also reported that there were two British Brigadiers, Nash and Knight right underneath the room where the assassination took place and drove away immediately afterward (U Maung Maung, 1990, p317). When in prison before his execution, Saw wrote to Vivian and his letters were intercepted by the loyal prison staff. And there was U Saw's letter to a British Council officer nicknamed "Tall Man" who later turned out to be Bingley led to the interrogation of him by the CID. The daily newspapers were filled with the British complicity so much so that the Governor demanded a categorical refutation from the head of the Burmese political movement and government (U Maung Maung, 1990, p320). The AFPFL leaders who were more concerned with the attainment of independence downplayed the involvement of the British in the assassination. In any case, wrote U Maung Maung, the Burmese leaders were sorely intimidated. U Saw and his accomplices were hanged after the due process of law.

Conclusion

The Burmese politics which came into being only in the 1930s was slow in its institutionalization process and relied too much on the capacity of its leaders especially Aung San and Nu. Unlike India which was hardly affected by the WWII and which enjoyed the cooperation between its political leaders and the British occupier, the infrastructure for political institutionalization in Burma was disrupted badly by the WWII. The post-WWII politics was ridden with ideological rivalry and personality clashes. Nu had effectively retired from politics beginning his life as a writer when the Japanese army surrendered. Only Aung San whom the British Prime Minister Atlee called "a statesman of considerable capacity and wisdom" was the unifier and builder of the country. With his untimely violent death, the Independence was won without its

architect. Resilient and tactful, his charisma and leadership skills won him the trust of the ethnic leaders and the cooperation of the British Government. One of the primary reasons there was the split between the AFPFL and the BCP was the jealousy of the BCP leaders toward Aung San's achievements. To ensure that the Burmese political scene was free from competition, they urged him to lead the fledgling Burmese Army instead of getting involved in the Burmese politics. They attacked him fiercely in their dailies and their speeches when he decided to become a full time politician. They momentarily relented after Aung San's assassination. It was too late; Burma no longer had her effective leaders who could reconcile the powerful feuding parties – the communists and the socialists. Assassinated together with Aung San were some ethnic leaders who were cooperative and broad-minded. The Panlong Agreement was reflected in the 1947 constitution registering the unfulfilled desires of some ethnic groups. Many believed the disintegration of unity among the ethnic groups was the death of Aung San whose integrity and trustworthiness were the underpinnings of the constitution. The British - most probably the clique of the arch conservative - knew very well with their superior knowledge of politics that they had done permanent damage to the country's well-being by snuffing out the life of Aung San by proxy. Aung San as the founder of the Burmese Army has a tremendous moral authority over the soldiers as well as the generals. It was common knowledge that were Aung San alive, there would never have been dictatorship in Burma. Aung San in his many speeches warned his soldiers to be always loyal to their country and people. He always urged them to be of service to the people not the other way around. He always urged the people to be on the alert against demagogues and dictators. Without leaders like Aung San, the military institution under the leadership of

other strong and scheming leaders was ready to take over the country's rein when the political institution began to show the signs of crack. The caretaker government or the mini-coup in the late 1950s, the precursor to the path-dependence process of the military occupation of Burma, was born out of the nuanced context of political situations in the pre-independence era.

Chapter 3: The Post-Independence Civil War

The split of the mainstream AFPFL party and the BCP, the decimation of the ethnic leaders in the assassination of Aung San, the untimely demise of the Independence architect, Aung San, laid the grounds for the civil war just after the independence which was celebrated on January 4, 1948. None of those events were inevitable. As in most cases, it was strong personalities and conflicting ideologies that were behind those tragic events. Aung San and Than Tun worked closely in the struggle for freedom from the British and the Japanese: Aung San as the Chairman of the AFPFL and Thann Tun as its General Secretary. They married the sisters who were the nurses when Burma was under the Japanese Fascism. Aung San was aggressive and pragmatic while Than Tun was introverted and ideologue. The schism between the Communists and the AFPFL was much to do with their personalities. The rebellion of the Communist after the Independence was ideology-driven. Following the assassination, many able leaders from the AFPFL were lost. When the communists went underground, few able leaders with integrity were left in U Nu's government. All the ethnic rebellion took advantage of the disunity between the dominant ethnic majority, the Burmese; they believed it was the most opportune moment to seize power and establish the autonomous regions of their own especially the Karen. Unlike other ethnicities, Karen had an intimate relation with the British occupiers. Some of them were converted into Baptism in the mid-1800s and

some recruited into the British army seeing actions in the WWI. The close relations with the British made them more politically awakened and consequently the Karen National Association was founded in 1881. It was succeeded by the Karen Central Organization in 1945. The Karen National Union (KNU) was formed out of the remnants of the KCO in 1947 (Charney 2009, p67). The KNU was politically and militarily strongest after the BCP when the insurrection broke out after the Independence with the establishment of its military wing, the Karen Nation Liberation Army (KNLA). The KNU and KNLA were the biggest threats to the survival of the fledgling Nu's government and one of the strongest justifications in the rising of the military institution.

The Divide and Rule of the Retreating British Government

When Aung San and the Burmese delegation went to London to negotiate Independence for Burma with the British Cabinet and the British Office from January 13 to January 28, the main obstacle was the Frontier Areas issue. U Maung Maung wrote "Indeed, H.N.C. Stevenson, the Director of the Frontier Areas Administration (FAA), had developed a plan to create a great horseshoe of tribal territory directly under his apartment and surrounding "Ministerial Burma" (i.e. Burma proper), stretching from the Arakan hills tracts through the Chin Hills on the Indian border, into the Kachin hills in the north, annexing some of the Burmese areas which were part of "Ministerial Burma", stretching down through the Shan States in the east of the Karenni States, parts of Toungoo District, into the hill district of Salween, with parts of Thaton and Moulmein, and reaching as far south as Victoria Point at the southernmost tip of Burma, absorbing the entire mineral-rich Tenasserim Division. (1990, p256)" The negotiation table turned into a verbal battleground for the Burmese delegates in defend of the country's territorial

integrity. The battle was won with the signing of the Panlong agreement between the AFPFL led by Aung San and the leaders and the people of the Frontier Areas on February 1947 pledging to live together and cooperate each other. The Whitehall had their own plan for the future army of the post-WWII Burma consisted of two parts without taken into consideration the army led by Aung San and his Japanese-trained thirty comrades fighting and beating the Japanese Fascists with the help of the Allied Army under the command of Mountbatten. This formation of post-WWII army set out by the Simla-based Governor Dorman Smith fitted with what Stevenson planned politically and geographically for Burma. Mary Callahan described the two armies this way: “One would encompass the Upper Burma, central plains, delta and southern archipelago areas. This “Burma” would be protected by an army made up of loyal “Burmese” – mostly Karen, Indians and Anglo-Burmese. The other Burma in this plan was the territory around the borders. The army in these areas would remain British-officered, with the rank and file coming from the hill peoples who had worked with the Allies during the war. The British government embraced the two-Burma principle of Simla’s plan and formalized it in their White Paper, issued in April 1945 (Making Enemies 2003,p93).” The idea of Burma having two armies unfolded in a dramatic and violent way which did not help the unstable, volatile post-independence Burma.

The two army proposal was turned down by the AFPFL whose Japanese-trained army routed their erstwhile ally and was hailed by the Allied Supreme Commander, Mountbatten, as effective partners in his operations against the Japanese. Mountbatten reconciled the AFPFL and the Colonial Administration Service Burma (CAS-B) with his two-wing solution in July 1945: one consisted of ethnic Burmese soldiers led by a

Burmese Deputy Inspector General (DIG) and another of non-Burmese led by a DIG from one of Kachin, Chin, Karen minorities. Both sides embraced the Mountbatten's plan. Wrote Callahan: "At a meeting of July 11 in Rangoon with Major General Rance, Brigadier K.J.H.Lindop, and several other military and civil affair personnel, Aung San agreed to the 12th Army's plan to raise new battalions distributed accordingly – four Burmese battalions, two Karen battalions, two Kachin battalions, and two Chin battalions (2003,p95)." Aung San with his exceptional political acumen knew that his combat-proved, hard-driven four battalions would be legitimized by this agreement to become the core of the Burmese army in the turbulent future. Nonetheless, the two-wing solution meant two armies with two separate identities and traditions, two different aspirations and inspirations which were determined to go in different directions instead of making meaningful efforts to be united and to work together toward a common destiny.

On September 6-7 1945 after the official surrender of the Japanese in August 1945, Mountbatten invited the AFPFL led by AS along with officials from the Allied forces and the officials from the CAS-B to implement his two-wing approach to his headquarters in Kandy, Ceylon. The Kandy Agreement fulfilled the wish of Aung San and other AFPFL leaders to have a nucleus of the future Burmese army from which they would expand and enlarge into a strong national force. On the other hand, with the clever manipulation of the British officials, the ethnic wing was given the training opportunities and access to higher positions in the military hierarchy. Instead of fostering ethnic homogeneity, the ultimate consequence was the two armies of different ethnicity under the same military organization bearing grudge and watching each other suspiciously with their own hidden political agendas. At the end of Candy Conference in September 1945, Aung San rejected

his appointment as the DIG in the Burmese wing of the army in October and plunged headlong into politics. About thirty-five hundred ex-resistant fighters did not register for regular enlistment in the Burmese wing of the British-created Army and instead formed the Pyithu Yebaw Ahpwe, in English the People's Volunteer Organization (PVO), which in effect was a paramilitary force loyal to Aung San (Bertil Lintner Burma in Revolt 1999,p74). The hierarchy of the PVO mirrored that of the army, with Aung San serving as commander in chief (Callahan 2003 ,p109).

Bo Let Ya, a student leader of RUSU and a trainee in Japan together with Aung San, was appointed DIG of the Burmese wing and signed the Britain-Burma Defense Agreement with John Freeman, the leader of the UK Defense Mission on 29 August 1947 (Hugh Tinker The Union of Burma 1961 ,p32). In the agreement, it was agreed that the Burmese Government was not allowed to accept any other mission from outside the Commonwealth. In accordance with the agreement, the British Services Mission was established to oversee training and procurement for the Burmese Army. Some Burmese military officers were not pleased with all the clauses in the agreement; they conceived it as too pro-British. Bo Let Ya who was a senior commander trusted by Aung San got unpopular because of his pro-British stance. When Aung San and his cabinet was assassinated in July 1947 with the weapons supposed to be provided by the British intelligence officers, Bo Let Ya's career as a military leader came to an end. When another senior military leader Bo Zeya trusted by Aung San went into underground with the BCP, it was Bo Ne Win alone who remained at the helms of the Burmese Army and who ,taking advantage of the position, became the interim prime minister of the

Caretaker Government and later the first dictator of the Burmese military regime (1962-1988).

The Communists Went Underground

Besides the two wing armies, there were two ideological groupings in the Burmese wing of the military organization reflecting the ideological conflict in the AFPFL between the BCP and the Socialist Party. The first distinct crack appeared within the BCP igniting the first step toward the civil war. The second Communist Party Congress was held on 20-21 July 1945 in Rangoon. The BCP as a force to be reckoned with was proved by its well-organized congress attended by more than 120 delegates from all over the country, representing a total of six thousand party members, not including members of CPB-affiliated mass organizations who numbered in the tens of thousands (Lintner 1999 ,p74). Thakin Soe, who initiated the anti-Fascist movement, split from the Communist party as his ideas of armed struggle for independence was rejected by the Chairman of the Politburo, Thakin Than Tun and other leaders. Thakin Soe set up his own communist party (The Red Flag) and went underground in the Irrawaddy delta to wage a guerilla war against the British. Thakin Soe fired arguably the first salvo in the forthcoming civil war that engulfed the entire country just after the Independence. Out of the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Burmese Rifles Battalions of the Burmese military wing or Burifs as they were commonly called, the third and fifth had a sizable number of communist sympathizers and the fourth consisted mostly of socialists headed by Ne Win, Aung Gyi and Maung Maung who played a prominent role in the future Burmese politics. The Socialist Party was politically headed by Thakin Mya, Kyaw Nyein and Ba Swe who held important places in the AFPFL along with Aung San and

Nu. There was not much difference between the communists and the socialists in 1940s because the communists adopted a doctrine advocated by the Chairman of the US Communist Party, Earl Browder. The Browderism believed in a peaceful transition into socialism. The impression of the people in general was that the Burmese communists in that period were more nationalists than internationalists who toed the line of the more powerful communist parties. But the Kandy Agreement which essentially dismantled the Burmese resistance forces disillusioned the BCP with regard to Browderism and pushed toward more violent means.

As Browderism began to fade from their memory, the BCP began to increase its contact with the International Communist Movement. In February 1947, two BCP leaders attended the British Empire Communist Conference in London, the first international experience for the BCP. The military victory of the Soviet CP and the Chinese CP turned the international communists into a militant mood while the national resistance movements worldwide made the weapons more accessible to those with a bent toward armed struggle. Hugh Tinker offered the causal explanation of the communist insurrection: “Although outwardly accepting the new independence, they adopted a thesis formulated by H.N.Ghoshal (the party’s principal authority on dogma) that the AFPFL had become the tools of the British imperialism, thereby making it necessary to overthrow the AFPFL and set up a genuine People’s Government. This thesis was formally adopted by the Central Council of the Communists on 18 February 1948. A campaign to “overthrow the Government by force” was at once launched, and the familiar weapon of strikes in key industries was invoked (1961, p34).” Ghoshal’s thesis was originated in the organizational meeting of the Cominform in Poland in September

1947 when the Russian communist leader Andrei Zhdanov expounded that armed insurrection was the best way to seize state power for the newly independent countries in Asia. What Zhdanov had in mind was not only China but also Indonesia, Malaya and Burma where the communist party had a dynamic presence. Richard Butwell argued, “In addition, the assassination of July 1947 had depleted the ranks of the non-Communists leaving the Communists unscathed. Since many of Burma’s ablest surviving nationalist politicians were in the Communist camp, Than Tun felt that his side had the political talents to outmaneuver Nu and the Socialists. Finally, Than Tun, a leader in the wartime underground movement and one of the founders of the AFPFL (as well as a man generally considered superior in ability to Premier-designated Nu), found himself relegated to a back-seat opposition role in the politics of a soon-to-be-independence Burma; proud, bitter, and jealous, he could not accept this lot (1963 ,p94). On 29 March 1948, wrote U Nu in his memoirs, seventy-six days after independence, the Communist Party of Burma, led by Thakin Than Tun rebelled. U Nu ,being aware of the rising tide of communism around the world especially in China, tried to stem the tide of the Communist insurgency by floating the idea of creating the Marxist League, fusing together the Socialists and the PVO (Aung San’s militias) ,the two big components of the AFPFL, and the moderate communists above ground .

Insurgency of Some Ethnic Groups

Among the ethnic minorities who sought independence from the Burmese initially were the Karennis. In their remote and isolated states, a local leader Bee Tu Re, proclaimed the United Karenni Independence States (UKIS) as a local government to preserve the independent status of the Karenni states of Bawleke, Kyebogyi and

Kantarawaddy in view of Burma's independence (Lintner 1999 ,p85). In November 1947, Saw Maw Reh, another Karenni leader and a veteran of Force 136 (a British-trained guerillas force) formed the Karenni National Organization (KNO) to back up the UKIS politically. By the time of Burma's Independence, they were collecting arms and ammunitions to prepare for their own defense (ibid). Bands of Muslims also rebelled in the extreme north of Arakanese ethnic region where the government had little control. They called themselves the Mujahids advocating the creation of a separate Muslim State. Another ethnic group ,far bigger in population but living in uncharted areas like the Muslims, was the Karens. The Karens unlike the Kachins, Chins, and Shans do not occupy identifiable ethnic zone in the country. Scattered as small communities in the Delta region intermixed with other ethnic groups especially the Burmese, the majority of them reside in Salween areas and Taungoo districts. Plan to pinpoint the area which could be called Karen state was problematic and economically not viable. Karen themselves are religiously divided – most of them are Buddhists and the rest are Baptists - as well as politically divided as some wanted to be integrated with the mainstream Burmese and some preferred autonomous region. When Aung San and the delegation went to London in 1947 to negotiate for the independence with the British, pro-union Karen supported it “since that Agreement proposed to double the number of seats reserved for the plains Karen from twelve in the old legislature to twenty four in the forthcoming Constituent Assembly (Charney 2009 ,p67). Some Karen leaders did go to the Panlong Conference though they did not participate in the proceedings. Karen leaders were always in consultation with one another with regard to autonomy as the British colonialists hinted they be given a separate region when independence was granted to Burma proper. That

was an impetus to the KNU who sought separation from the Burmese and they announced “ that they would not take part in the April Constituent Assembly election as they had been allotted insufficient seats and pressured Saw Ba U Gyi to resign from the Governor’s Executive Council (Charney 2009 p 67). When the KNU pulled its members from the election, the AFPFL replaced them the pro-Union members of the Karen Youth League. The KNU leaders sent a letter to the Governor that they would not surrender their arms. The AFPFL was fully aware of that and they strategized to placate the loyal Karen by giving the post of commander of the Army to General Smith Dun, a Karen trained in Sand Hurst. But what the AFPFL ignored to do was to confiscate the weapons from the dissident Karen.

In confronting the Communist rebels, the government had to rely heavily on the support of the minorities especially the six battalions of Karen and Kachin Rifles. They were the troops that recaptured the important towns like Prome, Thayetmyo, and the Pyinmana areas from the communists. The anti-Union Karen wanted to take advantage of the government’s helplessness in 1948-1949. According to Hugh Tinker “a movement began in Papun to set up a Karen government; Thaton and Moulmein were occupied at the end of August by Karen rebels, including Union Military Police mutineers. Fortunately for the Nu government, the prominent Karen leaders Saw Ba U Gyi, Saw Tha Din and Saw San Po Thin worked for a peaceful settlement. But late in 1948, Karen paramilitary formations were quietly being raised. It was collectively known as Karen National Defend Organization (KNDO) commanded by Mahn Ba Zan. The attacks and counterattacks took place among the KNDOs and the pro-government PVOs. As

the threats of the Karen rebels increased, the Nu government negotiated with the army mutineers, the PVO who aligned with the communists and the communists themselves. Wrote Hugh Tinker: “On 31 January a battle developed in Thamaing, a Rangoon suburb. It may have arisen out of the government order for the disarming of the Karen, it may have followed a KNDO bid to seize Rangoon. The situation was hopelessly confused; panic reigned in the city and the Government concentrated all available forces against the Karen. The next day, 1 February General Smith-Dun, the Karen Commander-in-chief was sent on indefinite leave (from which he was never recalled) and Ne Win took over the armed forces. In Ahlone the Karen quarter was set ablaze and fire-engines were prevented from reaching the area. As the Karen rushed in terror from their homes they were shot down. At the same hour Karen raided Mingaladon Air Force Armoury, carrying off arms and ammunition. The KNDO was declared an unlawful association (1961 ,p40). About the same time the Mon National Defense Organization, the military wing of the Mon Freedom League was also declared illegal. In A History of Modern Burma, Charney explained how the civil war gained momentum: “In November (1948), however, the KNU, along with two Mon-separatist groups demanded the grant of independence to a Karen-Mon State, consisting of much of Lower and Southeastern Burma. From December, when the government refused the request, numerous Karen soldiers and police officers joined an unofficial KNU rebellion, followed by the Third Battalion Karen Rifles and then the First Kachin Rifles. The rebellion became official in January (2009,p74). Now the civil war was in its full force blasting in the face of the fragile Nu’s government.

Conclusion

Even though the British colonialists tried to divide the post-war army into Burmese and the ethnic minorities with the aim of creating disunity and mistrust, the primary reason behind the full-blown civil war of Burma most probably was the decision of the powerful BCP to choose armed insurrection option to achieve state power rather than the parliamentary system. For the communists, the armed struggle option was the most tempting considering the rising power of the Soviet Union and the triumphant Chinese Communists in the international arena and the strong support of peasants and some parts of the post-war Burmese army. Burmese scholars and politicians are still debating whether it was Nu's government who forced the communists to go underground or it was the communists themselves toeing the insurrectionary line of the communists abroad rather than the peaceful means for state power who took to the jungle. Still on Facebook pages the children of the old politicians are fiercely debating the truth is with their fathers. The BCP who became a spent force in 1991 seeking shelter in Yunnan after being overthrown by the ethnic rebels, their erstwhile allies, gave up armed struggle only when they felt hopeless and helpless. That is the ultimate proof that they prefer the violent option. U Nu in his memoir related what he told Thakin Than Tun, the communist leader: "He (Nu) also pointed out that the appeal to the people of the AFPFL was the appeal of General Aung San. With this attention gone, there was no need to resort to arms to seize power from the AFPFL (1975,p138)." Nu was telling the truth as there were leaders in the BCP like Ba Hein who was cherished by the public. The BCP was the most popular political party in the post-war Burma after the AFPFL led by Aung San. Its leaders were trusted and respected by the majority of the populace. When they

went underground with the AFPFL at their heels, people confused, despaired and lost hope of unity and prosperity. On top of that, people lost trust in politicians who were at each other's throats all the time. The result was the budding democracy did not have the chance to take root and bloom in unstable and unsecure Burma. The disunity and animosity between the Burmese brethren gave the ethnic groups the false hope that now was the time to grab long-awaited-for autonomy. Among the ethnic leaders some were level-headed and rational and believed that racial equality and self-determination could be achieved on the negotiation table. But the armed struggle was the order of the day in 1950s when the politicians were forced to take the backseat and the generals' stars were on the ascendant. As Richard Kohn pointed out, the military is, by necessity, among the least democratic institutions in human experience; martial customs and procedures clash with individual freedom and civil liberty, the highest value in democratic societies (1997). Ne Win and his generals cleaned their house, made it strong and waited for the opportune moment while the house of politics was messy and left unattended by its bickering members of the household. Democracy was gradually eroded and swept away in the tide of the Burmese history.

Chapter 4: The Rise of the Military Institution

The rise of the military institution run parallel with the gradual and steadfast rise of its leader General Ne Win, who was biologically older than all the commanders . A member of the thirty comrades who founded the Burmese Army he was regarded as second only to the slain General Aung San in military rank and political status. It is hard to figure out when exactly General Ne Win's ambition toward the country's highest position took root, grew strong and bid its most opportune moment to bloom. Most probably it occurred when they were being trained on Hainan Island in China by the Japanese Army in 1941. The DBAA split into two in March, 1938 at the Prome Conference. Aung San represented one group at the Japanese training Camp and Ne Win was the champion of the other. They did not get along very well but the pressing cause of the nation's freedom put their hostility in abeyance. As long as Aung San was alive, Ne Win could not aspire to the country's highest position. With Aung San gone and the country in turmoil due to the civil war, Ne Win's hope flickered. But what turned the flicker into a flame really was in all likelihood the Kuomintang intervention in northeastern Burma. Said Robert Taylor: "Beginning in 1950 and continuing for more

than decade, KMT military operations had a major impact on Burma's internal political life and foreign policy, with consequences which are still operative (Foreign and Domestic Consequences of the KMT Intervention in Burma 1973 p v). How the KMT invasion strengthened the military institution and elevated the role of its commander-in-chief, General Ne Win was discussed in the first part of this chapter. The middle part was how the military leadership taking the opportunity as the savior of the country from the KMT restructured the institution to its best advantage. The last part dealt with how the restructured military hierarchy started to chip away the authority of the political institution and how Ne Win as the helmsman of the stronger and bolder military leadership strategized his role in the Caretaker Government so that he grasped the state power two years later with relative ease. As the most senior leader of the military organization after Aung San and its legitimate chief, Ne Win gradually arose as the peerless commander in the Burmese Army manipulating the ideological division (by ousting the left-leaning KMT war hero, Brigadier Kyaw Zaw) and personal rivalry among the elites (the field commanders and the War Office staff).

The Kuomintang Aggression

When Chiang Kai-shek's retreated to Taiwan to establish the Republic of China after defeated by the Chinese communists led by Mao, a remnant of the Kuomintang troops were left behind in the border areas shared by Burma and China. In January 1950, about two hundred Kuomintang troops entered Mong Yang on the Burma side and made a base camp. This small town was one of the closest to China's Yunnan province where the skirmishes between the Red Army and the KMT remnant forces were still continuing. These two hundreds were the first batch of the Nationalist Army stragglers who entered

Burma when the tide was turned in the civil war in Burma proper. They were captured by the Burmese Army and were sent to an army camp near Mandalay. A stronger force entered to the triangle border areas in Mong Pong, where Burma, China and Laos met, led by Ting Tsuo-shou, a professor and a colleague of Chiang Ke-shak and a commander Zhang Weicheng who was familiar with the geography of the areas (Bertil Lintner, Burma in Revolt 1999,p112). Soon they got contact with Chiang in Taiwan who was pleased and provided supplies through agents in Thailand. Emboldened because of their strength and their knowledge of the raging civil war in Burma they demanded the release of their imprisoned comrades from the Burmese authorities. A major battle broke out in Tachilek near Mekong River with heavy casualties on both sides where Burma lost her Air Force chief. The KMT soldiers retreated to Mong Hsat in the west. It was strategically important as it had an airstrip abandoned by the Allied forces. With the arrival of General Li Mi who commanded the 8th Army in Yunnan during the Chinese civil war and the building of the new infrastructure, the Mong Hsat camp turned into the Kuomintang headquarters closely in contact with Taiwan through its embassy in Bangkok.

At that moment, the war between North Korea and South Korea broke out in June 25, 1950, when North Korea attacked South Korea in a carefully orchestrated plan backed by China and the Soviet Russia. South Korea with the help of the UN and the US counterattacked turning the Southeast Asia region into a chaos. Wrote William Johnstone in Burma's Foreign Policy: On June 27 the Security Council requested UN member nations to render all assistance possible to the UN in repelling the North Korea attack, and the next day UN Secretary-General Lie transmitted the request to all member nations

(1963,p211). Burma responded that though it supported the UN in principle, it could not “render effective resistance.” And they voted against a later General Assembly resolution of labeling China as aggressor. Burma could not lose sight of the fact it shares a 1000 mile long border with China. Burma also was fully conscious of the fact that active participation in the containment of the China plan could adversely affected the country. Wrote Lintner: “He (Claire Chennault, hardline former US general and WWII veteran who was also Chiang’s main adviser) later admit publicly that a plan did exist to implement MacArthur’s idea of a broader war against China, using Burma as a springboard (1999,p118). Meanwhile the KMT force got stronger by recruiting the local ethnic minorities trained by cadres flown from Taiwan. Most of the army set out to Wa and Kokang regions after leaving a thousand –strong contingent to guard the Mong Hsat headquarters. The KMT’s extension of its insidious grip in these no-man’s lands had profound effects on the modern Burmese political history. While the Kokang tea was one of the best in the country, its opium is arguably the best in Southeast Asia. The KMT encouraged the locals to cultivate more opium for exports to be carried onboard the planes carrying weapons and supplies to the Mong Hsat airfield. Wrote Lintner: “At Burma’s independence in 1948, the country’s opium production amounted to a mere thirty tons, or just enough to supply local addicts in the Shan States, where most of the poppies were grown. By the mid-1950s, Burma’s modest opium production had increased a couple of hundred tons per year (1999 ,p142).”

When General Li Mi attempted to occupy the border areas of Yunnan province in May 1951 were routed by the PLA, the KMT troops strategized to consolidate and control their grip on the occupied territories. By 1953 the KMT virtually occupied

Kentung, Manglun, and Kokang states in the Shan State. (Taylor 1973 ,p14). They then negotiated and joined forces with the ethnic rebel groups. In January 1952, the Karen and Karenni rebels supported by the KMT troops occupied the mining town of Maw chi (Lintner 1999 ,p133). Mon rebels were also organized into the Mon's People Front and properly trained by a KMT agent in the hills around Three Pagoda Pass on Thai-Burma frontier. While the BCP forces were crippled and confined to the remote areas less accessible to the government troops in 1952, the resurgence of the ethnic rebellion coupled with the KMT intrusion was a forceful blow to the Nu's government who had begun shifting its focus from nation defending to nation building. Land reform which was of vital interest to the nation with 80% of population as farmers was delayed and could be implanted only in 1954. The KMT's support for the ethnic insurgents also benefitted the Burmese communists who sometimes fought alongside the Karen rebels equipped with weapons from the KMT. Nu believed, according to Taylor, that the KMT was providing the US-made weapon to the BCP through the Karen rebels (1973 ,p18). It could not be denied that the quantity of weapons was immensely increased in the country ridden with the civil war destabilizing further the democracy in the making. Taylor wrote: "In 1952, the government spent approximately 40% of the revenue on internal security. In 1954, after the KMT problem had lessened, the government still budgeted 28% of its expenditure for the anti-rebel activity. While not all of this expenditure was the direct result of the KMT intervention, a large portion was (1973,p20)."

In diplomatic front to deal with the KMT issue, Nu's government first approached India and the US government to assist in its endeavor to dislodge the KMT from its territory in 1951. India apparently was ineffectual. Reports made by two US

ambassadors, David M Key and his successor William J Seband, to the State Department fell on deaf ears. Burma turned to the UN as a last resort. Nu told the Parliament on March 2, 1953 that as the military option and the diplomatic efforts were not effective, the KMT issue must be taken to the UN. When the Burmese government informed the UN to charge the Taiwanese government with aggression on March 25, it was asked by the governments of Thailand, the US and Taiwan to make efforts to solve the issue outside the UN. The Burmese draft resolution was clear and explicitly pointed its finger at the Nationalist Chinese government for aggression. But the draft resolution passed by the UN General Assembly was much less than Burma expected. Taylor said: “It included no reference to a request for Security Council action and did not refer directly to the Chinese Nationalist Government. Rather it referred to unspecified “foreign forces” in Burma (1973 p27).” In addition, the Taiwanese government denied that General Li Mi forces were under its control. According to Bertil Lintner: “In view of UN actions in Korea, the world body could not ignore or condone another invasion in another country such as Burma, but the fact that the West’s interests and sympathies lay more with the KMT rather than the Burmese government contributed to the rather bland resolution that was finally adopted (1999 p140).” The US, just before the UN debate, suggested a conference of Burma, Thailand, Taiwan and the US to discuss the repatriation of the KMT forces in Burma to Formosa on March 8, 1953. But the talks dragged on and on. To put pressure on Taiwan, the Burmese government attacked the KMT from air as well as on grounds. Brigadier Kyaw Zaw, a well-experienced soldier who was trained together with Aung San and Ne Win in Japan was giving the task of pushing the KMT further into Thai-Burma border areas. The major forces of the KMT

were crushed in March by the Burmese Army capturing the KMT's headquarters in Mong Hsat. The final bastion of the KMT was in Doi Tung, a steep mountain straddling the Thai-Burma border. Brigadier Kyaw Zaw was a brilliant tactician and overrun the last garrison before the eyes of the Thais watching the battle across their border within a day (Lintner 1999,p153). But the commander was relieved from his position by Ne Win because of his liaison with the BCP in February 1956. Lintner said: "The once tiny Burma Army – perhaps as few as two thousand men in 1949 – grew steadily in strength and importance. By 1955, Ne Win had more than forty thousand men under his command, equipped with modern weaponry acquired from mainly India and Britain (1999, p 153)."

The Restructuring of the Military Institution

As Lintner said, the post-war Burmese Army was a shell of an army with its important core missing. The Kandy conference convened in September to build the army of the independence Burma under the sponsorship of Mountbatten was attended by Aung San, other AFLPL leaders and officials from CAS-B under the Governor, Sir Dorman Smith. It produced a two-wing army of 12,000 men out of which the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Burma Rifles were composed of ethnic Burmese commanded by Japanese trained Ne Win, Kyaw Zaw and Zeya. Among those three leaders, Ne Win leaned to socialism and the latter two to communism while Aung San stayed out of factionalism. The second-wing of the army consisted of ethnic minorities – Chin, Kachin, Karens whom the British and the Americans promised autonomy while they fought alongside as guerillas with the Allies. Karen officers were promoted to senior staff so that they could control the two-wing army. When the civil war broke out half of the army joined the communists and the

Karen rebels. Smith Dun, the Karen C-I-C was replaced by Ne Win. When the defense minister Let Ya was ousted for his pro-British tendencies, both Ne Win and Zeya went to Nu to demand the position. When his demand rejected, Zeya together with another Japanese-trained commander Ye Htut went underground with several military units. That split the Burmese wing army into two when the civil war broke out. On Christmas Eve in 1948, a church was bombed and eighty Karens were killed. At that point the Karen Rifles joined forces with Karen political leaders and the militia groups decided to wage war against the government. The government responded by outlawing the KNDO on January 30. The first Kachin Rifle led by former anti-Japanese guerilla leader Naw Seng joined the Karen rebellion and overrun Taungoo near Pegu ranges. The day after the defection of the Karen Rifles, a review was undertaken in the Burmese army which showed that the loss of 11,852 soldiers out of which 4000 were

Karen (Callanhan 2003 ,p134).The civil war was at its highest and the two army originated from the Kandy conference now disintegrated into several factions fighting tooth and nail against each other. The Burmese Army was badly in need of restructuring into a strong army in defense of the territorial integrity of the country.

It was not the army under Ne Win that saved Nu's government from being called "Rangoon Government" because it held only 10% of the entire country under its administration. It was the local militias who had been disbanded after the Japanese resistance war fought together with the dwindling Burmese army. Many former resistant and underground leaders had kept the weapons used during the war and formed militias to protect their towns and villages from communists and Karen rebels. In 1956, these local militias were finally and formally integrated into the Burmese army. As the army

ranks expanded from eight infantry battalions in 1948 to twenty six in 1951, two factions appeared in the newly emerging army with Ne Win in the middle. According to Callahan, "Two new axes of tension defined the framework that came to structure the internal struggles for power over the institution, at least until the 1962 coup. One axis lay along the experiential divide between the field commanders and Rangoon-based general staff officers, and the other along the ambiguous divide between civilian and military authority over defense macro-and micro-policy (2003 p150)." In the past, the Commanding Officers conference held on a yearly basis was the place where the field commanders aired the grievances about supply, welfare and paperwork with the staff. The widening gap between the staff and units were not able to bridge and the staff closer to Ne Win gained more power. In 1952 CO conference, the government ministers were invited to discuss land reform, economic development plan, and educational reforms. It was the staff officers like Aung Gyi and Maung Maung who could discuss those matters better than their operational counterparts. Noted Callahan: "The shift in content and tone at the 1952 conference led to widespread rumors that the army was preparing to take over the government (2003, p153)."

With the looming threats of the KMT and the simmering wars with the communists and Karen rebels, Ne Win orders his staff headed by Aung Gyi in 1951 to "chart a clear-cut course of military activities." The idea was to change the post WWII army improvised with the local militias into a modern army capable of fighting wars with such enemies as the KMT but also the potential threats from the neighboring countries. Late in 1951 a plan emerged where the civilian control and military autonomy were clearly defined: the National Defense Committee (NDC) whose responsibility was to set

defense policy and the Defense Services Council (DSC) to implement those policies. The NDC consisted of the prime ministers and the cabinet members with the commander in chief as advisors. The DSC was composed of the defense minister the three head of services, the adjutant general and the quartermaster general. Callahan wrote: “This articulation of separate responsibility gave Maung Maung, Aung Gyi and other army leaders the space they needed throughout the 1950s to carry out a wide variety of institution-building activities with little or no civilian oversight or interference (2003 p163).” When the fortification of the military institution was well on the way, the political purges among the officer corps whose loyalty was suspect begun. The most notable was Lt. Col. Hla Aung who had been an assistant to the deposed Defense Minister Let Ya. Hla Aung was moved from the War Office as the head of the Staff College. Another institutional renovation was the Defense Services Institution, a non-profit outfit to replace the unit-run canteens. Wrote Callahan: “With its tax-exempt status, DSI could not help but make substantial profits, which gave the army a source of money and resources outside the purview of civilian legislators and Ministry of finance bureaucrats (2003 p169).”

The Military Unbound

As the military was systematically and patiently institutionalized it was the leadership who reaped most of the benefits of the strong powerful institution especially NW and Aung Gyi who was head of the DSI. The military being highly hierarchical it was Ne Win the most senior and the most veteran emerged as the supreme leader of the military institution. Many civilian and military leaders resented the growing clout of Aung Gyi politically as the close associate of Nu and Ne Win, economically as the head

of the DSI and militarily as a brigadier at the powerful War Office. Ne Win put himself behind this façade but carefully building his image as a neutralist father-figure of the army after the slain founder AS. Ne Win was in undisputed control of the military and the transformation of the army from being a defender of the government to an autonomous force with its own agenda had been completed (Lintner 1999 p196). When the attempt to solve the KMT issue in the UN in 1952 failed and the US reluctant to get involved, the US aid was temporarily rejected and Burma looked for the aids elsewhere. In order to maintain its strict neutrality, it was inevitable that Burma must diversify its sources of arms and ammunitions as well as training to non-aligned nations. The Burmese army who did not do military purchasing before 1952 started shopping elsewhere and their international exposure with countries like Yugoslavia, France, Germany, Israel and the PRC increased their confidence and gave them a sense of superiority over their civilian peers. In addition, more than fifteen military missions were sent overseas between 1951-58 (Callahan 2003 p176). The ideas gathered from those missions and the products bought from the shopping trips were the source of brainstorming and discussion at the annual commander conference. Most of the military leaders who went abroad had participated in the struggle for independence and when they picked up new ideas of state building from their foreign trips they felt that they could do better for the country than the squabbling political counterparts. Those who came back from Yugoslavia reported about ethnic integration in the army and wondered whether it could be utilized politically. The annual three to five day CO conference became the venue to exchange ideas and to hatch plan for institution building as well as state building. With more self-assurance the military leaders challenged the role of the political leaders who as cabinet ministers

participated in the CO conference to explain and present their department policies and projects. According to Callahan, after Minister for Industries Kyaw Nyein lectured about industrial and economic development, Col Aung Gyi – then vice chief of staff army – reportedly attack him and threatened that unless the AFPFL could make a better showing of running Burma’s affairs, the army would have to intervene (2006 p180). In September 1954, the increasingly powerful Ne Win led a high-ranking military delegation to China with the intention of buying arms and observing training facilities. During the trip, he was said to be impressed with the Chinese communist leader Mao who held absolute power over his people. Wrote Lintner: “The army was becoming a state within the state, but few Burmese paid much attention to it. After all, the vast majority of the population had faith in the democratic system, the constitution and the rule of law (1999 p157).”

Conclusion

The civil war was not a decisive factor in deconsolidating democracy in Burma. It was not the Burmese army who beat the communists and the Karen rebels from their occupation of major cities into remote areas; it was the local militias who had hidden the weapons used during the Japanese resistant war that saved the day. It was not Ne Win who knew only the military aspect of civil war emerged as the hero of the civil war; it was Nu who showed determination, courage and strong leadership skills in routing the enemies of the state during the civil war. When the government was tottering underneath the strong assault by the rebels on all fronts, Nu was roaming the country in military aircrafts giving moral support to the commanders in battlefields and coordinating material support when the troops or the local administration demanded. When a Chin

battalion in Pegu refused to fight he flew there with his Chin parliamentary secretary to make “an earnest appeal to their patriotism and loyalty.” He also flew to New Delhi to seek assistance from Nehru. Nu said “True to his word, Pandit Nehru sent several shipments of arms without which Burma might never have recovered (Saturday’s Son 1975 p192).” The Burmese civilian leaders proved they were more than a match to their military equivalents. It was the KMT invasion in the northeastern Burma that changed the balance of power between the military and the civilian. Callahan wrote: “For the first time in modern history, army field commanders could not tap into networks of former Thakins, student union colleagues, or other old acquaintances to arrange for local support for ad hoc counterinsurgency campaigns (2003 p159). Unlike the period when they were combating local insurgency, the political elite were uncertain how to effectively respond the KMT invasion which had geopolitical implications. When the martial law was imposed in the Shan State in 1950, the field commanders turned into administrators. It could be assumed the KMT intrusion into Burma was part of the US plan to contain the communist Chinese growing power which was tested in its intervention into South Korea on June 25, 1950. When the KMT was well-entrenched with headquarters in Mong Hsat the CIA involvement became obvious. Said Taylor: “There is good reason to believe , however, that the CIA supported the KMT in Burma for the purpose of harassing “Peking” to a point where it might retaliate against Burma, forcing the Burmese to turn to the US for the protection (1973,p43). “If what Taylor assumed was true, the CIA interference through its proxy backfired. Burmese were skeptical of the democratic value as they had been enslaved by the British whose political system epitomized democracy. The interference in Burma’s internal affairs by the US, another democratic country,

further undermined the credibility of democracy. The communist activists across the country generated the anti-US and anti-democracy propaganda riding on the wave of the KMT invasion. When Nixon visited Burma in November 1953, he was met by angry crowds in Rangoon. In Burma, to be called a CIA was a great insult till the 1988 student-led democracy uprising. My assumption is that the KMT invasion with the support of the CIA was a major causal mechanism in destabilizing the country and deconsolidating of democracy in Burma. It also proved that actions taken by the governments or institutions outside the country strongly affected the democratization process of a country. People lost faith in democracy and its practitioners. Nu had to hand over the state power to the military following the split in the AFPFL in 1958 as its democratic institution looked helpless in the eye of the public while the military institution exuded the aura of invulnerability and growing strength.

Chapter 5: The Decline of the Political Parties

The decline of the political parties reached its lowest point when there was a split of the ruling party the AFPFL which vowed to last 40 years or 400 years. The AFPFL was officially founded on August 19, 1945 at the Naythuyein theatre hall in Rangoon before the audience of six thousand people; Aung San was there giving a keynote speech to the cheering and clapping people. 13 years later, the party was in disarray; some of its important founders were felled by the assassins, some went underground, some left the party in bitterness, and some broke away into fringe parties. On May 3, 1958 the remaining leaders decided to part their ways amid mud-slinging and mutual accusations. As the dynamic growth of the political parties is essential in the development of democracy the decline and fall of the mainstream democracy party, the AFPFL, was a deadly blow to the democratization process of Burma and paved the way for the ascension of the military institution. Why did this happen? Was the decline inevitable or something that could be avoided? The civil war trauma was one of the reasons that led to the weakening of the party. When the civil war was contained in 1950-51, the KMT invasion aggravated the traumatic effects wasting the country's resources minimizing the

people's faith in the value of democracy when they realized that the CIA was behind the invasion. The split of the political elites primarily due to the personality clashes, factionalism and favoritism dealt a deadly blow to the political institution from which it never recovered. On top of that, factionalism and favoritism spawned corruption especially among the party bureaucracy. Nu lost his trusted colleagues with whom he had worked together since the struggle against the colonial British. Nu fell victims to his personality traits which he admitted in his autobiography that he oftentimes let his heart rule over his mind. Others were guilty too; Kyaw Nyein who was the most powerful after Nu was sectarian and dogmatic; Ba Swe was wavering and unfocused; Tin who aligned with Nu over the split was narrow-minded and lacked vision. To acquire a strong, vibrant democracy, Huntington said: "History, to shift the metaphor, does not move forward in a straight line, but when skilled and determined leaders push, it does move forward (1999 ,p316). Wrote Richard Butwell : "Nu recognized in his speeches the need for determination and hard work on the part of leaders and masses alike to achieve Burma's economic goals, but he and his government failed to require sufficient discipline from their countrymen in practice (1963 p120)." The country took several steps backward in 1958; and in 1962 with these political leaders at the helms of the country it fell into abyss.

The Civil War Trauma

The civil war in Burma just after the Independence took a heavy toll on the country's fledgling economy. Economically, what the AFPFL leadership envisioned was building a welfare state – development was for social ends. The task of reviving the war-ravaged economy was something that would have tried the abilities of any government.

Butwell said: “In 1952, Nu said: Our objective was none other than a steady and energetic effort to be exerted by us to exploit the immense natural wealth of the country to benefit the citizens totally and create conditions of contentment and happiness (1963 p109).” The output of the land had fallen by about two-thirds as a result of the WWII. The oil wells at Chauk and Yenangyaung had been destroyed when the British retreated. Butwell wrote: “Nu government set up a Ministry of National Planning even before independence, and a very general Two-Year Economic Development Plan was announced on April 1, 1948. (1963 ,p110).” But the fulfillment of these plans was severely hindered by the insurgent activity. Furthermore, the disruption of normal farming activity drastically limited development plans based on the expectation of producing rice to the pre-war level. Burma’s dependence on rice exports was evident from the plan, which described grain as “the currency of the country.” By late 1951, as the insurgency was put fairly under control, land under cultivation steadily rose enabling the government’s projects to resume on the problems of Burma’s economic problems. Based on a comprehensive survey of the natural resources and potential of Burma made a US private firm the ambitious Eight Year Development Plan which envisaged economic self-sufficiency , increasing rice production to pre-war level and industrialization. The plan was also disrupted due to the drop in the international price of rice and insurgency. As a matter of fact both the initial Two-Year plan and the carefully laid-out Eight Year Plan which in Burmese known as Pyi-daw-tha plan did not succeed. The latter was modified and but abandoned later. The failure of the economic plans was the fodder to the communist propaganda. Under the impact of rising war costs due to the KMT invasion and falling rice markets the new Four-Year Plan was unfolded to the

parliament in September 1957. This economic plan was also abandoned when the political crisis broke out and the military intervened. The reason behind the failures in the economic projects was the physical state of the country which did not recover fully, after being invaded and counter-invaded by the Japanese and the British. And it was aggravated by the civil war in which most of the policies of all the insurgents were to destroy the nation's resources so as to disrupt all government's plans. Another reason was the lack of human resources as a result of nationalization: expensive equipment for industrial enterprises could not be operated due to lack of trained personnel or was ruined because of inadequate care. The result of Burma's lack of expertise in administration and business management was incompetent direction of government agencies. Some of the important managerial positions and civil service jobs were saved for those individuals who came with recommendations from the local militias helping the government in the civil war. In Nu's view the insurrections bore the chief responsibility for Burma's failure to implement her ambitious plans of economic development and social welfare.

According to Butwell, "from 1942 through 1945, Nu explained in 1957, Burma had been a battlefield with the result that the machinery for law and order was broken into pieces and disruptive forces became rampant all over the country. The launching in 1952 of the Pyi-daw-tha economic and social plans was a terrible blunder; the government diverted its attention from the complete restoration of law and order to develop the national economy and social services. (1963, p120). Michael Charney agreed: "By 1957, the Nu government's economic and social initiatives had led to severe problems threatening the stability of the country. Nu had realized that he had made a serious error in

emphasizing economic reform and social welfare from 1951 without having resolved the ongoing civil war (2009,p84).”

The Split of the AFPFL Party

Cracks appeared in the unity of the party long before it split completely in May 1957. Many well-wishing politicians and citizens did not want to see that happen. They knew that the democratization would be badly damaged and people would lose faith in democracy. A last effort to preserve the party’s unity was made in January 1958 in a national conference. Attempts were made to patch up the differences and to find a common ground; they all failed. The causes of the split run deeper than personal rivalries and factionalism; it was institutional. When it was founded in 1945 it was the political umbrella under which all the patriotic and able leaders, cadres, and members worked together toward the goal of independence. The expulsion of the CPB was justifiable; nonetheless, there was no denying that some communist leaders were qualified and capable politicians. Aung San’s ingenuity made up all the loss but when he was assassinated there was no one to replace him. The cabinet members, who were killed together with Aung San, were level-headed, trustworthy leaders with the capability to guide the AFPFL in times of need. The three leading members departed the AFPFL in 1951 over the policy towards the Korean War; the trio was well-known, veteran members. Nu though charismatic was a reluctant leader who was dragged into politics by Aung San. Sometimes his leadership skills were less focused and not strongly committed. When the civil war prolonged and the economic plans went astray it was human nature to find fault with one another and to get impatient and short-tempered. On top of that, Nu himself was impetuous and emotional. As he admitted in his autobiography he always put

his heart before his head. The Socialist party was the backbone of the AFPFL even though Nu was not a Socialist party member. There had never been a party conference after the Independence and the only

All-Burma Convention of the AFPFL was called in 1958 when cracks were distinctly appeared. In the Convention, Nu wanted his trusted man as the general secretary whereas Kyaw Nyein wanted another to be chosen. The AFPFL as an institution was loosely structured and norms, procedures were less important than personalities. The final split in reality was the split in the Socialist party. The Socialist Party since its election of the Presidium in 1945 with Thakin Mya, Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein were never been reorganized. When Thakin Mya was killed alongside Aung San he had never been replaced. The executive committee was restructured but never been elected. When the socialists gained control of the party after the communists were expelled they felt that they represented the AFPFL as Nu himself being an independent said anything about their party matters. There were strong personal attachments between Nu, Kyaw Nyein and Ba Swe. Most of the party issues and state affairs were discussed and important decisions were made in the colonial Pegu club instead of the old Secretariat when the cabinet office was. Nu said in his autobiography: "Up until the time I became President of the AFPFL, I was relatively unknown. Since I had no organizational support of any kind, I could not have survived for long as President, or the prime minister if, in the first place, the socialists had offered resistance to his leadership. However, the key figures in the Socialist Party, Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein, had accepted my leadership since student days at the university, and were personally attached to me as an elder brother. To add to

the fact, Thakin Tin, head of the Peasant's Organization had thrown his support behind me thus giving his presidency and premiership strength of tenure (1975,p314). “

The first dissension between Nu and Kyaw Nyein was over the issue of exporting rice. U Nu promised to sell a quantity of rice to China when he visited there. He cabled the news to Burma. On that same day the Rice Marketing Subcommittee in the cabinet sold the rice to a Burmese merchant. What the committee did was right but Nu bore a grudge against Kyaw Nyein who was the deputy Prime Minister. (When he wrote his autobiography Nu admitted he was wrong). What made the grudge into animosity was the two factions between the socialist party. The Socialist party like the AFPFL was also a weak institution with no definite organizational structure and no party constitution. It existed and survived as a group of political leaders with strong personalities. The party being loosely organized, the socialists who advocated for a classless society became class-conscious and created among themselves two distinct classes: the educated and the uneducated. Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein, the alumni of Rangoon University were the leaders of the educated and Thakin Tin and Thakin Kyaw Dun who did not pass the tenth grade led the uneducated faction. This factional feeling was intensified by organizational rivalry in implementation of the development plans and massing party faithful. Kyaw Nyein being the minister of industry advocated industrialization and Thakin Tin being the minister of agriculture believed that only agriculture should be the mainstay of the country's economy. Organizationally, Ba Swe of the educated group was in charge of the Trade Unions, closely associated with the industry, Kyaw Nyein's field of interest. Thakin Tin and his colleague Kyaw Dun of the uneducated faction controlled the numerically superior All Burma Peasants Organization.

The organizational war which began quietly among the socialists became more pronounced especially in the districts where the peasant organizations tried to dominate the district and township AFPFL. Actually rivalry between Kyaw Nyein and Tin was stronger than that of between other leaders. Ba Swe, though one of the three potential successors to Nu was too easy-going and unambitious. Originally Nu was entirely aloof from these factional conflicts within the party, and frequently asserted his authority to stop them. Though he did not really bother about the growing dissension among the Socialists, he did not want the AFPFL to break up into pieces; he made attempts to reorganize the AFPFL by trying to purge the bad elements but he did not succeed as the genuine purge would have practically eliminated the corrupt and unstructured party. Organizational conflicts gradually developed into personal wars starting from the lower echelons. Ba Swe and some socialist leaders were not active participants to this factional rivalry between Kyaw Nyein and Tin. The credit must be given to Ba Swe for his attempt to reconcile and harmonize the bitter relations to both parties. With the growing mistrust, suspicion and intrigues the split could not be hidden any longer. When it was time to take sides, Nu went along with Tin whom he felt comfortable with and Ba Swe sided with Kyaw Nyein, his college pal. The Nu-Tin faction called itself the Clean AFPFL and the Swe-Nyein faction the Stable AFPFL. The Nu-Tin faction won the no-confidence motion in the parliament by a small margin and formed the government. The repercussion of the split among the populace had negative effects and some believed that the new civil war could break out. On June 9 many shops were closed and private schools cancelled all their classes.

Conclusion

Insurgency as well as corruption and inefficiency should be blamed for the decline of the political parties. Communists, Karen, and other ethnic rebels of 1948 to 1951 clearly prevented Nu's government from gaining accomplishments on the economic and welfare fronts while continued operations against insurgency compounded by the KMT invasion after 1952 diverted money and attention from economic and social programs. But the insurrections cannot be blamed for the bad planning, the corruption, and the inefficiency of many of those who directed the growing number of economic enterprises and boards and the inexperience of the Burmese people in business and technical matters. Nor can the communists, Karen or the KMT be held responsible for the government's failure to provide leadership by examples, not by speeches, in the economic fields. Nu's government had to confront two enemies at the same time: insurgency on one hand and corruption and inefficiency on the other. Admittedly, corruption under the parliamentary government was not the kind of pervasive corruption that had been spread through the entire social system witnessed in some developing countries. Trager said: "Corruption and bribery were punished when discovered and were generally much less evident than the last years of the British regime. The Bureau of Special Investigation was created, attached to the Premier's office, for the purpose of ferreting out official misconduct (1966 ,p138)." Of all the important leaders of the AFPFL, only Kyaw Nyein was said to be corrupt. Butwell claimed," widely respected for his intellectual ability and drive, Kyaw Nyein was also feared more than any other member of the ruling group; he was generally considered to be ruthless, devious, and possibly corrupt (1963, p152)." Most of the corruption occurred among the political

appointees in departments like the State Agriculture Marketing Board (SAMB) or the State Timber Board. Tinker wrote: “ On 28 September 1954 an Inquiry Commission was set up with U Nu as Chairman and a High Court Judge as Deputy Chairman.

Immediately after the announcement of the formation of this commission, news became public of a grave scandal in the SAMB (1961 ,p120).” These twin foes were complimentary and fed on each other. Admittedly, it was insurgency which made a lethal assault on the political and economic life of the Burmese people which caused the disintegration of the national army and the unraveling of the national unity just after the Independence. The marriage of convenience between the government and the local militias of all persuasions as a makeshift procedure to counterattack the growing insurgency fostered corruption and inefficiency both of which are anathema to democracy. While the insurgency was on the decline, corruption and inefficiency kept growing undermining the integrity of the political institutions and the politicians it represented. Since its founding in 1945, the AFPFL was the ruling elite party of the country. Even before the Independence, it had been the de facto ruler of the country. After the Independence, it retained its overwhelming dominance in the first national election in 1951-2. It was victorious again in 1956 election albeit with a smaller margin. No doubt, the elites were drunk with victory and power; and power also corrupts institutions.

When a nation achieves its independence, there has never been a formula how the nation should be built. But few countries encountered what Burma and her post-war leaders had been through and fewer leaders would have the skills and capabilities how best to solve those political and economic problems facing Burma. What made those

problems almost unsolvable were the policies of the external actors. In the period when Burma gained independence, the world was engulfed in the preliminary global power struggle of the two super-powers – the Soviet Union and the US. The Burma Communist Party while it was conciliatory and cooperative during the Independence struggle, turned into a rigid, dogmatic political institution after they adopted Andrei Zhdanov's line of armed struggle for national liberation in the late 1940s.. Claiming that the Independence attained from the British in a peaceful way was a sham, they went underground turning the country into a battlefield. The Soviet militant ideology propagated among the international parties was the first external actor that played havoc to the fledgling country. Another external factor was the KMT invasion in the northeastern part of Burma with the help of the CIA. The KMT was there to make attempts to dislodge the Communist government in China and the CIA was there to contain the spread of Communism in the Southeast Asia. Their involvement made the already war-torn country more ungovernable and unmanageable by democratic systems and political institutions. Huntington argued: Democratization in a country may be influenced, perhaps decisively, by the actions of governments and institutions external to the country (1999 p85).

Chapter 6: The Caretaker Government (1958-60)

Nu's AFPFL Clean government officially handed over the state power to the Burmese military headed by General Ne Win on October 28, 1958 in the emergency session of the parliament. Obviously the split of the AFPFL severely tested constitutional and democratic continuity. During the early months of 1958, many people feared that the verbal violence of the conflicting groups would deteriorate into physical violence. Public and private industry and commerce slowed down because of the uncertainty, so did work in government offices. In addition, drought and flood badly hurt the 1957 harvest and the export of rice in 1958. A general feeling of uneasiness and fear prevailed in the economy and the community, especially in Mandalay and Rangoon. After winning the no-confidence motion by a slim majority of eight votes, Nu realized that his government could no longer do anything worthwhile. Nu knew that a new election was what he needed to form a cabinet consisted of all the members of his Clean party; he did not look forward to being once more a minority Prime Minister. While he was at a loss to take effective steps as a prime minister, he took a positive step politically by announcing an Amnesty Act on June 24 which provided amnesty and invited all political parties including the underground communist party to a National Convention. Following the Amnesty Act, the Amnesty Order was proclaimed protecting all crimes committed in course of insurrection up to the mid-night of July 31, 1958 against legal responsibility. Wrote Frank Trager in *Burma: From Kingdom to Republic*: "Further, it was an open secret in Rangoon that the army was disturbed by the latitude of the amnesty order of August 1, 1958 (1966,p179)." It was two trusted deputies of Ne Win who played a crucial role in having the state power transferred to the military leadership from the hands of the

civilian government in those times of instability; they were Brigadiers Maung Maung and Aung Gyi. It is not clear what Ne Win's attitude was toward the treason-like behavior of his subordinates. It could be safely assumed that Maung Maung and Aung Gyi would not have done this without Ne Win's blessing. What is absolutely true was that NW attained premiership for eighteen months as the head of the Caretaker government. How and why Ne Win became and the provisional prime minister and why his tenure as prime minister and his administration was a controversial one are the issues historians and academic are still debating.

General Ne Win became Prime Minister

Among the thirty comrades trained in Japan and later founded the Burmese army, Ne Win had remained in army life and gradually achieved the highest position. He entered the postwar (British) Army in 1945 as a lieutenant colonel, becoming colonel in 1947, major-general in 1948, and replacing Smith-Dun (a Karen), lieutenant general and supreme commander in February 1949; he became a full general on January 1, 1956 (Frank Trager 1966 ,p180). He had an excellent administration experience too. During the heyday of insurgency, he had served as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defense. The initial failure to push back the KMT invasion resulted in the overhaul and expansion of the army making Ne Win more powerful. The restructuring of the army hierarchy enabled him to put his trusted lieutenants in the most strategic places; these army officers played a significant role when NW made a mini-coup in 1958 and a final showdown with the civilian government in 1962. During the overhaul operations, a number of important functions were transferred from the civilian's purview to the general staff. One of them was the control over promotions and appointments and another was

the expansion of military education facilities with little civilian oversight. A few months after his party's victory in the April 1956 election, Nu resigned from the premiership to devote his time to the party organization and purification. Socialist leader Ba Swe who was never an effective leader became the new prime minister. The Army took full advantage of Nu's absence from office to expand its influence further. Wrote Lintner: "When U Nu resumed office on 1 March 1957, the situation had thus undergone fundamental changes. Ne Win was in undisputed control of the military and the transformation of the army from being a defender of the government to an autonomous force with its own agenda had been completed (1999 p176)." Many knew that Ne Win had never been a victorious general or a skillful military administrator. The credit of the institutional reform and renovation of the army after the KMT invasion went to Colonel Maung Maung who was said to be intellectual among the military leadership. One of a series of most remarkable military reforms during the well-executed overhaul was the establishment of the West Point-style Defense Services Academy which produces military cadets who has been ruling the country ever since then. It was the brain child of Maung Maung and he was deservedly called the architect of modern Burmese army. The general who fought bravely in the frontlines together with the soldiers against the Karen and the KMT was Brigadier Kyaw Zaw. Wrote Lintner: "Ne Win had not even participated in combat against the KMT; he hardly ventured outside Rangoon. Every Sunday, he could be seen at the race course in the capital where he had his own private box (1999 p176)." When dealing with Nu and other ministers or political parties he sent his deputy Brigadier Aung Gyi who unlike Kyaw Zaw or Maung Maung was more a politician than a soldier. According to Callahan, "Aung Gyi, the longtime confidante of

Nu was charged with persuading Nu of the necessity for army expansion while Maung Maung forged ahead (2003,p162).” And wrote Lintner: “A first attempt to make a deal with an Italian (arms-manufacturing) firm had not worked out at all. Money for the project had gone missing, and the Italian company had brought in a woman to stay with Ne Win, causing embarrassment for U Nu’s government, which had gone as far as threatening to dismiss the army commander from service (1999 p 155).” Well-known as a womanizer and gambler, why did he survive all those scandalous escapades and political maneuverings and became the interim prime minister after the AFPFL fatal split? He was a clever manipulator and always a step ahead of his rivals. He skillfully hid his scheming mind and evil thoughts behind the image of self-indulgent playboy. Vengeful and unforgiving, he was generous with his loyal friends and ruthless with those who disobeyed. He had been patiently biding his time when the AFPFL split and the four top leaders separated ways. According to Dr. Maung Maung , Ne Win’s official biographer, there was another side to Ne Win’s personality. Described Dr. Maung Maung in Burma and General Ne Win: “General Ne Win kept the Army calm in the political crisis, and repeated that the armed forces himself would show partiality to no faction but acknowledge undivided loyalty to country and constitution (1969 ,p242).” “The Army remained cool, and kept the peace. Several people urged General Ne Win to step in and take over.....But the General was correct and proper, and faithful to his pledge to uphold the constitution (1969 ,p244).”

Nu saw only that personal trait of his chief of staff portrayed by Dr. Maung Maung as loyal and devoted but somewhat undisciplined soldier. That was why he decided to turn over the rein of power to Ne Win when the political situation reached its

most critical point. After the split the government stopped functioning effectively as the cabinet was divided nearly evenly and both sides spent most of their time lobbying for the approaching parliamentary no-confidence contest. - Wrote Butwell: "By September 1958, government in Burma had all but come to a standstill, political considerations were seemingly the only ones that influenced official decision-making, and the public was obviously and increasingly losing ability of the Nu-Tin administration to direct the nation's affairs. In addition there remained the chronic problems of indecisiveness in policy formation and ineffectiveness in implementing government decisions. Burma needed a new – and steadier – hand (1963 ,p209)." While the parliamentary institution was in disarray the military institution looked formidable and invulnerable. Most of the senior military leaders leaned to the anti-Nu faction because they conceived that Nu was too conciliatory to the communists by proclaiming the Amnesty Act. The bitterness of the factional strife did not end with the parliamentary decision which gave the victory by a slight margin to the Nu faction over the no confidence motion. Taking advantage of the government's generous amnesty offer, many communists and their affiliated parties surrendered on August 5. The mainstream communist party led by Than Tun was campaigning for a negotiated peace with the help of their supporters in the big cities. The armed forces did not agree with Nu's offer of amnesty and proposed a diametrically opposite plan of annihilation the communist. In fact, the communists were decimated in a major operation in 1956 and Nu's policy of reconciliation through negotiation looked best for the both sides. While the army leaders suspected the Nu-Tin faction of conceding too much to the communists, the senior leaders of the Nu-Tin faction harbored the grudge that some powerful army leaders were in league with the Swe-Nyein faction. Many

soldiers believed that Nu's concession only encouraged the communists to demand more concessions. The army charged pro-communist elements and some second echelon leaders of the Nu AFPFL with plotting a coup against the government, encouraged by the leniency of that government. On September 26, 1959, Rangoon was almost completely encircled by army units. They, in turn, were surrounded by UMP at the instruction of Home Minister Min Gaung. On that night Nu met with two powerful military officials. Wrote Butwell: "Aung Gyi's version of the change of governments was that he and Maung Maung visited Nu to complain of the deteriorating security situation. Nu replied by asking them if they knew anyone to whom he might turn over power for a caretaker period during which law and order could be restored and free elections held (1963 ,p206)." The answer unanimously was General Ne Win. Under the circumstances, Nu could trust only General Ne Win who tried to look apolitical by playing the life of a playboy, who tried to look neutral by putting a distance between himself and his subordinates and who tried to look a professional soldier by submerging himself only in military matters. Wrote Trager: "The mounting crisis caused Prime Minister U Nu to broadcast in the radio on September 26 that he had decided to resign and turn the government over to General Ne Win, and that the elections scheduled for November had been postponed to April, 1959. The armed forces deployed troops to all major locations. In a public exchange of letters, U Nu urged the General to suppress "wrongs and acts of violence," strive for the "prize of internal peace," to ensure "a free and fair election," and to maintain "the policy of strict and straightforward neutrality in foreign relations." Ne Win agreed to do all that (1966,p179)."

The Unpopularity of the Caretaker Government

When the names of the cabinet were announced, it consisted of the professional civil servants who had earned the respect of the nation. They are thirteen in number including the prime minister and the ministers from four ethnic minorities. They were small in number compared to the thirty member cabinet of the previous government. But the cabinet was supported by a considerable number of military officers assigned to various executive and administrative posts in civil departments of the ministries. Approximately 150 such appointments were made, with several officers holding more than one post. They included Brigadiers Aung Gyi, Tin Pe and several other close associates of Ne Win mainly from his own old unit, the 4th Burma Rifles. Ne Win gave Rangoon a new mayor, a colonel who was a veteran in anti-KMT campaign who had no experience in civil administration. He had a clear order from his superior to clean up. He ordered houses to be painted but he did not realize that many could not afford the expenses. He had three satellite towns surveyed and relocated the slum-dwellers and squatters to the new locations within a time constraint. He conceived that these people were there because the politicians let them occupied the places so as to get their votes. Wrote Lintner: “As a result, all the poor people who had been living close to the city – where most of them had jobs in the docks , or as day laborers, rickshaw pullers or servants for the rich families – now found themselves living far out in new suburbs. While this made downtown Rangoon more pleasant to look at for the urban middle class, and foreign visitors, the move created serious problems. Overnight it had become more expensive for those who had regular jobs to get to them; most of the day laborers found it impossible to survive. Hardly surprisingly, these new working class “satellite towns” soon

became breeding grounds for anti-army discontent (1999 p181).” Public discontent was obvious when the municipal elections were held toward the end of 1959. Said Trager: ”To the surprise of most, the Nu-Tin group won a total of 367 out of municipal seats, taking control of 33 out of 42 towns. This victory foreshadowed the outcome of the national elections the following February 1960 (1966 p186).” The voters’ identification of the Swe-Nyein faction with the army leaders earned the faction their defeat. Hundreds of political prisoners – some of them well-known and respected writers and journalists – arrested and sent to the remote Coco Islands in the Martaban Sea. Charney reported: “Civilian politicians were also investigated and three months later, 371 civilian politicians had been arrested, including 58 from the Nu-Tin faction, 4 from the Swe-Nyein faction and 309 from other factions (2009 p95).” With bitterness and hatred, people still remember the Caretaker government’s heavy handedness against those who opposed to them. Not a few died of hunger strikes on the island against the Caretaker regime. The information dissemination was curtailed by the government amending some Press Acts. According to Callahan, ‘under Col. Maung Maung’s internal security team, the Psywar Directorate conducted something of a witch hunt for leftists among the press corps, shutting down five or six newspapers and imprisoning numerous editors, publishers, and reporters for alleged communists sympathies (2003,p195).”

There were some achievements by the Caretaker government. The cost of living was lowered especially in Rangoon by price control and profit margins. The army under Aung Gyi, the director of the Defense Services Institute (DSI), sold fish, firewood, beef and eggs as well as some textiles at the controlled prices. Those who could not wait in line for the goods in cheap controlled prices from the government bought in secret from

the private shops which were considered illegal. The Sino-Burmese border agreement was signed by the Chinese government and Ne Win in the early 1960s. The agreement was not signed under Nu's government because a Kachin leader vehemently opposed the agreement as the three Kachin villages must be given to the Chinese. The signing of the agreement though fair by international standard was a controversial as the Kachins believed they lost their villages. The Saophas – the chieftain or lords – of the Shan State and the Kayah States retained their feudal rights and privileges after the Independence. Some of them were educated in the West. Sao Hkun Hkio, the British-educated Saopha of Mong Mit served as Burma's foreign minister from 1956-58. By March 1959 under the Caretaker government these hereditary Saophas gave up their hereditary rights and became common citizens. Lavish compensations were paid. Under the Union of Burma 1947 Constitution, the Shan ethnic group had the right to secede from the country after 10 years with the Burmese majority. Apparently the rallying point for the Shans were lost if they considered cession. In fact, the Shans were discontent of the heavy presence of the Burmese troops in the Shan State following the KMT invasion. A small Shan resistance group was in the preliminary stage of formation and came into existence after the Caretaker government in 1960.

Conclusion

It was euphemism to call the Ne Win interim government as the Caretaker government. Nu in his autobiography called it nothing but a coup. It was true that the country felt insecure and unstable just before the Nu's resignation; it was not something unusual for a country that had been threatened with total disintegration right after the Independence. Once Nu announced the hand-over, Lintner said" the nation was stunned

(1999,p177).” Charney argued: “It took some weeks for Burmese to fully understand that this was not a military coup (2009,p94).” In fact, different scholars have different views over the Caretaker Government. Said Thant Myint-U: “The army’s caretaker government that followed was, by all accounts the most effective and efficient in modern Burmese history (2006,p284).” Most of them were impressed with their accomplishments in civilian jobs in a relatively short period even though the public highly resented their autocratic ways. Almost all of the scholars were not certain about the source of the coup. What was the role of the communist elements? Were the field commanders or the War Office officials behind the coup? What could be safely assumed was the Nu’s faction of the AFPFL was in dire straits and the military leaders were fully aware that now was the moment. But their leader Ne Win realized that the time for the major coup was not yet ripe. The young military leaders were jubilant. Callahan wrote: “Meanwhile, field commanders were mostly satisfied with the dismissal of the

Nu-Tin cabinet ministers and the election of Gen. Ne Win to prime minister. According to Col. Hla Maw, then CO of the Eleventh Brigade,” We were happy with the 1958 coup (2003 p190).” Those who followed closely the steps taken by Ne Win after the Independence days would agree that the usage of the Caretaker or Interim government was some sugar trying to coat a mini-coup that presaged major coup in 1962 - two years after the Caretaker government - jeopardizing the democratization process in Burma forever.

The reform of the War Office, the purges which enabled NW to install his loyal officers in the strategic positions , the gradual usurpation of civilian control which was a coup itself were carefully implemented under his total control with the help of the loyal

unwary subordinates. When Nu resumed his office on 1 March 1957, Ne Win and the military institution were totally changed. In the 1956 CO conference, a giant step was taken by the PsyWar Directorate which was founded in 1952 to formulate an ideology for the armed forces. The Directorate invited the former communists and socialists to draft an ideological statement synthesizing the left wing ideas and the Buddhist philosophy arguing that the military should fight for not only the battle fields but also the mind and heart of the populace operationalizing the ideology. Before the Caretaker government's cabinet was formed on 28th October, army officers across the country met in Meiktila, south of Mandalay on 21 and the ideology formulated in the 1956 conference was christened as the national policy titled "The National Ideology and the Role of the Defense Services." Wrote Lintner: "It spoke of psychological regeneration which was the result of the "decisive leadership of the government and the clarity and conviction of the Defense Services." After having successfully entered business, the army had now begun to show a more direct interest also in politics and the running of the country (1999,p177)." As a matter of fact the ideology was the embryo of the doctrine of "The Burmese Way to Socialism" that was adopted as the official ideology of the military regime that came to power following the 1962 coup. Wielding this ideology and utilizing the mini-coup in 1958 as a prototype, Ne Win snuffed out democracy and ruled Burma for 26 years.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In February 6, 1960, the General Election was held and the army went back to the barracks. General Ne Win turned over the reins of government to the victorious Nu at the opening of the parliament session in April. Michael and Maitrii Aung Thwin wrote: “Finally, in 1960, when the extension granted by Parliament to the army expired and the latter had quelled the troubles which had prompted the request for the extension, the army returned the power to the civilian government, not only ensuring that the scheduled elections proceed as planned but managing and arranging their implementation (2012,p242).” Nu’s Union party won the landslide victory. They captured at least two-thirds of the popular vote in a total of about 6 million (Trager , p186). Even the two top opposition leaders Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein did not win a seat. The election was primarily an endorsement of Nu personally. His devotion to Buddhism, and his promise to make it the state religion, undoubtedly won him support throughout the country from the influential Buddhist clergy and its devotees. Nu believed that the worst was over; the road ahead to consolidate the hard-won democracy was safely before him. His opening speech to the Chamber of Deputies on April 5, entitled “Crusade for Democracy,” begun with the comment that, “Burma has just passed through a period in her history which is unique not only in our own experience but that of other countries in the world” (Trager ,p185). During the Caretaker Government, many on both inside the country and outside believed that the 1958 coup would last long, perhaps for decades. Even if Ne Win did not want it, his deputies Aung Gyi and Maung Maung would like to hold on to power as long as possible. The return of the civilian government was hailed by the international community and Ne Win was “even awarded the Magsaysay Award for his conscientious

custodianship of constitutional Governments and democratic principles in Burma through a period of national peril.” (Callahan 2003 ,p196)”. In March 2, 1962, the Burmese army carried out a coup which changed the course of history in a profound way. The coup was masterminded and executed by General Ne Win with finesse whom had won not only the trust of the international community but also his political boss, Nu. On the night of the coup when he was forcefully taken away from home, he anticipated that his commander-in-chief would come to his rescue. Nu wrote: “U Nu’s impression was that there had been a revolt by junior officers and that General Ne Win was in the dark as to what was going on. When his plight was known, he thought, General Ne Win was bound to come to him (1875 p343).”

There are those who look favorably at the Caretaker Government. Michael and Maitrii Aung Thwin pointed out in reflecting the three year period: “During these eighteen months of the “Caretaker Government’ the army’s influence spread, permeating non-military sectors as well.....Beyond economic interests, youth idolized famous military heroes while the institution itself became a desirable career goal (2013 ,p241).” Dr. Maung Maung described the Caretaker Government this way: “The great sigh of relief swept through the country on announcement of the proposed change was proof enough of its popularity (1969 ,p251).” Calling Ne Win as “constitutional soldier” Dr. Maung Maung added: “In these ways the “constitutional soldier” set about to strengthen the law and the constitution. In the hands of the Caretaker government the constitution did not lose its hear; it gained a new lease of life 1969 . p263).” No wonder, Dr.Maung Maung became the last President of Ne Win’s regime before it ended in a bloody way. But there were those who did not share their favorable views. Michael Charney called the

Caretaker Government a dress rehearsal. The period from 1958 to 1960 is often viewed more or less correctly as a dress rehearsal for the military takeover in 1962 (Charney, 2009 p 93). He continued to say: “There is another reason for considering the period from 1958 to 1962 as one entity (ibid).” He argued that “although the military surrendered its direct involvement in the civil administration, it did not surrender its physical control of territory under the republic’s control, probably to avoid the kind of tense situation with regard to the militias that had existed in 1958. The military waited until 1962 to put an end to the Nu regime, but it had the capacity to do this at any time it wished (ibid).” If what Charney argued that the period (1958-62) as one entity and the military had the capacity to do the coup at any time it wished were true, then the period (1958-62) itself was critical juncture which set out the path dependence of multiple coups in the country. I beg to differ. There was a temporal separation of two years (1960-62) before the path dependence phenomenon was set off. The 1962 major coup was the tipping point. Explained Capoccia and Kelemen : “In accounts that involve long-term, cumulative causes, there may be a tipping point – at which the cumulative cause finally passes a threshold and leads to rapid change in the outcome – but the tipping point is not a critical juncture. It may be the case that actions taken on the verge of the tipping point might have forestalled it ((2007 p351).” Why Ne Win made a pause for two years before he executed the coup de grace had a vital reason.

In February 1961, the purge of nine brigade commanders, one regional commander, and Brigadier Maung Maung was announced. Brigadier Maung Maung was sacked for working too closely with the CIA and his feud with Ne Win’s intelligence chief, Lwin. Lwin was the rising power and an indispensable asset to the scheming

general. The official reason for the purge of the commanders was that they did not obeyed Ne Win's order not to interfere with the 1960 election. Callahan asserted: "It was widely thought that Prime Minister Nu had encouraged and possibly ordered Ne Win to terminate these field commanders, who had planned quite brazenly to overthrow his government in 1958 and then tried to sabotage his reelection campaigns (2003 p200)." It was highly unlikely that these high military officials could be deposed in the same day without the agreement of the prime minister. Nu knew very well that these commanders leaned to his political opponents Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein. That's why he agreed to Ne Win's idea of disposing them. What he did not realize was that these commanders were the last hindrance between Ne Win and his quest for the absolute political power. They were not Nu's friends; neither were they Ne Win's friends. Callahan interpreted the purge as the result of field-staff tensions. Callahan wrote: "The interpretation that the purges resulted from field-staff tensions is supported by NW's campaign over the next several months to reorganize the command structure of the army (2003 p203)." Two most important positions were given to two brigadiers "whose loyalty to NW unquestioned (ibid)." This purge should be added to the major achievement the Caretaker government had reaped during its tenure: the removal of UMP (Union Military Police) attached to the Home Ministry. The UMP was loyal to the Nu Government like a shield. The purge and the removal completed the Ne Win's restructuring of the army. NW's intention in restructuring was not to build a more effective and efficient army but to facilitate his final move toward the state power. The two year's wait was worth its while.

On the night of the coup, NW was not in the center of command directing the operation. He was watching the performance of a Chinese ballet company visiting

Rangoon. The coup was so well-planned and so efficiently carried out that there was only one casualty. Over 400 politicians and ethnic leaders were put under detention including Nu, the president, the chief justice and the ex-president, who was led away and never be seen again. The parliament was abolished and the constitution suspended the next day. The Revolutionary Council led by Ne Win, consisted of 18 members mostly from his 4th Burma Rifle was formed to rule the country before the new constitution was promulgated in 1974. Unlike the 1958 coup which was under the constraints of the parliament and the constitution, the true nature of unbridled militarism was exposed. The military officers of junior ranks substituted the well-trained, well-educated civil servants who later left the country in a drove. The academics whom Ne Win did not trust were forced to leave their jobs. Thant Myint-U related: “Also to go were the Western foreign aid agencies and advisers, The Ford Foundation and Asia Foundation were unceremoniously kicked out of the country, and the Fulbright and other state scholarship programs, which had sent hundreds of young Burmese to America and elsewhere, were stopped. The John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, today with campuses in Washington, Bologna, and Nanking, then had a campus in Rangoon; the teachers were told to pack up, and hopes for educating a new generation of world-class Burmese diplomats were ended. Even the English-language training centers, run by the British and the Americans, were shut down (2008 p291).”

The best approach to explain the deconsolidation of democracy in Burma in the period (1958-1960) should be institutional as well as personalistic. No doubt, the weakening of the political institutions occurred simultaneously with the strengthening of the military institutions against the backdrop of the civil war and the KMT invasion. Both

wars could have been avoided if the Burmese communists had not fallen under the international parties' influence and the KMT had not intervened at the goading of the CIA. Even if the two wars had been inevitable and the two incompatible institutions – one civilian, one military and one strong, one weak – did exist contemporarily, what would have happened to Burma without Ne Win the schemer? Ne Win's ambition could be traced back to the days of DBAA in 1930s. When the DBAA split into two factions, Aung San joined one faction led by Thakin Ko Daw Hmaing and Ne Win went to Thakin Ba Sein's faction. Hmaing's DBAA group was the mainstream group and with several young leaders who were relatively as smart as Aung San. Ne Win's group was a splinter group and Ne Win was arguably the best among the equals. When both of them were being trained by the Japanese Ne Win was the representative of his group and resented Aung San's leadership. Since then the relationship of the two were bumpy. It would not be a surprise if Ne Win conceived himself as a man of destiny. If he thought himself on the same level as Aung San, the rest like Nu, Ba Swe, and Kyaw Nyein was not in his league. He must have been planning and plotting as to how to fulfill his destiny since then.

Mary Callahan did not accept the central role of General Ne Win in exploring the origin of military rule in Burma. She argued that, "However, one problem with attributing all outcomes to Ne Win is that the historical evidence is spotty at best. In fact, NW's prominence resulted in large part from activities and developments that occurred within the army and the Burmese polity in the 1950s, over which he had little control or influence (2003 p6)." If we study the great personalities like Lenin or Hitler, they had had a lot of uncertain moments in their lives before they reached the pinnacle of their

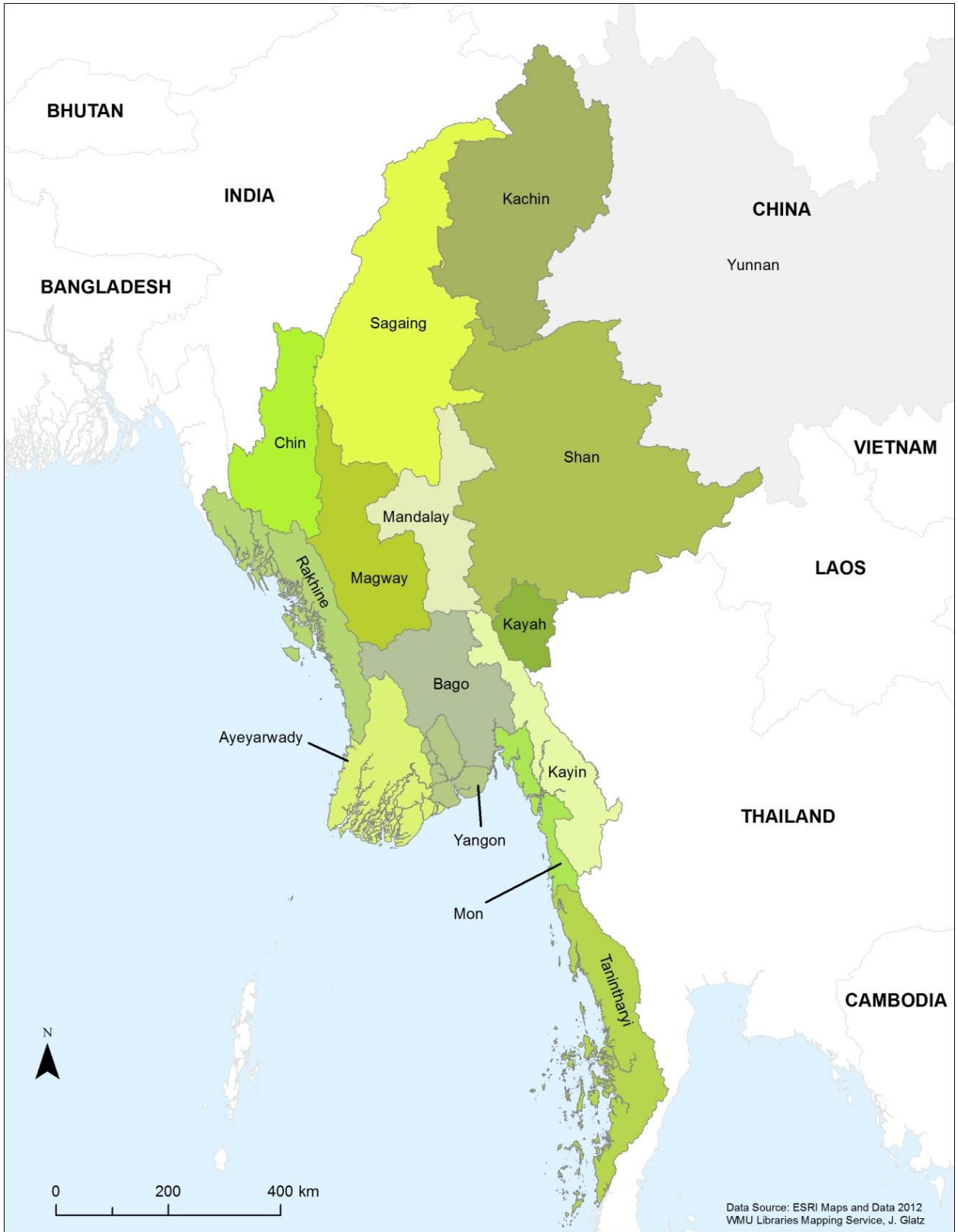
careers. And we could not forget what Lintner wrote: “When U Nu resumed office on March 1957,, the situation had thus undergone fundamental changes. Ne Win was in undisputed control of the military(1999 p176).” When examining personalities, we should look at the elite actors on both sides of the political phenomena. Many compare Ne Win and U Saw who masterminded the assassination of Aung San. Both of them were ruthless and ambitious, crafty and dangerous. Aung San was aware that Saw bore him some grudge; they had been together in Burma’s politics together for so long a time that there was little doubt that Aung San could read U Saw’s mind. And yet, when U Saw’s assassins rushed into the Aung San’s office with the machine guns there were no guards at the gate or his office to counterattack them. Nu also failed to see a lot of indicators that his commander in chief had the evil plan against him and his government. Besides being impetuous, Nu had a tendency to trust who came to tell him first. What I have been arguing is that democratization process in Burma was hampered by the weak political parties and organizations, the civil war and the gradual rise of the military institutions. In addition to that, we should not lose side of the crucial role played by personalities – the trusting nature of Aung San, the personality clashes of the AFPFL leaders (their split was not over policy or politics) and the gullibility of Nu against the vengefulness of U Saw and the scheming mind of Ne Win. I would like to highlight Ne Win who abolished the democratic values and institutions in Burma in one clean swoop on one summer night in March 1962. If Nu had had the habit of watching his colleagues objectively and critically the way a keen analyst did, the country’s destiny might have been changed and democracy saved.

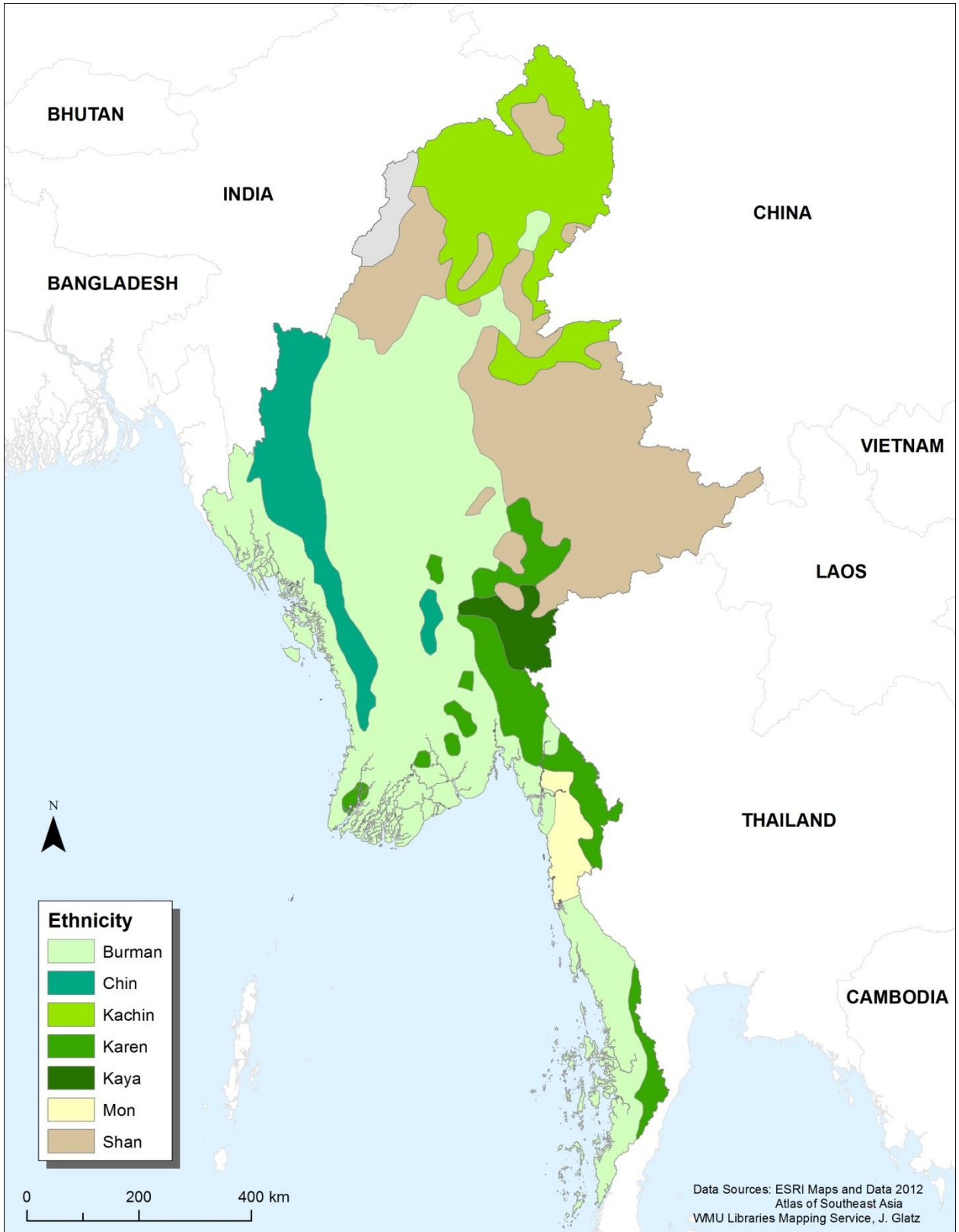
Lintner wrote: “The international community by and large shared this view – but a rare exception was a Central Intelligence Agency analyst who had predicted with a remarkable foresight as early as in 1951: “(There is a) current struggle for control of the armed forces between the government and the army commander in chief, General Ne Win. For some time government leaders have been attempting to undermine Ne Win’s dominant personal position within the army. Ne Win may retire completely from the struggle and leave the government in undisputed control. On the other hand, there is a continuing possibility that Ne Win might attempt a military coup, which could lead to a protracted violence.” (1999,p157).”

Appendix 1

Maps







Appendix 2

Chronology

1824-26	First Anglo-Burmese War
1852-53	Second Anglo-Burmese War
1885-86	Third and Final Anglo-Burmese War
1906	Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) formed
1911	First Newspaper Thuriya (The Sun) published
1920	General Council of Burmese Association (GCBA) founded
1921	Introduction of a Dyarchy System
1930	Do Bama Asi Ayone (We Burmese Association) founded
1931	Rangoon University Student Union (RUSU) founded
1935	Government of Burma Act separating Burma from India
1936	Rangoon University Strike
1938	Aung San and Nu joined DBAA
	All-Burma General Strike
1939	First Congress of Burma Communist Party (BCP)
1940	Aung San and a colleague went to Japan
1941	Burma Independence Army formed
1943	Japan granted Independence to Burma
1944	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) established
1945	War of Resistance against Japan; Japan defeated in WWII
	Karen Central Organization formed
	Second Congress of Burma Communist Party (BCP)
1946	BCP expelled from AFPFL
1947	Panlong Agreement
	Assasination of Aung San and Cabinet
	Karen National Union (KNU) established
1948	Burma won Independence; Nu became the first Prime Minister
	BCP went underground
1949	Karen National Defense Organization outlawed
	Civil War begun
1950	Kuomintang in Burma
	North Korea invaded South Korea
1951-52	First General Election; AFPFL won landslide
1953	KMT occupied Kengtun, Monglun, and Kokang
1956	Second General Election; Ba Swe became Prime Minister
1957	Nu resumed office
1958	AFPFL split; Ne Win sworn in as Prime Minister of the Caretaker Government
1960	Nu and his Clean AFPFL won the election landslide

Appendix 3

Abbreviations

ABSU: All Burma Student Union
AFPFL: Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
BCP: Burma Communist Party
BIA: Burma Independence Army
BOC: Burma Oil Company
Burifs: Burma Rifles Battalions
CAS-B: Colonial Administration Service-Burma
CNE: Council of National Education
CO: Commanding Officer
DBAA: Do Bama Asi Ayone (We Burmese Association)
DIG: Deputy Inspector General
FAA: Frontier Areas Administration
GCBA: General Council of Burmese Association
HI: Historical Institutionalism
ICS: Indian Civil Service/Imperial Civil Service
KCO: Karen Central Organization
KMT: Kuomintang
KNDO: Karen National Defense Organization
KNLA: Karen National Liberation Army
KNO: Karenni National Organization
KNU: Karen National Union
PLA: People's Liberation Army of China
PVO: People's Volunteer Organization
RCI: Rational Choice Institutionalism
RUSU: Rangoon University Student Union
SAMB: State Agriculture Marketing Board
UKIS: United Karenni Independence States
UMP: Union Military Police
YMBA: Young Man's Buddhist Association

Appendix 4
Ethnic Distribution

Indigenous	Percentage of Population, 1983 Figures
Burmese	69.0
Shan	8.5
Karen (Kayin)	6.2
Kayah	0.4
Chin	2.2
Kachin	1.4
Mon	2.4
Arakanese (Rakhine)	4.5

(Sources: Steinberg, David I Burma/Myanmar: What everyone needs to know 2010
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