CHAPTER THREE
CONSTRAINTS OF LEGITIMACY AND STABILITY

The independent Myanmar adopted a parliamentary democratic constitution of the British model with certain quasi-federal features. The need to provide an accommodative system in those days where demands and interests of several ethnic minority and tribal groups who became part of the Union could be acknowledged was one of the main concerns in the negotiation process of transfer of power. It was reflected in the structure of the constitution. Moreover it was the modern political structure which post-independent political elites knew best. Ideologically the new Myanmarese political leadership blended the liberal democratic values inherited from the British with socialistic goals in a nationalistic and Buddhist syncretism of the Thakin political thought.

Immediately after independence, Myanmar faced the problem of nation-building for bringing about a peaceful, harmonious and affluent society. It was enfeebled by personal and institutional shortcomings, rebellious minorities and economic deterioration. The country was moved by uncompromising nationalism and sub-nationalism and predominance of security consideration in national policy which were, in retrospect, shaped by colonial legacy. These inherited legacies of colonial connection constituted impediments to smooth functioning of parliamentary democracy. The most crucial development was the growth of Tatmadaw as the de facto power during the turbulent decade of parliamentary democracy. The Tatmadaw was one of the most politicised army in the world. The democratic government under U Nu failed to govern effectively and overcame the challenges to national unity and stability. On the other hand, the proven effectiveness and efficiency of the military in campaigns against various insurgencies paved the way for the military to acquire more and more influence, credibility and power. They felt they needed to play a vital role in the nation’s political affairs. Subsequently military emerged as the dominant political actor pursuing the same ideal of the new nation. The parliamentary
democracy dramatically collapsed early in 1962 and the course of political development and the transition of the regime took on a heavily isolationist cast from that point of time.

The post-colonial Myanmar was filled with full of chequered scenes of interests which matter most part of this study. Certainly it was the reason for the arrival of an isolationist political system under military rule in 1962 and along with its component and structural pattern. This study investigate into the conditions which created the period of parliamentary democracy under U Nu’s turbulent years leading to the failure of the experiment of democracy in Myanmar. Experiment of democracy as an attempt to solve the post-independent crises of Myanmar had failed. In parliamentary democracy, the elements of strong and coercive regime of the colonial period degenerated into weaker form within a weak society infested with multiple problems encompassing political, economic, security and disunity. The state reasserted under military headed by Ne Win by forcibly capturing political power. Ne Win created a strong and despotic state based on isolationism. The context and motive of such isolationist political order will be examined and analysed. The components and structural pattern of isolationism in Myanmar’s political process are matters of interest to be analysed.

The political elites and military leaders had encountered challenges of nation-building and further developmental process which could promote a cohesive and stable nation. The post-colonial Myanmar was dominated by security concerns of a chronically conflicting society. Prioritising of security agenda due to persistent challenges to national unity and state sovereignty evolved into building a powerful state that largely dissociated the society from everything political both by advancing ideological justification, by force and dissemination of fear. There was continuity of political upheavals, ethnic conflict and economic underdevelopment though the nature of regime changed from democracy to isolationism. The turbulent period of parliamentary democratic governance in 1950s and early 1960s characterised by the weakness of the democratic process and its actor finally led to the point of democratic breakdown. Ne Win occupied supreme power and isolationism was politicised which led to strengthening and comprehensiveness of isolationism. The motive of political
transition which came with military rule and isolationism which evidently exhibited under Ne Win is analysed.

**Ideological Syncretism and State of Instability**

In the early morning of 4 January 1948, Myanmar attained the moment the Myanmarese had been fighting for long i.e, independence. However immediately after independence it found itself entangled in unresolved problems and challenges of post-colonial society and polity. The initial years in the life of independent Myanmar were full of uncertainties, the successful resolve of which would have direct implications on maintaining their newly-won independence. Broadly speaking, independent Myanmar faced two kinds of challenges: one that, after independence, there was huge task of consolidating control over groups that disputed the legitimacy of the state and creating a national identity to unify a divided population, and two, that of rebuilding a war-devastated economy. The concerns for unity, peace and prosperity were the prominent need and task before the leaders of the new country. The government had to find speedy solution for the twin challenges to unity and development, both inherited from colonial connection, so that the legitimacy of Myanmar as a country continues. How did the challenges to nation-building, development and stability of democracy were attempted to handle in the first decade after independence had great implications for future Myanmar?

The civilian and the military leaders of the post-independent Myanmar were predominantly constituted by former students of the Rangoon University who addressed themselves as ‘Thakins’. The ill-fated assassination of Aung San along with some of the ablest leaders of the country pushed U Nu into forefront as leader of Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League and he became the first Prime Minister of independent Myanmar. U Nu was a remarkable and respected figure in Myanmar’s struggle for independence. After the death of Aung San, he was persuaded to come out of the self-professed disinterest for politics after the fall of the unjustified British colonialism in Myanmar and asked to lead Myanmar to stability and prosperity by the

24 When Myanmar got independence, its economy was in bad shape. During the World War II, the retreating British army and the Japanese occupation forces had inflicted heavy destruction and ruins by following an earth-scort policy.
British governor Sir Hubert Rance and the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League leaders. Initially hesitated but later he accepted the offer.

U Nu had Aung San’s vision to guide him in envisioning and articulating roadmaps towards political and economic stability. Aung San dreamt of independent Myanmar to be a single entity. He once said that if the Burman had received one Kyat (the Myanmarese currency), the minorities would also get one Kyat (Smith, 1991, p. 78). To deal with crises of unity what Aung San envisioned was unifying the myriads of ethnic groups in Myanmar under the ideal of unity in diversity, and peaceful co-existence. In political parlance, he intended to establish a Union based on a federal system with adequate provisions to safeguard the rights and interests of the national minorities. In the path for independence and in its quest for national unity and securing co-operation of the minorities for a Union, Aung San envisaged a federal union to be the appropriate political structure. He convinced the British that Myanmar was ready for independence through Panglong Agreement, where he promised minority groups such as the Shan, the Chin and the Kachin that their financial and administrative autonomy would be protected in a democratic Union. On the specific issue of separate states, the agreement stated that a separate Karen state within a unified Myanmar was desirable. Despite the goodwill, the agreement could not bring about political stability and ethnic harmony largely due to inherent inadequacies in the agreement. It was not represented by all the ethnic minorities. The Mons, the Arakanese, the Wa and the Nagas were absent from Panglong. The role of the Karen was also remained unclear and confusing. The political turmoil following the assassination of Aung San gave further blow to the initiative towards a unified Myanmar nation. Aung San’s premature assassination placed the responsibility of cementing a multi-ethnic country on the soldier of U Nu. Considering the volatile

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25 Aung San in a convention of the League on 23 May 1947 says: “Only true democracy can work for the real good of the people, real equality of status and opportunity for everyone, irrespective of class or race or religion or sex. . . . There must be provisions [in the Constitution] for the fundamental rights of citizens irrespective of race, religion or sex. . . . Nobody can deny that the Karens are . . . a national minority. . . . Therefore, we must concede to them the rights of a national minority. . . . Now, when we build our new Burma shall we build it as a Union [federation] or a Unitary State? In my opinion, it will not be feasible to set up a Unitary State. We must set up a Union with properly regulated provisions as should be made to safeguard the rights of National Minorities. We must take care that ‘United we stand’ not ‘United we fall’” (cited in Tucker, 2001, p. 152).
nature of Myanmar, U Nu also endorsed Myanmar, a country with long authoritarian traditions, marrying western liberal-democratic norms.

Myanmar witnessed an experiment of democracy after gaining independence in 1948. On the leadership and ideological front the nationalistic, anti-capitalistic and pro-socialistic leaning upon the ruling Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League leaders did not vanish after the liquidation of colonial rule and with the establishment of a democratic political system. The syncretism of what was professed and what they practiced was most evident in the spirit and practice of the constitution. The first constitution of independent Myanmar was drafted and approved by a Constituent Assembly in 1947 and it came into force in 1948. The new constitution preferred social democracy and welfare state within a framework of parliamentary democracy. The result was a liberal constitution having socialistic aspirations.26

The independent Myanmar was committed to a democratic state and a planned economy for ensuring social and economic justice, dedicated to the upliftment of the material and cultural life of the people and to their protection from economic exploitation, insecurity and abuses. It believed it would ensure political and economic stability. In actual practice, the theoretical orientation to liberal-democratic ideals of the constitution of 1947 was adapted to the specific Myanmar conditions and in respond to the country’s historical legacies. Despite the democracy providing for institutional process of securing power, what paramount in the politics of Myanmar was influence of assertive personalities whose prestige and charisma were vital to

26 According to Maung Maung (1969, p. 196), a socialist state was the proclaimed goal of the newly independent country. He quotes prime minister U Nu’s speech which he made at the time of adoption of the constitution of 1947 in the Constituent Assembly: “Let me say at once that the foundations laid for New Burma are those of a leftist country. And a leftist country is one in which the people working together to the best of their power and ability, strive to convert the natural resources and produce of the land, both above ground and below ground, into consumer commodities to which everybody will be entitled according to his need”.
power base disrespecting the democratic process of power capture but equally conflict-ridden (Guo, 2011).

U Nu the then Prime Minister began his post-independent political career with the intention of fulfilling the goal of crafting a unified and prosperous nation out of the fragile political and economic situation. Yet his ideology and method were not always matched with his predecessor Aung San. For instance, U Nu substituted Aung San’s ‘unity within diversity’ for an approach to nation-building based on unitary model and also extended his religious beliefs (Buddhism) into politics. Keeping nation-building as paramount importance, the government of U Nu practically functioned as a unitary system decentralised in some degree, but not federal in real sense. According to Taylor (1987, p. 227), the constitution of 1947 “delineated the federal state, but in reality provided a centralised governmental system”. The various provisions of the new constitution called for autonomy of the ethnic minorities and protection of their culture, but these were not upheld in practice. The minorities on the other hand claimed that the government at the centre attempted assimilation and hegemony by using state apparatus. Such lack of trust and identification with the democratic government of U Nu from the ethnic minority groups, coupled with government’s inability to meet high expectations of development in peripheral minority regions due to lack of fiscal and administrative resources, political disunity and insurgency movement evaporated the goodwill created by the Panglong Agreement and democracy under the constitution of 1947.

27 According to Callahan (1998, p. 52), the leaders of Myanmar identified democracy with imperialism and there giving too much concession to the British in arranging the transfer of power agreement attracted heavy pressure on the leaders. She supported this point by saying that the constitution of 1947 embodied this distrust for democracy by emphasizing not on individual rights and limitations of state intrusions in individual lives but instead on operational part of the constitution being focussed on the empowerment of the state to build a strong and equitable economic system. She also quotes Aung San: “Only by building our economic system in such a way as to enable our country to get over capitalism in the quickest possible time can we attain a true democracy”.

28 A few months after Aung San’s death U Nu stated: “I am cent percent against the creation of Autonomous States for Karens, Mons and Arakanese”. (cited in Tucker 2001, p. 152)

29 U Nu emphasised religion into politics with a belief to instil moral and social values to end insurgency activity. He hosted the 6th Buddhist World Conference from 1954-56 in Rangoon and established Buddhism as the religion of the state in 1961 much like the traditional Buddhist kings of Myanmar. However, Buddhism as tool to social cohesion and enhancement proved dangerous in a multi-religious and ethnically divided country.
The conflicting perceptions were reflected in politics between 1948 and 1962 which went in contradiction to the spirit of Panglong Agreement and co-existence implying the ethnic groups sharing in the Union as co-founder of the Union. The principle of unity in diversity and self-determination implying wide autonomy for the states under-pinning the Union was neglected. There was conflict of what Gravers (1999, pp, 43-71) points out ‘two versions of nationalism’ consisting of ‘Union state and ethnicism’. On the part of the Union state, there was an uncompromising strain of nationalism as engrained in colonial mentality which was adverse to ethnic pluralism and that had shaped the inter-ethnic relations ever since. On the other hand, the ethnic minorities had distrusted the central government dominated by the Burman and wished autonomy or independence. Minorities soon felt Aung San’s promise betrayed in independent Myanmar. The ethnic discords replaced ethnic concord directly threatening stability of the embryonic country. A crisis of identification with the state developed as many of the minority sections did not want to be part of the state or recognise the legitimacy of the weak leadership of U Nu. In other words, efforts of independent Myanmar to build a strong nation was greatly enfeebled by negative colonial legacy and chauvinistic attitude of the dominant ethnic Burmans, weak leadership and politicised or politically awakened ethnicity among others.

Another problem was the concern for development. As mentioned earlier, economically Myanmar was devastated by World War II. After the war, economic and social infrastructures, including towns and villages were razed to the ground and the social and economic life of the people was miserable. The government of U Nu sought to transform a war-devastated Myanmar economy and eliminate the economic injustices of the colonial capitalist economy through planned national economic policy and large-scale state control of the economy. The economic system of the democratic regime was a ‘mixed economy’ which was like typical of the early stages of the newly independent countries in Asia like India under Nehru and Indonesia under Sukarno. The public sector provided the main thrust to the economy, but the role was also reserved for the private sector in some areas like agriculture. The Two Year Plan for Economic Development of Burma, announced in April 1948, the Land
Nationalisation Act, 1948 and the Pyidawtha\textsuperscript{30} or Eight Year Programme of Economic and Social Reform Programme launched in 1952, envisaged the establishment of an economic system which combined mixed goals of development and equal distribution. The bitter memories of the colonial economic experiences and the nationalistic economic policy discouraged the growth of market-economy. The import-export trade was regulated through license and permit system which was often granted to indigenous firm and entrepreneurs in preference to foreigners. The land nationalisation put lands from the hands of Indian land owners into the hands of Myanmarese farmers.

U Nu inter-mixed the problem of rebuilding the war-devastated country with its commitment to equitable redistribution of the fruits of development, but it resulted in a slow and complex process of rebuilding the country (Warshaw, 1975, pp. 115-116). Nationalism and neutralism also provided impetus to socialistic vision of the new country. For example, though the government accepted foreign aids it refused to allow the foreigners to help in the reconstruction of Myanmar for it wanted to develop a wholly Myanmarese society (ibid., p. 116). Nationalisation and import-substitution strategy strengthened state’s intervention into the economy, yet the government lacked the capacity and skill needed to steer the economy to realise the mammoth task of economic reconstruction and ensuring economic injustice.

Myanmar under U Nu’s leadership also attempted to uplift his country through moral and social transformation. Combined socialistic and religious sentiments led U Nu to understanding and adoption of socialism more as a device for social equalization than for economic development. He advocated that Buddhism held the key to social cohesion and enhancement of Myanmar. By early 1960s it was clear that both the socialism and state dominant economy, and appeals to religious sentiments failed to secure national stability. Religion continued to be used for pious political purpose but the government had retracted from the state-led growth model to

\textsuperscript{30} As Mya Maung (1964, p. 1182 see footnote) explains the term Pyidawtha in Myanmarese language means a happy and prosperous state with the additional vision of a utopian blend of traditionalism and modernity. The Pyidawtha plan was launched by the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League government under the leadership of the Prime Minister U Nu. It was the first plan for socialism in independent Myanmar. The plan called for a Myanmar “in which our people are better clothed, better housed, in better health, with greater security and more leisure-and thus better able to enjoy and pursue the spiritual values that are and will remain our dearest possession” (Warshaw, 1975, p. 116).
development of economy by encouraging private sectors. The Myanmarese socialists however opposed to the capitalist trends in the economy and in disappointment they withdrew from the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League coalition and formed their own party (ibid.). The military officers, who then committed to the economic and developmental aspects of socialism and secular values, strongly opposed such changes in the priority of the state development and modernisation strategy. Eventually it turned to be one of the factors for the dissatisfaction of the military over the parliamentary government.

Most of the post-independent leaders in Myanmar were not very much enthusiastic for democracy nor did they had qualities of tolerance and compromise for a democratic governance. Rather it was the push factor to convince the British to grant independence and concern for unity that was envisaged in Panglong Agreement which necessitated adopting a liberal-democratic system. It may be mentioned here that democracy was identified with capitalism and colonial rule by most Thakin leaders, and the inclination towards democracy also created problems inimical to national solidarity. The leftist elements within Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League who criticised democracy as the system of the colonizer disliked liberal-democratic ideals and wanted transformation of the Myanmarese society through the Myanmarese method and philosophy. No doubt, they were the first immediate threat to national stability. The failure to achieve a unified nation by political means resulted in more than sixty years of civil war from 1948 up to the present. Though of late, many cease-fire agreements had been reached between the central government and the several ethnic rebel groups, the ethnic insurrections that began soon after independence still plagued the advancement of the country providing an excuse for the continuance of military rule and dominance in the politics of the country.

The parliamentary democracy and mixed economy model had formed the model for state modernisation and nation-building strategy. The elements in realizing the national goals in the immediate aftermath independence were outwardly democratic, but undoubtedly socialistic, unitary nationalism and authoritarianism in spirit, which were closely linked to and reflected as a prevailing political tradition among the civilian and military elites of the country. The other major influence was
Buddhism, which successive government had attempted to harness as an instrument to gain legitimacy but with varying degree of success. More specifically, it was the realisation later that introduction of democratic state as means of a unified, prosperous and independent Myanmar would remain elusive notion that U Nu promoted Buddhism and socialism in a moralistic plane. When the Pyidawtha programme failed chiefly because it was in the midst of a civil war, the quest for economic development focussed on the encouragement of private sector and foreign investment. The approach to national unity also shifted on an appeal to spiritualism under the influence of U Nu’s increasing devotion to Buddhism. Buddhism which was inextricably tied to the Burman identity was integrated into the ideology of the state as a major factor for establishing a stable society. The move however strengthened inter-ethnic tensions with non-Buddhist Myanmarese such as the Christian and the Muslims fearing assimilation to the culture of the majority. Meanwhile, the military who was struggling to control the civil war found the policy of the government resentful. The extremely nationalistic, paranoid, anti-capitalistic and socialist-oriented military leaders who considered parliamentary government to be continuance of western or foreign values rather than the Myanmarese ideals (Warshaw, 1975, p. 113) were greatly disturbed by the ills of parliamentary government and party politics.

Political Turmoil under Parliamentary Democracy

Myanmar adopted parliamentary democracy until 1962 with the exception of a period of eighteen months between 1958 and 1960 during which a military caretaker government functioned as de jure government. In March 1962, military again seized political power through force and coup because the military had strong perception that the parliamentary democratic system had failed to secure the unity and welfare of the country. The military thought that parliamentary democratic government under Prime Minister U Nu could not bring Myanmar to the path of unity and prosperity and hence legitimacy of the government was challenged by several groups concerns for internal disorder. The military whose political status and leverage was on the rise amidst the

31 The period between 1948-1958 and 1960-1962 can be called “Democratic Era” in Myanmar. During this period, the Myanmarese political system was structured by the constitution of 1947 and it included many of the basic provisions associated with democratic rule. It was a parliamentary democracy having two houses- the Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Nationalities. It also granted several rights and privileges to the minorities.
political upheavals, factionalism, insincerity and ethnic conflicts within Myanmar became apathetic to the parliamentary democratic system and ultimately it ousted the democratic government under U Nu out of power.

Myanmar’s tragedy began right after independence. The diverse and potentially volatile political and ethnic groups that had been kept in check by Aung San’s aura and vision were asserting their discontentments after his death. In the following ten years, Myanmar was a tormented parliamentary democracy due to multiplicity of conflicts, rifts, rivalries in competition for influence in politics and ethnic conflicts which were fomented by lack of economic development. The communists and many other ethnic rebel groups who felt unfairly treated and their rightful place not sanctioned denied recognising the sovereignty of the democratic government of U Nu. Consequently the parliamentary democracy was engulfed into multi-front civil war.

The first credible threat to the government came from the communists. The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) was formally organized in 1944 during the World War II. Due to doctrinal difference among its leaders the party split into two groups in March 1946 with each groups leading by two prominent leaders. Thakin Soe led a faction known as the Red Flag Communists and the other faction led by Than Tun was known as the White Flag Communists. The Thakin Soe faction was less in strength but it went underground and began an armed insurrection against the government (Arunugam, 1976, p 169). The group led by Than Tun constituted the mainstream group initially formed part of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League government, but ideological rift and personal rivalry among the leaders led it defected from the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League government. It then took the path of open revolt against the government since 1948. The White Flag Communist of Than Tun complained that the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League had become little more than a tool of British imperialism and that “it was therefore necessary to overthrow it and establish a proper people’s government” (Thant Myint-U, 2007, p. 259). Than Tun denounced the Nu-Atlee Treaty of October 1947 highlighting the

32 Than Tun explained the stand of the communists in March 1948 as thus:“Behind this facade of independence the old colonial social order is retained. British imperialism continues its domination, though the form has changed. Imperialism did not hand over power to the national bourgeoisie until it
defence arrangement which allowed a British military training mission to remain in Myanmar for three years which the White Communists took as both evidence of British intention to subvert the future sovereignty of Myanmar and proof of U Nu’s capitulation (Smith, 1991, p. 103). The Communist Party of Burma was declared illegal in 1953. Large numbers of People’s Volunteer Organisation (PVO) members who failed to be disarmed or incorporated in the paramilitary forces of the government joined the rebels forming credible threat to the government. The government also faced series of desertion in large sections of the military that sympathised with the communists. For instance in mid-June 1948 a battalion from the sixth Burma Rifles went over to the communist side in Pegu district and in August the same year two other battalion followed suit (ibid. p. 109). These units were led by experienced military officers.

The anti-government rebellions were based either on ideological rift or personal rivalry in a political tinge, such as the Communists and People’s Volunteer Organisation. By the end of the first year of independence disgruntled ethnic minorities, such as, the Karen, the Mon and the Kachin also articulated claims of social and political autonomy primarily based on ethnicity, and having disgusted with the constitutional arrangement, they, like the communists, took up arms against the state. The Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO), the military wing of the Karen National Union (KNU), counting in its ranks many seasoned troops from British colonial days, posed a formidable threat to the Union government. It resorted to armed revolt over the unresolved issue of an independent Karen state. The Karen National Union was declared illegal political body in 1949. In 1951 the Kachin formed a small armed group which later culminated as the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and its political body the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) in 1961. The Kachin Independence Organisation demanded full autonomy for the Kachin state and protection of their culture and identity by the central government. Similar claims were also articulated from the Mons. These organisations attempted was sure the national bourgeoisie had given up the path of opposition and that it was going to use the power so transferred not against imperialism but against the people” (quoted in Smith, 1991, p. 103).

Historically the central government had minimal control over the peripheral ethnic areas in Myanmar. The ethnic aspirations and grievances against the central government remained high in those areas. Such feelings and conditions provided World War II which ensured ready supply of arms and ammunitions left over provided the basis for insurrections.
either to monopolise the loyalty of their respective ethnic community or sought to keep their community from integrating into the Myanmar state articulating claims ranging from complete independence to autonomy of politics and identity. The necessity of fighting what have been aptly termed as the “kaleidoscope of insurgency” (ibid. p, 28), involving the communists, People’s Volunteer Organisation and ethnic insurgents simultaneously was difficult, if not impossible, for the infant parliamentary democracy government and its ill-equipped, inexperienced and embryonic military forces. As a result, the provisional government under U Nu lost large territories to communists and other rebels earning it the mocker “the Rangoon Government” (South, 2008, p. 27) and in the words of Thant Myint-U (2007, p. 270), the “islands of government control in a sea of uncertain authority”.

Another important obstacle to Myanmar’s security and stability developed in the form of Chiang Kai-Shek’s Nationalist Chinese Forces or Kuomintang (KMT) unit flooding into Myanmar side of Sino-Myanmar border in the north east. These forces had settled in Shan state after their defeat at the hands of the army of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The Kuomintang troops received supplies and ammunitions from the United States to launch attacks against the People’s Republic of China. There they laid the foundation of multi-dollar poppy agriculture and opium trade route. Fearing foreign intervention, Mrime Minister U Nu wanted the Kuomintang forces removed from Myanmar’s soil and in several diplomatic interventions at the United Nations; he managed to get most of the Kuomintang troops withdraw to Taiwan. But the worst development was that the military unit dispatched into Shan state to counter the Kuomintang ended up committing atrocities and sparking a Shan uprising in the late 1950s (Yawnghwe, 1997, p. 79).

The trouble for the parliamentary government of U Nu did not end here. Compounding the series of armed rebellions, peaceful strikes and protests were also staged by government clerks and workers in the government services (Tinker, 1957 p, 127). The Ministerial Service Union started a nation-wide strike in February 1949 which was soon spread to Railway Union. They were protesting against government

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34 The provisional government period lasted from independence to 1952, till the first general election was held. It was not an elected government (Langpoklakpam, 2006, p. 13, footnote no.9)
imposing salary cut following disruption of economic activities in the rebel occupied areas, so that the fiscal strain the civil war had exerted to the government could be redeemed. In the midst of such crises, U Nu also found the members of his cabinet had approached the White Communist leader, Than Tun, and offered to give to the communists the leadership of the country (ibid.). The communists however overestimating the strength of their position rejected the proposal, unless there could have much earlier blow to the parliamentary democracy of U Nu and Myanmar might have turned into a communist country. All these developments nearly paralysed working of U Nu’s government. There was complete chaos and anarchic condition in the country.

During these tumultuous years of post-independence, U Nu’s initial approach had been democratic and political solution encompassing consolidation through conciliation. It showed success in dealing with some dissatisfied member of his cabinet and administrative officials. U Nu also attempted to appease anger and distrust of the various rebel factions directed towards the Myanmar government. In May 1948, a conciliatory 15-Point Leftist Unity Plan\(^{35}\) which envisioned wooing the underground communists and retaining the People’s Volunteer Organisation remnants was declared. However the ideological and personal differences between the rebel leaders and the central government proved so wide that it could not be reconciled successfully through political discussion and conciliation. The political and ethnic conflicts continued.

A serene by personality, U Nu had another weakness. His efforts were often impulsive and short-sighted and eventually proved futile. When his good intentions had received lukewarm responses, he offered to resign as Prime Minister and Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League president provided the various factions would agree on a peaceful solution. In view of the rebels’ uncompromising gesture and

\(^{35}\) This Marxist-oriented compromise programmes proposed among other thing, to: 1) secure political and economic relations with Soviet Russia and the democratic countries of Eastern Europe in the same way as they were having these relations with Britain and the United States; 2) nationalise monopolistic capitalistic undertakings, and to administer the resulting national undertakings by partnership between the state and the workers; 3) transfer the entire foreign trade, including the export and the import trade, into the hands of the state; 4) refuse any foreign aid of any kind which will compromise the political, economic and strategic independence of Myanmar/Myanmar; 5) abolish private ownership of land and distribute the land only among the tillers of the soil; 6) draw up a plan for the industrialization of the country with a time-table and to begin work on it immediately (see Bandyopadhyaya, 1983, p.39).
increasingly militant responses U Nu however gave a second thought to his approach. Perhaps his predominantly compromising attitude as against the determined effort of the rebels to enforce their demands by force strengthened the position of the rebels. Disgusted U Nu later decided to meet force by force. It was a period of the Myanmarese military still largely depended on its Kachin, Karen and Chin regiments for waging war against the communists. In second half of 1948, U Nu formed local auxiliary defence groups known as the Sitwundas (Peace Guerrillas) for territorial and rear deployment (Smith, 1991, p. 116). The multi-front insurrections which in the beginning proved highly successful were plagued by internal differences and many alliances among them proved temporary. In March 1950, rebel factions of the People’s Volunteer Organisation broke alliance with the communists thereby reducing the threat of a potentially dangerous combination. In August the same year the Karen National Union leader Saw Ba U Gyi was ambushed and killed by an army patrol. Besides U Nu had the loyalty of the uncompromising personality of the new Army Chief-of-Staff General Ne Win. Ne Win responded to rebel threats by greatly improving the government’s military mechanism. By 1952, the army had recaptured many lost territories. Meanwhile the dispersed communists and other political discontents as military units coalesced with criminal elements in terrorizing sections of the countryside disrupting transportation and interfering governmental and economic functions (Cady, 1953, p. 50).

The fragile situation affected development concerns of the government. After independence the role of the state had greatly expanded following the government envisioning a democratic welfare state in a framework of parliamentary democracy. However the goal proved to be incommensurate with the pattern, focus and effectiveness of the government of U Nu. The new country was attempting to reconstruct the economy even as the civil war was going on but it encountered a major administrative problem due to rapid personnel turnover in the bureaucracy at independence. Independent Myanmar suffered from rapid loss of personnel efficiency and institutional effectiveness. Most of the senior members of the British

36 The anti-government rebels such as the communists, ethnic insurgents and Kuomintang forces had military agreements among them though the understanding often proved to be temporary. For example, the Kachin Independence Army, Shan and Kayah rebels joined to form the National Liberation Alliance. Several People’s Volunteer Organisation and Kuomintang rebels were absorbed into the Communist Party of Burma alliance.
administrative services who provided the backbone to British administration in Myanmar had reputation of efficiency and integrity, and gained prestige and social standing throughout their positions. Most of the senior bureaucrats who served the colonial government were not the Myanmarese, but mostly the Indians and the Europeans. With the fall of the British rule they either retired voluntarily or were encouraged to leave. Except few British officials, most of them preferred to leave Myanmar. Numerous vacancies were created in post-independent administrative institutions which were filled by the Myanmarese who were less experienced as they had been serving subordinate positions in the colonial government. The British administrative policy of deliberately doing nothing to train the Myanmarese officials oriented to the developmental functions of the state incapacitated the bureaucratic machinery of the country adapted to the economic functions of the post-independent Myanmar. At this point what Khin Maung Kyi (1966, p. 133) commented seems quite impressive. According to him, in an unstable political atmosphere where the authority of the political leadership had yet to be firmly legitimatised, bureaucrats were required to cope with a changing role, going from that of the ‘upholder of the status quo in a colonial social order to that of a socio-economic organizer in a developing society’. This did not happen rather the bureaucratic machinery of the post-independent Myanmar was inept and hence the welfare and social justice functions of the government were stalled. The administrative officials were not very accommodative to their changing responsibility.

The expectations and demands of the people were high, but it could not be fulfilled by the inept governance of the ill-trained and insufficient administrative officials and whose core concern was also security of the state. The extractive and distributive capability of the political system was caught up in red-tape and became dysfunctional due to huge gap between role demand and actual performance of the bureaucrats. They tended to resist the chaotic expansion of their role that accompanied the far-stretched economic needs and policies demanded. Instead the administrative officers were pushed to concentrate in the colonial administrative priorities of collection of revenue, and maintenance of law and order following growing political instability. The state’s development plans suffered due to incapacity of the state to implement the plans including the inability of the government officials
and the fragile security situation. The prioritising of security agenda as a result, further absorbed state’s resources and limited developmental reach of the government. In other words, the goal of social and economic justice through planned development and state steering suffered implementation defects and many other ills. The economy started deteriorating gradually.

The armed revolts were gradually brought under control by resorting to state’s military and punitive forces. Myanmar was not however destined to get rid of its legitimacy crises. When the country’s struggle for survival against the armed rebels had posed little threat, intra-party conflict within the ruling Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League coalition erupted. In the background of civil war and the economic recession, there came turmoil in the dominant ruling party which split the party into two bitterly hostile factions in 1958. Each faction was led by two of the country’s four most prominent political figures who had been in constant association since the early days of the struggle for independence. Prime Minister U Nu and a Deputy Prime Minister Thakin Tin led a faction known as the ‘Clean Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League’ group. The other faction headed by Deputy Prime Minister Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyien was called as the ‘Real Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League’. This political conflict based on assertive personalities and personal mistrust, intolerance and rivalry destabilised the civilian government of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League. It was a period where the suitability, continuity and integrity of democracy in Myanmar were severely tested.

The immediate cause of the split was a conflict over the appointment of the secretary to Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League, but the intra-party differences, personal rivalry and intolerance had continued since long time back. The differences were less doctrinal or ideological. It was the outburst of the prolonged irritation and suspicion among the leaders of the party who were increasingly losing respect for each other. The leaders bypassed institutional mechanism for obtaining power and gave primacy to personal relation and personality, prestige and charisma over the democratic principles. As a serene by personality, U Nu’s esteem was high among his colleagues in Asia. For instance, along with Jawaharlal Nehru, Binobha Bhave and Mao Zedong, he was considered four main figures in Asia in 1950s. Internally, as
politician, he was one among equals among his colleagues who would neither be able to maintain his legitimacy nor leadership position. His authority and leadership were denied by many influential members of his colleagues.

The very nature of Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League as coalition of different ideologies and personalities also contributed to the conflict within. Once the anti-imperialistic nationalism that had provided a strong enough catalyst to hold the ideologically opposing Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League factions together faded and many of the threats from rebels to unity dwindled providing some room for open politics, competition for power and position in Myanmar became revived. In the absence for respect and uphold of democratic process, norms and principles many political evils not conducive for the smooth working of parliamentary democratic system emerged. The competitive power struggle within the ruling Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League came to the fore above the interest of the nation. These political problems grounded on factionalism and rivalry were closely linked to the factor of quest of personalisation of power and decision-making, and the nature of internal politics under the one-party dominant system. Both were complementary factors in paralysing the Myanmarese political life, the background of which could be explored in the Myanmarese political culture and tradition.

Myanmar held elections in April 1947 to choose members of its Constituent Assembly, and the independent Myanmar’s first general elections for the bicameral parliament were held in 1951. In the election, Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League secured about 60 per cent of the vote cast and won 147 out of the total 250 seats (see Table 4 below).

37 According to Trager (1958, p. 147) political evils, such as ‘charges of corruption, political play-offs, nepotism, and wives interferences in husbands’ cabinet’, were freely bandied about.
Table 4: Results of 1951-52 General Elections in Myanmar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Percentage of votes secured</th>
<th>Number of seats won</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFPFL allies*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Democratic Front (PDF)**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arakan National Unity Organisation (ANUO)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League allies included the Burma Socialist Party (BSP), the All Burma Peasants Organisation (ABPO), the Burma Muslim Congress (BMC), the Kachin National Congress (KNC), the United Karen League (UKL), the Chin Congress, the United Hill People's Congress (UHPC), the All Burma Women's Freedom League (ABWFL) and the All Burma Federation of Trade Organisations (ABFTO).

** The People's Democratic Front was an alliance of the Burma Workers’ and Peasants’ Party (BWPP), the Patriotic Alliance (PA) and the Burma Democratic Party (BDP).

The turnout for the election was less than 20 per cent with only 1.5 million voters out of an electorate of 8 million (Taylor, 1996, p. 173). In the intervening period, as mentioned, it was ruled by a provisional government under Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League’s monolithic dominance under the leadership of U Nu. The political hegemony of the party was clearly established by winning huge parliamentary majorities in the first two national elections held in 1951 and 1956 respectively. However the Myanmarese democracy during this period, though provision for democratic functioning was institutionally available, in reality, it remained to be on paper. The Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League functioned with no constitutionally responsible and critical opposition to its policies and decisions.

During the first general elections, the most credible parliamentary oppositions were formed by the Burma Workers’ and Peasants’ Party (BWPP) and the Independent Arakanese Parliamentary group (IAPG), but their effectiveness were seldom felt. The Burma Workers’ and Peasants’ Party was formed by left-wing socialists who once formed part of the ruling Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League.

They defected from the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League in protest against the government’s withdrawal from socialistic policies. With their departure, the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League was confined to a very limited group of person, most of whom relied around personality of the U Nu till 1958. U Nu held wide constitutional power and personal prestige which allowed him to enjoy much power and influence in comparison with his colleagues. Theoretically matters were to be decided on the basis of consensus, but in reality, this consensus was never attained until Prime Minister U Nu made up his mind (Bandyopadhyaya, 1983, p. 40). Under such circumstances, the Myanmarese democracy was characterised by clique politics where decision and policies of the government could aptly be termed as undemocratic processes in a democratic framework. In other words, the top few leaders who held too much power but were less responsible, dominated Myanmarese political life. For more than a decade the few leaders at the top monopolised all the benefits and burdens of the governance. They neither wanted to broaden the power base at the top nor lightened or shared the burdens and responsibilities of their positions.  

Some of the important causes of the split were leadership failure, intolerant attitude towards colleagues, high handedness, consequent misunderstanding and antagonism among the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League leaders. It happened so because of the very nature of the politics as struggle for power and the monopolistic control of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League in the politics of Myanmar for more than a decade. There was no effective parliamentary opposition in the parliament. Intra party democracy was absent with U Nu holding seat of power for more than one decade. Unfortunately he was not charismatic enough or skilled in personal management which could keep check challenges to his authority. There was intra-party struggle for power or tussle for power was played out within ranks of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League. The party ran the government, but in practice, it was the small clique at the top who controlled the party and the government. The

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39 Maung Maung (1969, p. 284) claims that U Nu himself admitted this by quoting him as: “Most of...decisions were carried on at the initiation of one, two or three leaders without adequate discussion and consultation with other members of the party, and far less with persons and interests outside the party”.
worst was the growing dissensions within the small clique as corruption and insincerity were rampant in the power echelon. The leaders increasingly became restive, impatient with colleagues and criticism, and relied more and more in impulsive and arbitrary personal actions without the help of firm institutionalised rule and respect for established procedures. The period was such that the dominance of political disputes in the news overshadowed the achievements of the government (Silverstein, 1977, p. 7-18). Public contempt also grew over factional fights of the politicians. At the same time, economic condition was deteriorating following fluctuation in price of rice in international market and inept management of the economy. The insurrections against the government were still active as disbanded military units. As a result of all these, the popularity of Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League as well as democracy dwindled. The military in turn was gradually strengthening its strength and image in the eyes of the people and government alike.

The second General Elections in Myanmar took place in 1956. The elections brought the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League back to power, but the support base of the party was contracted. In this election, the ruling Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League could won 147 seats out of 250 seats (together with its allies it got 173 seats), but the voting figures showed the support for the party downslide by 12 percent (see Table 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage of Votes secured</th>
<th>Number of seats won</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pro-AFPFL Parties</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Fascist People Freedom League</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Hill People’s Congress (UNPC)</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Economic Cultural Development Organisation (PECDO)</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Shan State Organisation (ASSO)</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan States Peasant Organisation (SSPO)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachin National Congress (KNC)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anti-AFPFL Parties</strong></td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The election result of the 1956 brought back the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League to power. The final voting figure showed an increase in the percentage of vote in favour of the opposition. Out of the two-fifths of the total electorate actually voted about 48 percent voted for the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League and the oppositions captured nearly 52 percent of the total votes, though they won lesser seats. The reason for the losing popularity of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League could be sought to the fact that the party had been paralysed by political infighting and rivalry and its government was not successful in reversing administrative inefficiency, economic deterioration and resolve insurrections and cross-border tensions. The oppositions were facilitated by their greater organisational coherence and growing stature. The parliamentary opposition lacked position to break the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League’s monolithic presence but the confusion over personal rivalries and factional conflicts within the party that persisted on for long actually threatened the dominance and stability of the party. It was at this stage that U Nu decided to resign his post as Prime Minister for one year and as President of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League, to set about ‘clean it up’ from corruption and personal rivalries. When he actually did it, U Ba Swe became Prime Minister and U Khyaw Nyein was assigned the post of deputy Prime Minister. U Nu returned office ten months later, though ills of the party not yet resolved. The last effort to preserve Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League unity was the convention of Third All Burma Congress of the Party in June 1958. The ‘unity

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Name</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burma Democratic Party (BDP)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma Nationalist Bloc (BNB)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arakan National United Organisation (ANUO)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United National Pa-O Organisation (UNPO)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Parties (10)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided Seats</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Silverstein (1956, p. 182)

*The National United Front (NUF) was a coalition of oppositions of the Burma Workers’ and Peasants’ Party (BWPP), the Peoples Unity Party (PUP) and their allies*
The peace and unity convention\textsuperscript{40} too could not reconcile the schisms that had developed among the top leaders particularly since mid 1950s and ultimately, Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League split into two factions as mentioned before in 1958.

The post-split political situation was very critical. As party got split, the thirty member ruling cabinet was divided into two equal halves between the two factions (Maung Maung Gyi, 1983, p. 120). The immediate question was which faction would rule Myanmar? A special session of the lower house of the parliament was convened where relative strength of the Nu-Tin group and Swe-Nyein faction was tested. In the 250 member house, Nu-Tin Group won 127 votes against 119 votes secured by Swe-Nyein faction (ibid.). U Nu’s new cabinet survived only through support of the leftist opposition coalition, National United Front and some other minority party secured by promising to work for new Mon and Arakanese states. The majority was so fragile for the new government of U Nu that he felt need to pass annual budget by presidential decree because he doubted the required majority in the parliament to approve it (Steinberg, 1982, p. 69).

After the 1956 elections U Nu’s leadership was thus greatly weakened. The parliamentary government of U Nu began vulnerable to both push and pull pressures from the coalition partners. The left-wing supporters pressurised the government to offer complete amnesty to all insurgents willing to surrender and be assured that they would be permitted to contest the next elections. U Nu could not turn down the demand of its influential supporters. According to Steinberg (1981, p.15), about 2,000 insurgents surrendered and there developed a new Leftist party known as the People's Comrades Party. U Nu was also pushed to incorporate into the army the surrendered leftist People’s Volunteer Organisation insurgents and to remove key military figures opposed to the leftist policies which were strongly opposed by the Myanmarese military (ibid.). It can be observed that the influence of the communists began to strengthen in the formal politics. The military which was fighting the communists and other rebels felt suspicious at such development. Around this time,

\textsuperscript{40} The peace and unity convention was held in the peace pagoda site in January 1958 and it was attended by about two thousand delegates (Langpoklakpam, 2006, p. 7)
Taking advantage of the weak position of the government, the Karen and the Shan insurgents also revived their demands for greater autonomy or secession.

The forces of political divisiveness, the continuous multi-front insurgency and the weakening economy, combined to destabilize the first decade of parliamentary democratic government under U Nu. Around this time Maung Maung and Aung Gyi convinced U Nu to invite Gen Ne Win to form a caretaker government especially to stabilise the civilian government of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (Guo, 2011). U Nu inadvertently allowed General Ne Win, the military chief, to gain state and administrative control by handing over ruling power to them. The military assumed direct political power for the first time in independent Myanmar. This event was referred to as a “coup by consent” or “constitutional coup’detat” (Steinberg, 1982, p. 69). U Nu however indicated that his withdrawal was only temporary and that he would return to power after a brief spell of military rule. It was indeed a risky decision for the future of democracy in Myanmar.

One of the most critical developments during the politico-economic turmoil of the first decade of democratic era was the enhancement of the prestige and position of the Tatmadaw, the Myanmarese military. Before mentioning the nature of military caretaker government during the period 1958 to 1960, let us first understand the birth and growth of modern Myanmarese military. The modern Myanmar military was remotely descended from colonial era. Its origin can be traced back to the birth of Burma Independence Army (BIA) founded by a group of nationalist military-politicians known as the ‘Thirty Comrades’. They were of middle class origin, fiercely nationalistic and had socialist leaning which was consolidated during the British colonial rule. Their goal was independence, and these military elites became the nucleus of the post-independent army.

One basic characteristic of the politics in Myanmar in the post-independent period was inter-mixing of political and military roles. For instance, General Ne Win, the Army Chief of the Staff, served as Deputy Prime Minister and as Defence Minister at some time in the government of U Nu. In fact Myanmarese military officials had high reputation in Myanmarese society. Their goal was considered clean,
and the military was recognised as incorrupt, competent and vigorous. It enjoyed high reputation in Myanmarese society. However the military also had their share of crisis. The military suffered massive desertion with many Karen units of the army joining the rebel camps. Fearing further escalation important Karen military officials were sacked from their posts. The Karen loyal to the government, General Smith Dun was forced to resign and was replaced by Lt. General Ne Win, the former Deputy Commander of the Burma Independence Army. The crisis within military establishment however rendered the leadership of the military in the hands of the Burmans.

It can be mentioned that ideology was also a major component of the Myanmarese military. Their ideology was grounded on modernisation, national unity, distrust of foreign influence and protection of culture. We will see that both the temporary military caretaker government of 1958 to 1960 and the direct military regime under the Revolutionary Council and the quasi-civilian military rule under the constitution of 1974 which came later advanced ideological foundations more or less in the above terms. During the first few years of independence, though the Tatmadaw was a small, divided and disorganised force and mutinous as well, it acted as protector of the Anti-Fascist People Freedom League government (Maung Maung Gyi, 1983, p. 185). It forged its political identity as a consequence and by product of counter-insurgency operations it spearheaded during period of the parliamentary democracy period. The military broke the backbone of the communists and Karen insurgencies. Furthermore, it also fought against remnant of the United States Central Intelligence Agency backed Kuomintang troops in the Shan state. All these elevated the position of Tatmadaw from being merely security agency of the democratic state to state’s survival with emphasis on national unity and development. There developed self-perceived guardian role of the Tatmadaw and it became increasingly restless over the corruption and inefficiency of the U Nu’s parliamentary democratic government and his mishandling of internal political and national divisiveness. It began to see itself as alternative to the ineffective government. The military grew into a parallel centre of power as de facto institution in Myanmar political circle. Under General Ne Win, the military became the formidable force binding the country together during the turbulent period of parliamentary democracy. It began to occupy a position parallel to
the civilian government. However in functional and organisational terms the military was more disciplined and organised.\footnote{As Callahan (1998, p. 14-16) writes: “The military had been bolstered by its successful role in turning the tide of Myanmar’s civil war in the 1950s, such that by the end of the decade, it had gained enough organizational and administrative experience to consider itself a viable and stronger leadership alternative to the ineffective civilian government”.

The caretaker government was the first direct military involvement in politics which remained in power for eighteen months from September 1958 to March 1960. U Nu announced on September 1958 that apprehending disintegration of the Union due to disturbed and dangerous conditions, and to take over responsibility for the government in order to restore security, law and order, so as to create the conditions necessary for holding a free and fair General Election, he had transferred the power of the government to a caretaker government under military General Ne Win. For the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League its handing over power to the military was to stabilise the democratic government of U Nu and it was expected to aid the civilian government. Both the factions of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League authorised the military assume the reign of government. The military also perceived its political role as getting the country back on track in which the state under the democratic leadership failed drastically. The rationale behind inviting the military take-over was to establish a strong and disciplined state that had been destabilised by intra-party conflicts, internal divisiveness and inept administration. There was crisis of governability due to weak position of the central government which need to be reversed for the stability and development of the country. In other words, the caretaker government intended to overcome the civil war and to preserve the unity and for it eliminated corrupt and incapable politicians by strengthening regulative and punitive mechanism of the government. The prime minister U Nu accorded constitutional sanctity to the military caretaker government. Once the military had established centrality of role in the national affairs, it set out to arrest intra-party conflicts, contain the armed insurgency movements and to establish administrative efficiency.

The caretaker government swept aside the constitution of 1947 and attempted to establish a regimented and strong government by clearing up the messes of the
parliamentary politics. The clean up was undertaken in a militaristic manner, at the cost of democracy and constitutional sanctioned rights. Hundreds of political leaders whose policies leaned toward the communist were held captive as political prisoners. It passed an Anti-Subversion Ordinance empowering the government to crackdown on its opponents and freedom was denied for them. The government was quite visibly a military regime. The period of caretaker government witnessed a much greater penetration of military in the politics, economy and society. The military government allowed the cabinet position to be held by civilians, but it seconded military officers to each ministry or departments to take over the functions of management (Steinberg, 1982, p. 70). The military unilaterally run the state making all decisions through officers placed in various ministries and organisations. Quick decisions were reached without considering political benefits and more authoritarian methods were employed to implement them. Political activities were halted and democracy existed only in name during the eighteen months of caretaker period.

The military caretaker government performed well during the short period. It removed urban squatters to new satellite towns outside the cities, chewing and spitting betel nut banned, everyone over twelve years old in Rangoon was photographed for national registration, streets were widened and the army taught lessons of morality to its citizens (Charney, 2009, pp. 97-98). It undertook strong offensives against the insurgents and other anti-state elements such as criminals. Crime statistics greatly diminished and insurgency related accidents dropped drastically. The military set about cleaning up inefficiency and corruption within bureaucracy. For instance, working hours of the civil servants were closely monitored and thousands of them not considered qualified for their jobs were dismissed. Ne Win improved public services as well. Likewise it targeted to make the people aware of their civic responsibilities and national responsibility through an organisation known as the National Solidarity Association (NSA). The military expanded Defence Service Institute (DSI), a military run organisation created in 1950, from operating staff shops to become the most powerful business organisation in the country involving in banking, construction, shipping and fishing, and owned department store and many other businesses. The successful functioning of the Defence Service Institute in economic ventures and enterprises had given a belief on the military that it could run the economic affairs of
the country. The Myanmarese military were intimately involved in the economic activities in monopolistic manner (ibid.). All these gave the military confidence that it could manage the economy and run the country more efficiently than the civilians.

During this period General Ne Win paid visit to Peking and negotiated border agreement with Peoples’ Republic of China. Further he successfully conducted the promised Third General Elections in 1960. U Nu and his party Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League faction now renamed as the Union Party (Pyidaungsu) was voted back to power (see Table 6) and consequently General Ne Win returned power to the victorious U Nu. The military proved its efficiency and capability to run crisis-infested political and economic affairs of the country. It attempted to exhibit undemocratically regimented state was more suitable for Myanmar. To a large extent, the success of the military’s political experimentation could be attributed to the very nature of its rule of strict regimentation and conducting functions and decisions of the government in accordance with the military’s channel of command. While the civilian leaders were enfeebled by political considerations in policies and actions, the military leaders were more goal-oriented and practical minded. Due to his constructive role, General Ne Win earned the distinction of being one of the most respected leaders of the country. He was nominated for the prestigious Magsaysay Award, but he declined to accept it on the ground that it might compromise Myanmar’s neutrality in foreign

Table 6: Results of 1960 General Elections in Myanmar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Parties</th>
<th>Percentage of votes secured</th>
<th>Number of seats won</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clean AFPFL</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean AFPFL’s Allies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable AFPFL</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable AFPFL’s Allies</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arakan Organisation</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncontested seats</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tinker (1967, p. 92)

As Steinberg (1981, p. 18) notes, the Defence Service Institute had ventured into vital economic enterprises in which Myanmarese have had no previous experiences, so that the military now had have a hand in the control of the national economy.
policy stand (Yawnghwe, 1997, p. 129, footnote, 62). At the end of its rule the caretaker government presented its accomplishment in a polished document known as “Is Truth Vindicated”? The military had not only exhibited efficiency but also shown its professionalism by returning to the barracks after handing power to the democratically elected government of U Nu.

Speculations can be made on the factors behind the military’s withdrawal from politics in 1958 and its recapturing the same in 1962. On the very onset it can be reminded that the caretaker government did not came at the initiative of General Ne Win himself, rather it was outcome of U Nu being convinced to do so for security of the state as well the government. General Ne Win simply carried out what was expected from him by acting as the most trusted supporter of the state. It can be argued that Ne Win’s political ambition had not taken shape or his intension for regenerating a new Myanmar was only embryonic at that time. For example when asked what would he do if he found he could not able to fulfil his assigned task by a visiting team of West Germany journalists, Ne Win replied confidently that he would resign (Maung Maung, 1969, pp. 257-58). He returned power to U Nu despite the military’s disappointment to his electoral victory. All these indicated that General Ne Win or the military was not thinking for a permanent military rule. At that point of time, the control of General Ne Win in the Tatmadaw was also not yet fully established, and that the military lacked a strongman, as Yawnghwe (1997) asserts, to direct the military as unified body to retain political power for long time. The military thought that it had successfully silenced many rebel activities and the threat to national unity and integrity was not as paramount as it was before. Notwithstanding its efficiency in managing political and economic affairs of the country, the military’s method and tactics was not liked by the people. The people clearly voted U Nu back to power overlooking military’s sympathy and inclination for the anti-U Nu party led Stable Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League of Swe-Nyein. The electoral defeat of party headed by Nyein- Swe which identified themselves with the military during the election, but eventually lost it was a lesson for the military.

43 Yawnghwe (1997, p. 86) argues that prolong military intervention that results in the reorganization of political power depends to a large extent on the military being unified by a strongman; and if an undisputed strongman is lacking, the military will most likely restore civilian rule.

44 As mentions by Steinberg (1982, p. 71) the military subtly supported the Stable Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League of Swe-Nyein.
All these factors caused the military hand over power to U Nu. The brief spell of military rule however tested military’s efficiency in managing national political and economic affairs. The military’s political ambition and confidence that it could run the country better was spurred up. It began to look for another opportunity. The future of democracy in Myanmar was at stake.

**Breakdown of Democracy**

U Nu returned to power after his Union Party won the elections of 1960. Learned for the mistakes of the past he intended to strengthen democratic governance in the country. However democracy proved to be a process the essence of which was not understood by the Myanmarese political leaders and other sections of the society. The disrespect of essence of democracy could be seen within the ruling Pyidaungsu or Union Party (UP) itself of U Nu. While the government needed to have capitalised on the achievement of the military and got rectify the errors of the past, there developed conflict within the party between the ‘Thakins faction’ and ‘Boes factions’. The tussled for power indicated want of democratic sentiments. Even though U Nu became Prime Minister again, his stature had been significantly reduced, as he had failed to display decisive authority or to eliminate conflicts within his own Union Party. The military which had successfully exhibited that it could rule Myanmar more effectively during the caretaker period despised selfish and narrow politics of the politicians.

Two more issues also came to the forefront which had direct implication on national unity. Before the return of U Nu to power in 1960, he made two notable promises during his election campaigning: i) U Nu promised to uphold democracy and Buddhism to secure support of the Burman and other adherents of Buddhism, and ii) he also hinted the formation of separate Mon and Arakanese state if he returned to power. U Nu won the election of 1960, but those promises he made during electioneering created more problems and confusion during his second premiership. He tried to appeal to all, but satisfied only a few of them.
In 1961, U Nu initiated constitutional amendments to make Buddhism state religion of the country which created uncertainties on the several ethnic minority groups who professed different religions. They could not reconcile to the idea of Buddhism making made official religion of the country. In 1961 itself the Kachin Independent Organisation (KIO) went underground complaining that U Nu’s propagation of Buddhism as the official religion threatened the integrity of the largely Christian Kachin society (South, 2008, pp. 33-34). The Tatmadaw also worried that it might evoke indiscipline and disunity in the ranks of the armed forces based on religious issues and it supported the proposal only for the Burman dominated areas. The Buddhists monks were equally dissatisfied with the amendment.

U Nu’s plan to revisit the federal structure and the question of giving autonomy status to the Mon and the Arakanese woke up the centrifugal tendencies intrinsic in the various ethnic races of the country. It was a period the Shans and the Karenni states of the Union were discussing their place on a Union of Myanmar. It can be mentioned here that an unusual feature of the 1947 constitution of Myanmar was that Shan state and the Karenni state of the union enjoyed, subject to compliance with certain procedures, that is, the right to secede from the union ten years after the introduction of the constitution. That period was reached in 1957, but under the caretaker period of 1958 to 1960 it largely remained dormant. However the questions of giving autonomy status to the Mons and the Arakanese state flare-up political divisiveness. Particularly the Shans demanded a federal system with the creation of separate state for the Burmans inhabitants of the erstwhile Myanmar proper at a conference of the Shan leaders in Taunggyi (ibid. p. 34).

At this critical juncture, the insurrection activities of the underground ethnic rebels were also resurrected. As mentioned above, many Kachin had joined rebels on the state religion issue. The Karen rebellion became stronger with many Shan rebels becoming their allies, and by the end of 1961 U Nu publicly stated that rebels controlled one-tenth of the country (Butwell, 1962, p. 7). The economy of the country was also not in sound position. The government had ended Pyidawtha plan in 1960, but it was not substituted by a well-workout plan. Initially government showed inclination to privatisation and liberalisation of state enterprises, but from mid 1961 it
strengthened role of state in economic and social welfare. However the economic performance continued to be disappointing. Production declined and inflation rose.

In other words, the government of U Nu failed to strengthen democracy for the second time in Myanmar. Political instability, factionalism, economic deterioration and ethnic conflict continued to create turmoil not conducive for the democracy to take roots in the country. The military’s distrust for democratic government increased and the gap between it and political leaders widened. In early 1962, U Nu convened a National Seminar in Rangoon to discuss minority groups’ demand for the right to form a federal state. General Ne Win and his colleagues were alarmed at the prospect of U Nu granting concessions to the federal movement which it considered would disintegrate the country.

Now the question is what went wrong with Myanmar’s experiment with democracy or democratic governance ultimately leading to the point of democratic breakdown? Democracy was the most admired political system in the post colonial societies, but most of them ended in dictatorship or military rule. This happened in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, Myanmar etc. In fact democracy was one of the most difficult systems which was not easy to maintain because it needed a strong base or foundation at the leadership level, popular culture and way of life. Historically Myanmar did not have strong democratic foundation. The country lacked the essentials of a functioning democratic society, which relates to its political culture and traditions and political socialisation process (Maung Maung Gyi, 1983). Democracy in Myanmar came with the British rule. The British initiated the practice of representative institutions and government in a very limited sense. Majority of the Myanmarese nationalists distrusted western values and practices and it was only few western-educated Myanmarese elites who gained rudimentary knowledge and experience of working a representative government during the British period in Myanmar. Unfortunately the Japanese occupation and colonisation of Myanmar inflicted a great blow to the evolution of democracy in Myanmar.

It can be argued that establishing democracy in a country where democracy was only an exception in the political culture, and behaviour of the people and leaders
alike proved a difficult task for independent Myanmar. Moreover the socio-economic and political factors of the colonial society of Myanmar were not conducive for democracy to flourish. Institutions of democracy and democratic procedures were largely alien to the people who had been ruled by despotic rulers for centuries. The lack of identification of the minorities to the Union or central government created problems impeding democracy to function and strengthen smoothly. The parliamentary government was weak and fragile. The vacuum created by the lack of unity and stability under the democracy was filled by military to become a *de facto* power.

The leaders of the parliamentary government did not know or respect the essence of democracy. Democracy means majority rule. It implies respecting the decisions of the majority by the minority and at the same time reflecting the right and interests of the minority in the decision of the majority. Democracy ought to ensure win-win situation for all for which it requires tolerance, adaptation, adjustment, sacrifice and mutual respect. The democracy of Myanmar in 1950s and 1960s suffered serious errors. The democratic government was dominated by the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League but it loosely cemented ideological conflicts, personal rivalry and intolerance among its members. The political leaders were ideologically divided on the basis of which was personal rivalry and assertive personalities in search of gaining influence in politics. Power and prestige were sought beyond the institutional procedures, maiming debates, discussion and compromise which were the essence of democracy. U Nu’s personality and authority could able sustain democracy in Myanmar not more than one decade. His democratic government was weak, paralysed and inefficient. Personal and organisational abuses that precipitated, not only brought about leadership crisis, but also weakened the participative and penetrative capabilities of the government. Moreover the people of Myanmar which largely inhabited in rural areas, which were illiterate, superstitious and had no understanding of democracy at all had little interest in democracy and its institutions and processes.

The leadership failure apart, the policies and programmes of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League government could not pacify the politically conscious
minority leaders. The Prime Minister U Nu had pious intention in introducing Buddhism as state religion but it was an immature decision in a multi-ethnic country following diverse religions. The national leaders failed to build trust between the centre and the peripheral areas. When the minority leaders had the feeling of largely excluded from the state power or attempted to assimilate to the dominant group and culture, they took up arms for their voice and fight for a credible political space. The unconsolidated nature of the state and constant threat of rebellious minorities were some of the major reasons for the breakdown of democratic processes in 1950s and early 1960s.

The success of democracy in Myanmar was also hindered by economic factors as well. Throughout the period of parliamentary democracy, Myanmar could not recover from the economic blows it received during the World War II. The pressing problem of economy could not be given priority because the government was obsessed with security and legitimacy crises as ethnic and political divisiveness challenged the survival of Myanmar as a nation. Political upheaval, factionalism, rivalry and ethnic conflict weakened the effectiveness of democratic government. The ruling party during the democratic era was greatly weakened by political conflicts and factionalism. The bureaucrats who were supposed to act as socio-economic vanguard could not cope with the changing role of the post-colonial period. A vicious circle established which hampered both economic development and national cohesion.

The leadership of U Nu was weak in dealing with the daunting task of political and economic construction in the parliamentary democracy era. He endeavoured to revive Buddhist values and develop a national culture by invoking ancient practices in constructing Peace Pagoda, hosting the Sixth Buddhist Council etc. but the same proved futile in an immensely pluralistic and fragmented country. Due to his weak leadership a situation of power struggles and splits became chronic ill of the politicians, the mounting pressures of minority insurgency and it resulted in a relatively easy military coup by Ne Win in 1962 (Mya Maung, 1990, p. 607).

The socio-economic and democratic processes in Myanmar during parliamentary democracy era were not conducive for the growth of democracy. The
cult of personality, authoritarianism, xenophobia, traditionalism, nationalism and isolationism, unconsolidated nature of state, economic mismanagement led to the breakdown of democracy in Myanmar. The collapse of parliamentary democracy marked the end of weak and displaced state and birth of a regimented and disciplined state under the military.

**Role of Military Leadership**

The arrival of military rule under General Ne Win in 1962 witnessed the disposing of democratically elected government of U Nu by force and an end to Myanmar’s nation-building and development based on democratic approach. After the election of 1960, U Nu returned to power, but the second spell of parliamentary democratic government was weak and ineffective to reverse the deteriorating political and economic conditions in Myanmar. The failure of parliamentary democracy undermined public faith on its proponents and it resulted in the widespread dissatisfaction among the people. The military on the other hand emerged as the most effective *de facto* power in the state. The strength of the military had considerably grown from twelve battalions and five thousand soldiers at the time of independence to fifty-seven infantry battalions, five regional commands and more than one hundred thousand soldiers by 1962 (Callahan, 2003, p. 173). It began to think itself as the ‘tried and tested’ guardian of the state vis a vis the deteriorating state of affairs under the parliamentary democracy. The success it achieved during the caretaker role had greatly enhanced its stature. The mounting secessionist pressure from the rebellious section of the society and the problem of deteriorating economy gave the increasingly self-asserting Myanmarese military under General Ne Win, the excuse that they were defects of parliamentary democracy. It began to think of installing a new political order in Myanmar devoid of ills of parliamentary democracy. In the early hour of 2 March 1962, the armed forces led by General Ne Win, carried out a *coup d'état* and overthrow the parliamentary democracy regime under U Nu. In the morning of that day General Ne Win informed to the nation through a radio broadcast that the armed forces had gained power due to the ‘greatly deteriorating condition of the union’.

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45 General Ne Win broadcasted on the radio informing his intention: “I have informed you, citizens of the Union that the armed forces have taken over the responsibility and the task of keeping the country’s safety, owing to the greatly deteriorating conditions in the Union” (Maung Maung, 1969, p. 292).
The coup was well-planned and largely bloodless losing of only one life that of the son of the former Shan President of the country Sao Shwe Thaik. The early hour of that morning the military entered the houses of every government ministers and placed them under protective custody (Charney, 2009, p. 108).

The key personality behind the coup was General Ne Win. His original name was Shu Maung. Before he entered military service he aspired to be a successful entrepreneur. He served as a post-office clerk for some time. He was also a capable soldier who enjoyed the blessing of Aung San by becoming one of the latter’s deputy. He got military training on Hainan Island along with Aung San and other comrades collectively known as ‘Thirty Comrades’. He acted as Deputy Commander of the Burma Independence Army during the freedom struggle of the country. Personally he was less literate, superstitious, short-tempered but skilled in personnel management and knew psyche of the people well. He became General of the Tatmadaw after the first General of the union General Smith Dun was forced to resign in wake of the Keren rebellion in 1949. The greatest contribution of General Ne Win in post-independent Myanmar was building an army which successfully defended Myanmar from rebels including communists, People’s Volunteer Organisation and ethnic insurgencies. It battled against the cross-border Kuomintang incursions. Gradually he occupied a position of unquestionable authority within the army and with the coup and end of civilian government, there was no competitors left to his authority (Thant Myint-U, 2007, p. 295). The political personality of Ne Win was shaped by his Thakin line of thought of intense nationalism, anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism and militarism. His personal experiences during the British colonialism and Japanese militarism in Myanmar had long-lasting impact on his personality.46

Through a successful coup under General Ne Win, the military had established absolute political control in Myanmar. An analysis on the circumstances leading to the coup can be undertaken. General Ne Win was a strong and devoted soldier and as

46 According to Thant Myint-U (2007, p. 294z), the political personality of Ne Win was driven by two things: i) he was a devotee of Japanese militarism who hated the chaotic and messy party politics and ii) he had a strong and burning desire to rid the country or people he saw as foreigners.
mentioned above, he understood psyche of his countrymen well. During the first ten years of independent Myanmar experimenting parliamentary democratic governance, he adopted patient observations despite his personal dislike for the messiness under the party politics. Ne Win considered parliamentary government to be an expression of British rather than the Myanmarese ideal. However the military as institution under his leadership was not yet ready or had in a stature to occupy political role as ruler of Myanmar. He got an opportunity to govern Myanmar under a caretaker role for eighteen months during which period he corrected several ills of the civilian regime. The military got the experience of running the country and it also received great applaud for its reconstructive role. In spite of this, the people of Myanmar were not ready to accept military as the permanent rulers of the country. The election results of the 1960 General elections confirmed this fact. The army knew all these and withdrew after eighteen months of power. Moreover General Ne Win’s stature in the Tatmadaw had not firmly established then.

Meanwhile the situation in the country continued to deteriorate and simultaneously, military’s impatience for the party politics increased. The popular faith in parliamentary democracy dwindled in favour of the military who had displayed greater efficiency and success. Perhaps Ne Win was not yet ready then for the military takeover which actually took place one year later. The army justified its coup with claims that parliamentary rule had failed to unite political factions or quell the ethnic insurgency in Myanmar (Wakeman and San San Tin, 2009, p. 16) It also invoked the legacy of General Aung San and vowed to prevent the country from disunity and to retain the sovereignty of the state (ibid.).47 It was also noted that the coup was also ‘to construct socialist economy’ and to preserve culture and tradition of Myanmar.48

47 Brigadier Aung Gyi, one of the important leaders of the coup justified the coup in the following ways: “In Burma we had economic, religious, political crises, with the issue of federalism as the most important reason for the coup...A small country like Burma cannot afford division. The states enjoy autonomy and the right of secession guaranteed by the constitution, but if secession were to be exercised, small and independent Burma would sink like Laos and Vietnam” (quoted in Chang, 1969, p. 825).
48 Aung-Thwin (1989, p. 24) believes that apart from other historical reasons for the military coming to power and toppled the parliamentary regime, there was a more fundamental cause, which had to do with the collective psychology of the majority Myanmarese. The coup was a manifestation of the
In other words, by early 1962, democracy was a much lower priority for the military, but it was law and order and forging a strong and united nation that became the primary task of the military leaders. Initially many saw the coup not different from the previous one, but gradually they came to kwon that it contrasted sharply with the caretaker government of 1958-1960. There was no intention to establish a temporary caretaker government to remove the ills of parliamentary democracy and of eventual return of power to parliamentary democracy government and hence no plan for elections in the near future was provided. There was probably a mixture of causes for the coup such as growing security problems, political factionalism and inept governance, failure of parliamentary democracy and politicised military under Ne Win which together implied weakness and failure of the era under parliamentary democracy. Parliamentary democracy was thought unsuitable for Myanmar and the Tatmadaw through the coup wanted to eliminate the parliamentary politics from Myanmar. The military claimed to bring about revolutionary changes in the Myanmarese society in view of the consistent threat to national unity and economic breakdown relying on the concept of a strong, dominant and disciplined state.  

Soon after the coup, the military under General Ne Win took direct control of the government and a seventeen-member military body known as the Revolutionary Council (RC) was established with General Ne Win himself as Chairman to carry on governmental affairs. After the coup, local and regional administration was brought under the control of the military through the creation of a system of Security and Administrative Committees (SAC). The Central Security and Administrative Committee was formed for administering laws and directives of the Revolutionary Council.

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49 Taylor (1987) also holds a statist perspective and sees the collapse of the parliamentary democracy and the establishment of the military rule as the ‘assertation of the state’. He argues the state became enfeebled and incompetent and the capture of state’s carapace became the purpose of almost all political action. Thus Taylor sees the collapse of the parliamentary democracy regime both as the ending of a weak and displaced state and the assertion of the powerful state under the military’s tight control and oversee.  

50 Besides the Chairman General Ne Win, the members of Revolutionary Council included Commodore Than Pe (Chief of Navy), Air Brigadier Clift (head of Air force), Brigadier Aung Gyi, Brigadier Tin Pe, Brigadier San Yu, Brigadier Sein Win, Colonel Thaung Kyi, Colonel Kyi Maung, Colonel Aung Shwe, Colonel Than Sein, Colonel Kyaw Soe, Colonel Saw Myint, Colonel Chit Myaing, Colonel Khin Nyo, Colonel Hla Han and Colonel Than Yu Saing.  

Council, co-ordinating government projects and maintaining public discipline.\textsuperscript{52} Below it, there was a four-tiered hierarchy of state and division, district, township, and village Security and Administrative Committees and their chairmen on all levels were military officers.\textsuperscript{53} These bodies were responsible to the military officers of the Revolutionary Council. General Ne Win’s political and economic vision was of soldiers leading socio-economic and political revolution (Tohlanyei) in a unique Myanmarese way. To accomplish this, the Revolutionary government attempted to implement a new set of orientations concerning social, economic and political values and reconfigured the structure of the state. Ne Win sought ideological justification or basis for his coming to power. Consequently, a critical seven page document known as the ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ (BWS) was issued on 30 April 1962 that defined economic and political guidelines for the future direction of the Revolutionary Council government.\textsuperscript{54} This document states the goals of social and economic justices the Revolutionary Council envisaged:

“The Revolutionary Council of Union of Burma does not believe that man will be set free from social evils as long as pernicious economic systems exist in which man exploits man and lives on the fat of such appropriation. The Council believes it to be possible only when exploitation of man by man is brought to an end and a socialist economy based on justice is established; only then can all people, irrespective of race or religion, be emancipated from all social evils and set free from anxieties over food, clothing and shelter, and from inability to resist evil, for an empty stomach is not conducive to wholesome morality, as the Burmese saying goes; only then can an affluent stage of social development be reached and all people be happy and healthy in mind and body. Thus affirmed in this belief the Revolutionary Council is resolved to march unswervingly and arm-in-arm with the people of the Union of Burma towards the goal of socialism” (Art. 1).

The Revolutionary Council attempted to establish a ‘socialist democratic state’\textsuperscript{55} by avoiding weak parliamentary democracy as it was considered inappropriate to military’s thinking and strategy. The ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ states:

“Parliamentary democracy called ‘The People’s Rule’ came into existing in history with British, American and French Revolutions against feudalism. It happened to be the best in comparison with all its preceding systems.

\textsuperscript{52}“Myanmar - Military Rule under General Ne Win”, available at: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/myanmar/ne-win.htm, accessed on 26 June 2013
\textsuperscript{54}The ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ declared the policy directives of the Revolutionary Council. This document was drafted by Chit Hlaing, a lecturer on Marxism and Soviet communism under the Ministry of Defense.
\textsuperscript{55}The term ‘democratic’ used by the military was a misnomer. There was neither democracy nor a will to establish a democratic system in future in the minds of the leaders of the Revolutionary Council.
But in some countries the parliament has been so abused as to have become only the means by which the opportunities and propertied people deceive the simple masses.

In the Union of Burma, parliamentary democracy has been tried and tested in furtherance of the aims of socialist development. But Burma’s “parliamentary democracy” has not only failed to serve our socialist development but also, due to its very inconsistencies, defects, weaknesses and loopholes, its abuses and the absence of a mature public opinion, lost sight of and deviated from the socialist aims, until at last indications of its heading imperceptibly towards just the reverse have become apparent.

The nation’s socialist aims cannot be achieved with the assurance by means of the form of parliamentary democracy that we have so far experienced.

The Revolutionary Council therefore firmly believes that it must develop, in conformity with existing conditions and environment and ever changing circumstances, only such a form of democracy as will promote and safeguard the socialist development” (Art. 14).

In other words, the military’s justification for coming to power was to achieve the goal of a ‘just’ socio-economic system which would ensure adequate food, clothes and shelter for everyone. It argued that the parliamentary democracy had failed in Myanmar to ensure such a socio-economic system due to its “inconsistencies, defects, weaknesses and loopholes, its abuses and the absence of a mature public opinion” and hence it had been unable to eliminate the ills (socio-political and economic) of the country. Myanmar was not expected to progress in a parliamentary democracy and it was considered unsuitable for the country. It claimed democracy was needed to be replaced by a political system which was to be in conformity with the ‘conditions and environment’ of the country so that it could lead to modernisation and nation-building. The military wanted such a system to be regimented and disciplined. There came isolationism of a unique kind in the political history of Myanmar. In order to disseminate military’s ideology and mobilise popular support to the attainment of the goal, the Revolutionary Council established a transitional political party known as the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) in July 1962. The Burma Socialist Programme Party was designed to devote itself to direct its effort to realise military’s ideal society under the strict control of the Revolutionary Council. In all these efforts the military junta also pledged to respect the uniqueness of Myanmar culture and values. 56

56 Maung Maung (1969, p. 296) writes that in setting forth their programmes as well as in their execution, the Revolutionary Council expressed its efforts to study and appraise the concrete realities and also the natural conditions peculiar to Myanmarese objectivity. On the basis of the actual findings derived from such study and appraisal, it intended to develop its owned ways and means to progress.
Critics of the military criticised the ending of democracy in Myanmar by force alleging that it was power, not revolutionary motive that guided the military and that, its conceptualisation of modernisation and nation-building through isolationism was hypocrisy to conceal the real motive of power. It cannot be denied that the military’s self-proclamation that it was guided by the motive of socio-economic justice and political reforms was later transformed, and that it became a policy of perpetuating military regime and Ne Win’s authority in the country. However given the socio-economic and political affairs of the country on the verse of collapse during the parliamentary democracy era, the military’s ideology and justification carries great credence. Yawnghwe’s (1997) idea of lack of undisputed strongman within the Tatmadaw had been overcome by General Ne Win by establishing himself to be the unquestionable authority in the military establishment. There were major purges and shuffles in the military organisation during the intervening periods of military takeovers. Lord Acton’s famous aphorism that ‘power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts more absolutely’ seems more appropriate in the context of Myanmar here. Power corrupted Ne Win and hence the military’s spirit of reforms was later lost in the reality of lust for power of Ne Win at the expense of the society as a whole. The ascendancy of the military power under the Revolutionary Council as means to an end was transformed to become an end in itself. It will be shown later that having come to power chiefly at gunpoint, Ne Win subsequently transformed the Tatmadaw into a personal instrument to occupy uncontested position in the struggle for power.

The socio-economic thought of the military was again publicised in the philosophy of the Burma Socialist Programme Party known as the ‘System of Correlation of Man and His Environment’ (SCME) which was announced on 17 January 1963. The “correlation” contains non-dogmatic Marxist, Buddhist and xenophobic rhetoric combined with the concept of materialism in a distinctly Myanmarese style. According to the philosophy, man was both egoistic and altruistic, and aspired to ‘the fulfilment of both his material and spiritual needs’. Furthermore, it stated ‘wholesome morality is possible only when the stomach is full’. The spiritual life and man’s reason play a determining role in changing the history of society (Gravers, 1999, p. 62). The socialist democracy or the socialist way of democratic life would be characterised as ‘middle-way’ i.e a mixed of materialism and spiritualism,
an attempt to reconcile socialism and Buddhism to serve their own interest. The two peculiar document were outcome of military’s search of justification for its takeover and it reflected its anti-capitalist and pro-socialist thought, traditionalism, xenophobia and concealed quest for power which was manifested by Ne Win’s despotic rule in later years.  

The Revolutionary Council regime had leftist inclination. The leftist orientation of the military can be said to be a revival of the rhetoric of anti-colonial nationalist movement of the 1930s and 1940s. It can be mentioned here that there was continuity in many aspects of government of democratic era and the military rule. The leaders of both the era of democracy and military rule were concerned with the realisation of socialistic goals. While the civilian leaders experimented democratic socialism in a framework of parliamentary democracy, the military regime wanted to establish a monolithic socialism (Mya Maung, 1990, pp. 603-604). Both the civilian and the military of Myanmar were the products of anti-colonial movement sharing more or less the same goals though they pursued them through different strategies in the post-colonial society. They had identical purpose of resolving multifaceted crises of unity, nation-building and lack of development. While the civilian leaders adopted a democratic framework, the military leaders nurtured the idea of an isolationist, strong and regimented state where the political space for the society would be minimal.

To set the stage for a political set up wherein the ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ could flourish, the Revolutionary Council set about reshaping the state into a new

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57 According to Thant Myint-U (2007, p. 291), the two pillars of military’s thought viz. socialism and Buddhism proved to be half-baked attempts for General Ne Win’s window dressing for his own raising xenophobia and desire for uncontested power.
58 A realistic perspective is accorded to this idea by Callahan. The greatest external threat to Myanmar’s independence at that time was Communist China. Callahan (2003, p. 209) argues that the leftist inclination alone served Myanmar its own interest by saying that “…China could hardly justify aggression against Myanmar after it proclaimed socialist revolution in 1962.”
59 Mya Maung (1990, p. 604) reflects this view when he writes that the “civilian and military leaderships that came to dominate independent Burma shared, in varying degrees, characteristics of traditionalism, nationalism, anticolonialism, and anticapitalism. Both of them emerged from the same mold of domestically Western-educated class of Rangoon University, represented by the Thakins (masters)”.

order by reconfiguring state apparatus and political process that in turn affected state-
society relations in Myanmar. To realize a vague goal of an ideal society, the hyper-
nationalist military adopted a political strategy of isolation and strict control in
domestic politics. This strategy curbed space for populace in political life and
maximised power of the state to the extent that Myanmar became a despotistic state. As
the military was adverse to corrupt party politics, it wanted to create a disciplined and
orderly political system devoid of multi-party system and parliamentary politics
which the military considered to be unruly and divisive elements. A politically closed,
ethnically exclusive and highly isolationist political order was created wherein power
was concentrated in the hands of military-men. What constituted political for the
society was shut down, and dissent forbidden to become Myanmar an isolationist
state. The isolationist state de-legitimised oppositions, political parties and
associations beyond the authorisation of the military. The junta constructed a political
process in which decision, policies and action of the government were disconnected
from the demands and wishes of the people. Such isolationism resulted the input
mechanisms of the political system almost non-existent. The citizens were only
expected to obey and follow without complaints. The junta had to rely on political
repression, strict control and isolation to manage such a crisis.

After the coup, the junta arrested many elected leaders including U Nu and
held them without trial for many years. In September 1962, it disallowed functioning
of existing political parties. The following year, the Revolutionary Council closed
down private organisations except the military sponsored organisations or religious
bodies. The latter were strictly regulated and subdued. Besides curbing the right to
association, the military government curtailed freedom of speech. The government
censored media reporting it considered inaccurate and critical to its regime. All
private medias and medium of dissemination of information were barred instead the
military set up its mouthpiece publications like the Working People’s Daily (WPD)
and government-run radio broadcasts were started. Since 1963 all periodicals except
for Burma Socialist Programme Party publications had to be submitted for approval
from the Press Scrutiny Board (Wakeman and San San Tin 2009, p. 62).
Tightening the social control further, the junta curtailed much entertainment activities, such as horseracing, beauty contests and gambling. The education system was brought under strict regulation with several school activities curtailed and reading of English books cancelled. Instead reading of traditional stories of Myanmar or tales from Buddha’s life and socialist textbooks were encouraged (Wakeman and San San Tin 2009, p. 16-17). The military establishing tight control over higher education caused 1962 student protests. In 1964, the junta implemented the Intelligence Level Aggregate (ILA) system in an effort to prevent campus protest by scattering university and students as geographically scattered units (ibid. p, 32-33). The most drastic step of establishing socialism in education was nationalisation of private and missionary schools in 1965 (ibid. p, 26). In fact, the state controlled every aspects of Myanmarese life including what to see, read, hear, say, do and with whom to associate. The state considered itself having moral authority to do so and consequently separation between state and society vanished in Myanmar. The state interference and penetration in social life was at its epitome. The constitution of 1947 was neither formally replaced nor suspended, but held in abeyance. Both Houses of Parliament were dissolved along with judicial bodies including the Supreme Court and the High Courts. In their absence, the Revolutionary Council assumed all the legislative, executive and judicial powers of the state, but it were conferred on its chairman. Under the Revolutionary Council, Myanmar was governed by decree and proclamations, and all its pronouncements had the force of law and remained in effect until withdrawn or replaced (Silverstein, 1977, p. 90). The words of the Chairman Ne Win became the laws of the land. The system turned to be totalitarian where political, administrative, and legislative bodies at all levels were occupied and controlled by military officers responsible only to their superiors in the chain of command.

Such a system of direct military rule through its agency, the Revolutionary Council, largely remained unchanged throughout the period between 1962 and 1974. The Revolutionary Council alienated political leaders, civilian elites, ethnic leaders and other forces not sided with its agenda. The junta did not trust the professionalism of the civilian bureaucrats. It undermined the spirit of Panglong Agreement and completely abolished the limited federal system of government in place before Ne Win’s ascent to power. By establishing a strong and isolationist political system Ne
Win promised that he would hold the country together by deterring any separatist movements and would take the country to the realisation of an ideal society to which Aung San had pledged to march all along Myanmar’s struggle for independence before his death.

Most articulated Myanmarese responded to the uninvited power capture of the military with ‘reserved approval.’ Initially many people saw the military takeover of 1962 not different from the previous one of 1958. They were optimistic of the military’s self-righteous role keeping in view of the weak state of affairs in Myanmar and the achievement of the military to its credit during the first decade of independent Myanmar.\(^{60}\) The remarkable record of the military to its credit during the tumultuous years of civil war and caretaker government benefitted the military. The coup was initially accepted as the people saw the Tatmadaw as the child of General Aung San, the revered national hero, and the coup leader Ne Win, was considered his close associate. Moreover, the democratic institutions had failed to live up with popular expectations. The Myanmarese was disgusted to the fourteen years of civil war and insurgency and lack of development, so they languished for peace, stability and development. The fragile socio-economic and political affairs of the parliamentary democracy era had debilitated and displaced the state’s credence to silence crisis of national unity and act as protector of the life of the people and agent of welfare and development. Such enfeebled national affairs was sought to be countermanded by the military by toppling the democratic government and the messes of parliamentary politics. The military displaced the civilian bureaucrats at the top and middle levels. The civil servants in the fields were placed under the strict control and supervision of the Security and Administrative Councils (SACs)\(^{61}\) at each administrative level.

The military junta sought to establish disciplined and subservient masses. To transform the public into a new citizenry, the military government attempted to discard the ‘colonial psychology’ and to develop positive spirit inside them. For this,

\(^{60}\) U Rewata Dhamma, Secretary of the International Burmese Buddhist Sangha Organization (IBBSO), observed: "Many people supported Ne Win when he first seized power. Many were fed up with U Nu and the way he had played around with issues like the ethnic minority question. They liked the idea of a strong ruler who promised change and who could solve all their problems. It was rather like Hitler in Germany. The trouble with Ne Win is that, whatever his intentions, power (it was never money) corrupted him" (cited in Smith 1991, p. 204).

\(^{61}\) The Security and Administrative Councils (SACs) was later named as Peoples’ Peasant Councils,
the Revolutionary Council attempted to establish monopolistic control over every aspect of public life, including social conventions, personal appearance, choice and behaviour. As mentioned above, it banned horse-racing, beauty contests, government sponsored music and dance competitions, gambling etc. Only cultural activities sanctioned by the state were permitted. To the end, the Revolutionary Council employed coercive power of the state to impose strict control and regulation. The result was that the state was run like a military institution. The state structures from top to down were dominated by military commanders. The junta undertook regular surveillance over almost every aspects of the life of the people. The people of Myanmar were required to inform the authorities of their own and their neighbours’ movement, the presence of houseguest and any contact with the outsiders.

The ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ was designed for an extensive dependence on military for its fruitful implementation. It required that the military as institution stayed on strong and united. This was ensured by establishing unquestionable hold of Ne Win over the military institution. Ne Win resorted to purge politics. The military was transformed through a series of purges into a system of personal cohort organisations of Ne Win. All the independent-minded subordinates and potential rivals were purged so that no one remained within the army who could challenge his authority. This had the result that the military had become an instrument of Ne Win’s despotic and totalitarian rule. His tight hold on the military organisation in turn accrued to him the supreme controlling power of the Burma Socialist Programme Party. The Tatmadaw and Burma Socialist Programme Party were thus distorted as agents of despotism of Ne Win, not the catalyst of a ‘just’ society. Isolationism was accordingly politicised and it was transformed as an instrument to stay in power though outwardly the revolutionary rhetoric of socio-economic emancipation still maintained. Within the Revolutionary Council, it appeared that some free debate was allowed, but opposition to basic decisions once made constituted mutiny. There had been a tendency since 1962 to prune those who confronted with the decision of Ne Win. For instance, alleged difference over economic policies invited dismissal of

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62 The military regime removed Buddhism from the public sphere to individual concern. Under the Revolutionary Council, Myanmar abandoned U Nu’s nationalist policies revolving around Buddhism. However, it had been a continued attempt of the military to draw the Buddhist sangha into its sphere of control by institutionalising the sects.
former Brigadier Aung Gyi and former Colonel Chit Myaing. Similarly Brigadier Tin Pe lost his position as Minister of Trade and Co-operative in 1967 and many threatening members of the Revolutionary Council were dismissed before 1970. Subsequently the members of the military leadership had been those who wished to qualify their loyalty to Ne Win. His personal tool in the form of military’s intelligence system exercised an all-encompassing surveillance over the potential opponents, both within the army and outside. As such a state of fear and suspicion of one another spread around, which made everyone fearful of involvement in politics even if officially sanctioned, such as being active in government sponsored organisations.

The effort of the Revolutionary Council to realise its goal of socio-economic justice practically involved strategy of large scale nationalisation of the economy to demonetisation which was undertaken most irrationally in an almost bewildering speed. For example, from the year 1963, all banks, both indigenous and foreign owned and large and small companies were nationalised. In addition to it, the government assumed monopolistic control of all foreign and domestic trade, business, industries, banking etc. The junta often resorted to demonetisation measures. In the efforts, the civilian elements, both politician and professional bureaucrats, were alienated at large because all initiatives relating to different aspects of plan formulation and implementation were monopolised by Ne Win and his entourage, but unfortunately who had little practical knowledge on details of economy. The monopolistic control of the economy on the one hand and the economic mismanagement due to lack of skill, competence, know-how and administrative proficiency resulted in economic deterioration and by 1970, policy revision was felt extremely necessary for economic survival. Some liberalisation measures were undertaken. The deteriorating economic condition could not be curbed and consequently in 1987 Myanmar became one of the least developed countries of the world.

The peasants and workers were given special attention on the socio-economic programmes of the isolationist political system. They were guaranteed new regulations that protected their lands from confiscation due to exploitative debts. Efforts were made to halt peasants from losing their lands to money lenders, who had
since 1960 alone, taken 150,000 acres of land from the poor peasants. They were
given not only a stake in the new society, but attempts were also made to educate
them to fit better into the new society. In the education sector, curricula had been
revised to stress technical training and Myanmarese cultural values. New educational
institutions in science and technology were created and the majority of the new
students were placed into these institutions. Students themselves were encouraged to
practise self-discipline in study and loyalty in service to the nation. The military sent
few exceptional students and scholars to receive technical training in the erstwhile
Soviet Union.

The junta promoted an isolationist ideology in internal affairs under the
philosophy of ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ and the ‘System of Correlation of Man
and His Environment’. Myanmar also closed off from the outside world. The external
isolationism became inevitable upshot of the internal political setting (Holmes, 1967).
Myanmar curtailed diplomatic activities particularly in multilateral forums.63 Instead
Ne Win favoured personal high level diplomacy with its counterparts abroad to deal
with the acute diplomatic crisis.64 Only government to government aids from few
external supporters of the regime was accepted. The regime droved many foreigners
out of the country by nationalising foreign owned properties or enterprises. In term of
foreign policy, the non-aligned and neutral stand of the parliamentary democracy era
was transformed to become Myanmar an isolationist country of a unique kind in the
world of nations. The junta curtailed citizens’ access to foreigners and vice versa. The
Myanmarese citizen being authorised to travel outside Myanmar was made extremely
difficult. The junta limited visits of foreign tourists and disallowed foreign journalists.
Even in late 1960s, a foreign tourist could only stay for seven days, but they were not
allowed to travel to the designated areas of Rangoon, Mandalay and few other towns
in central plain (Smith, 1991, p. 1). Myanmar isolated itself from even regional
affairs. It totally dissociated itself from foreign intervention and international

http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/burma-
myanmar/Myanmar%20The%20Military%20Regimes%20View%20of%20the%20World.ashx
accessed on 24 April 2010
http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/burma-
myanmar/Myanmar%20The%20Military%20Regimes%20View%20of%20the%20World.ashx
accessed on 24 April 2010
obligations. The junta attempted to consolidate its hold on the domestic affairs freely without being interfered or criticised. Under the military junta of Ne Win, Myanmar went into isolation deeper and deeper so much so that it became a pariah country. It endeavoured to affect logical solution to Myanmar’s socio-economic and political problems in its own way without being hindered by what it considered unruly elements of the outside world. In other words Myanmar became xenophobic and paranoid in relation to the world of nations. The policy of isolation from the international affairs could help Myanmar keeping itself out of superpower rivalries between the United State and the erstwhile Soviet Union and the tussle for regional supremacy between China and India. However that achievement came with considerable cost of advantages which could accrue to the country from the active engagement with the world of nations. Consequently the political and economic modernisation of the country lacked much behind from many of its neighbours.

According to the ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ the military contemplated drastic changes in different aspects of the Myanmarese society soon after the coup of 1962. The new regime openly abandoned parliamentary democratic method of governance together with all its paraphemalia of legislature, executive, courts etc. Democracy turned into a despotic and authoritarian regime which ruled the country under a unique system of isolationism in both the domestic and foreign affairs. The Revolutionary Council as the ruling body of the military however wore the outward garb of a military junta and it was considered unsuitable to lead Myanmar into the promised modernisation and nation-building. It felt the need of an agency or outlet which would train and educate the people to ensure their conscious participation. Thus the Burma Socialist Programme Party was created as an institution, a vehicle to cultivate a complaint and subservient citizenry. Through the Burma Socialist Programme Party, the military contemplated a quasi-civilian military regime.

65 As mentions by Steinberg (1983, p. 81), ‘...shut off externally and under the military’s rigid internal control, Myanmar turned inward to try to find the route to Burmese socialism. In pursuing this course, the military had transformed the nation’.

66 To quote Silverstein (1967, p. 8): ‘To ensure the completion of the military’s revolution and to anticipate the day when they will step out of office, they (the military) are in the process of recruiting, training and organizing a new elite of soldiers and civilians who are loyal to their ideas, dedicated to their programmes and pledged to carry on when they are given the opportunity’.
The Burma Socialist Programme Party (Lanzin) was established in July 1962. The initial effort of the Revolutionary Council was to form a single united mass party consisting of different parties which were operating during that time. When the military did not receive satisfactory response to its initiative, it decided to establish its own party in the form of Burma Socialist Programme Party. The party was not a party in the western parliamentary sense because the military had simply rejected parliamentary democracy as alien, not suitable to the needs of Myanmar, rather the party was an instrument of the government to tell the people what it wanted, what they should follow and to secure support to the military regime. The Burma Socialist Programme Party was admittedly a cadre party (lasted till 1971) eventually designed to become the core of a larger movement. During the transitional phase, the Burma Socialist Programme Party worked to mobilise, train and indoctrinate the people the ideology of the ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ and the ‘System of Correlation of Man and His Environment’. In the process, the junta urged the people to refrain from indulging in destructive measures (Maung Maung, 1969, p. 297).

The Burma Socialist Programme Party was guided by a transitional constitution which provided a highly centralised structure for the party. At the top of the organisational structure, three committees were established viz. the Central Organising Committee, the Discipline Committee, and the Socialist Economy Planning Committee. Only the members of the Revolutionary Council could become member of the first two committees. The Socialist Economy Planning Committee was allowed to recruit non-council members but it needed to be endorsed by the Revolutionary Council. The Central Organising Committee had five departments under it dealing with affairs relating to peasants, workers, mass organisation, administration and educational affairs. Many local cadres stood at the base of the party structure and it could have members both from civil society and military ranks (Silverstein, 1967, p. 12). Above the local cadre, there were divisional organisations linking the local cadre with the national cadre. All these bodies were ultimately controlled by the Revolutionary Council on the principle of ‘centralism’. The

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67 According to Donnison (1970, p. 175), the Burma Socialist Programme Party was an instrument of government of the kind the world familiar with in the single-party, totalitarian states, whether fascist, Nazi or communists in flavour. It was formed not to ascertain or give effect to the will of the people but to ensure support for the Revolutionary Council (ibid.).
organisational principles were militaristic. All the orders flowed from the top to the bottom, and all decisions taken by the leaders at the top had to be carried out by the subordinate agencies without any murmur. All of the subordinate organisations of the party including those for youths and students were organised and operated much as military organisation (Taylor, 2010, p. 87). The party conducted training courses for the government servants in which they were taught the ideology of the party and the government.

The party also sponsored a series of integrated mass organisations designed to reach the masses and cultivate their support for its ideology. For instance, People’s Workers Councils and People’s Peasant Councils and later, the *Lanzin* Youth Organisation were established to mobilise and control the population centrally (Steinberg, 1981, p. 31-35). These organisations were designed as instruments to propagate military’s ideology and to get the message of Burma Socialist Programme Party far and wide and at the same time, preventing counter-messages being heard and understood. The Central School of Political Science (later the Institute of Political Science), the Academy for the Development of National Group, and a series of military centres were formed to inculcate party ideals in the bureaucracy and in the army (ibid.). Similarly it published many doctrinaire magazines like Party Affairs, Economic Affairs, and Lanzin News, and printed books like Milestones of World History and Milestones of Burmese History filled with propaganda articles and socialist dogmas (Wakeman and San San Tin, 2009, p. 62) The Burma Socialist Programme Party scrutinised these publications before they were publicly available.

The people interested in the Burma Socialist Programme Party can be broadly divided into three categories viz. candidate, sympathizer and full-member (Silverstein, 1967, p. 12). All recruits were accepted as candidates. The candidates could become ‘full-fledged membership’ by fulfilling certain conditions. It was provided that only those persons who accepted military’s revolutionary objective were inducted into the party and for a candidate member to earn full-fledged membership, his loyalty to the country and the party, moral character and potentialities to the Revolutionary Council
were counted. The membership of the party was permanent. The ‘sympathizers’ were those whose social background or other factors made it necessary for them to demonstrate their loyalty and belief in the party before being granted candidate status. These members were carefully selected from above, not from below because a person could not be granted admission unless the Revolutionary Council approved it (Steinberg, 1981, p. 29). The Revolutionary Council had the authority to recognise any suitable person as candidate member or full-fledged member. The new recruits were indoctrinated the party’s ideology of the ‘Correlation of Man and His Environment’.

In March 1963, the Burma Socialist Programme Party set out to recruit new members. The membership of the party grew slowly and great care was taken to ensure its full-membership remain in the hands of the retired or serving military personnel. Since 1964, the percentage of non-military elements at the bottom of the Burma Socialist Programme Party were increased, but the upper echelons of party leadership continued to predominantly compose of serving and retired officers. When the first party congress was held in 1971, the number of full-time membership was about 73,368 of whom 58 per cent were military, 24.4 per cent of the 260,857 candidate members were also in the armed forces (Steinberg, 2010, p. 65). By 1973, the military contributed more than half of the Burma Socialist Programme Party members and every high government officers. In 1976, a major purge expelled about 50,000 members, but by 1977 its strength again rose to 181,617 members and 885,460 candidates about 60 per cent of whom were military, police or former officials of those organisations (Steinberg, 1981, p. 32).

In order to ensure the success of the party, the military regime also launched a series of activities designed to eliminate its opponents. On 28 March 1964, Ne Win made the Burma Socialist Programme Party, the only legal party allowed to function under a new law known as ‘The Law to Protect National Unity’ (Konsam, 2011, p. 12-13). All other political parties were banned (the ban continued till 1988) and their

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68 A membership of the Burma Socialist Programme Party could never resign from the party. Provision was made for candidate members to go through probationary period of two years during which they could resign prior to acceptance as full members (Steinberg, 1981, p. 29)
property and assets were confiscated. Myanmar became a one-party state in 1974. All legal channels of oppositions to the government were thus closed.

Under the Revolutionary Council, the Burma Socialist Programme Party was designed to act as a vanguard of a unique Myanmarese socio-economic and political construction. The constitution of the party provided for the rigid selection, discipline, training and indoctrination of the people to prepare for a ‘just’ society. The military formed the backbone of the party making the latter a junta in mufti. The line of demarcation between the party and the government was very thin. The constitution of the party also provided that a ‘close and appropriate co-operation’ should be established between the revolutionary government and the party. The Revolutionary Council created the party and provided financial subsidies, and in return, the Burma Socialist Programme Party devoted its activities in mobilising support base for the government and helped it to carry out its programmes. No doubt the Burma Socialist Programme Party was a civilian cohort of the military. Still the military was the supreme authority unresponsive to anybody, including its civilian arm, the Burma Socialist Programme Party. On the other hand, both the Burma Socialist Programme Party and the military organisation constituted cohort organisations of Ne Win and served as vehicle for his power. The party told the population what the government expected from them not the vice versa. It indoctrinated the people, the government servants and its members the ideology, purpose, likes and dislikes of the military junta and at the same time, it attempted to discredit democratic politics. It helped to justify the military regime and its policies by attempting to convince the people that the military and the one-party state of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (quasi-civilian military regime) would lead to emancipation of Myanmar from the crisis of unity and development. However the Revolutionary Council and the Burma Socialist Programme Party did not go smoothly toward its goal. Resistance to isolationist ideology and policies of the military government came from both the outlawed insurgents and many sections of the civilian population. In cities and towns, students, monks and some other groups propagated anti-regime protests, but with all legal channel of opposition to the government closed and every act of dissident considered criminals, they were outlawed activities for the military regime, not to be tolerated.
Ne Win convened the first congress of the Burma Socialist Programme Party in 1971 indicating that the Burma Socialist Programme Party had turned into a mass party. Meanwhile the military imposed a new Burma Socialist Programme Party crafted constitution of the country. The new constitution of 1974 further consolidated the position of the Burma Socialist Programme Party as the only recognised party in Myanmar. Twelve years later after taking over power, the Revolutionary Council of the military transferred power of the state to a military rule in a civilian garb or quasi-civilian military government or the one-party state of the Burma Socialist Programme Party. The new government was Ne Win’s civilian cohort regime. He resigned from the army to dramatise the change from military to civilian control, but he did not relinquished his control or power over the military and the Burma Socialist Programme Party. As mentioned above he continued to rule Myanmar through his cohort organisations. However military as agent of nation-building and development under isolationism could not cure the chronic ills of Myanmar instead economic and political crises within isolationism developed which reached its climax in 1988. The same year the Burma Socialist Programme Party was dissolved.\(^69\)

**Myanmar Under Ne Win**

When the military had forcefully seized power in March 1962, Myanmar had been suffering from political instability, internal divisiveness, rebellion, conflict and lack of development. The parliamentary democratic system seeking to provide an open political space to all sections of the society created more problems than it solving the challenges in the functioning of a vibrant democracy. Throughout the period of parliamentary democracy, Myanmar as a state was weak and its legitimacy was deprived of by several sections of the society. The leadership of U Nu was conciliatory, inefficient and less effective in solving with the crises of unity and development. The problems and ills of Myanmar continued, but parliamentary democracy was replaced by military authoritarianism based on an isolationist ideology in Myanmar’s quest for modernisation and nation-building.

\(^69\) However Burma Socialist Programme Party was re-born as the National Unity Party (NUP), which inherited the buildings and machinery of the old party.
Soon after the coup of 1962, a military government known as the Revolutionary Council was established. The council and its chairman General Ne Win monopolised all the powers of the state and exercised the same in a highly isolationist and regimented manner where dissidents were not tolerated. Myanmar was also isolated from the outside world. The military considered it as the unique Myanmarese way to resolve the socio-economic and political crises of Myanmar and the means to construct a strong and modernised nation. In justification of the military takeover, the junta developed the ideological underpinning of his rule known as the ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’. It provided the goal of a ‘just’ society in Myanmar where flood, clothing and shelter would be guaranteed for everyone and only than Myanmar could advance to become a united, strong and prosperous nation. It considered the western parliamentary democracy as not suitable or inappropriate to bring about the socio-economic justice in Myanmar. The Burma Socialist Programme Party was founded as the military’s vanguard party to materialise the thought of the military. It was made the only legal political party allowed to function legally. Under the Revolutionary Council, Myanmar state became a strong and disciplined institution imposing its will on a subservient citizenry by employing methods ranging from Marxist rhetoric to force, coercion and other punitive methods. The ideological and philosophical foundation of the military government was also clarified by the philosophy of the Burma Socialist Programme Party known as the ‘System of Correlation of Man and His Environment’.

After coming to power, the military junta under Ne Win established an isolationist political system for twenty-six years (1962-1988) which can broadly be divided into two periods: first, isolationism of the direct military rule under the Revolutionary Council from 1962 to 1974 and second, isolationism of the quasi-civilian military rule or the military rule in civilian garb under the constitution of 1974 between 1974 and 1988. During the first period, the military under a Revolutionary Council ruled Myanmar by decrees and proclamations without being guided by a constitution and unrestrained by legislature and political accountability. All the institutions and practices of parliamentary democracy era were unequivocally rejected as inappropriate to the socio-economic and political construction in Myanmar by the military regime. The military thereafter embarked on a constructionist role
considering itself as agent of modernisation and preservation of unity and stability. The military created a unique but vague ideology of isolationism as the basis of socio-economic and political policy. During the period of the Revolutionary Council the ideology was vigorously followed. Unfortunately the thought of the military was corrupted by Ne Win’s lust for power in the country.

The second period of the military rule came with the implementation of the constitution of 1974. The new constitution sought to ensure popular support and legitimise the military regime by giving it a facade of quasi-civilian character and constitutional rule. The work of constitution-making was monopoly of the Burma Socialist Programme Party which initiated, steered and controlled the whole process. Except few hand-picked representatives of workers, peasants and ethnic groups, the process did not have all the auspices of involving the people with divergent views. Only their ‘yes’ votes were asked, manipulated and secured in a constitutional referendum which was much like the one held recently in 2010 on the constitution of 2008.

By 1973, the junta under Ne Win had firmly consolidated its control in Myanmar. However the mounting political and economic crises did not justify the continuation of Revolutionary Council and it began to contemplate a military rule in civilian garb. Consequently the military manoeuvred to adopt the constitution of 1974. The referendum to the constitution which was the first popular vote since 1960 was very significant test for the junta which it could not afford to lose. In support of the referendum the junta undertook extreme mobilisations employing methods, such as propaganda, meeting, strict instructions, intimidations etc. The referendum was conducted in flawed manner and hence was rigged.\textsuperscript{70} It was not surprising that in December 1973 the military claimed that the constitution of 1974 was approved by an overwhelming majority of 90.19 percent votes.\textsuperscript{71} On March 1974, the direct military

\textsuperscript{70} According to Wakeman and San San Tin (2009, p. 61), in the voting day, the curtailed voting booths were kept close together with a white box for votes in favour of the constitution and a black box for votes against. Monitors could easily observe who cast ballots in which booth and identify any negative vote and few dared to vote in opposition (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{71} The Burma Socialist Programme Party government hailed the results of the referendum as a great success. However many critics attacked it as typical authoritarian tactics to stay on power. In the ethnically designated border areas the support was however less forthcoming: 66.4 per cent in Shan
rule of the Revolutionary Council was ended and Myanmar became a one-party socialist republic, a quasi-civilian military regime.

The new constitution of 1974 changed the name of the country as the *Pyidaungsu Socialist Thammada Myanma Naingngandaw* or the Socialist Republic of Union of Burma. With the operation of the new constitution, the constitution of parliamentary democracy of 1947 was formally abrogated. It established a unicameral legislature known as the *Pyithu Hluttaw* (People’s Assembly). The new constitution legitimatised the leadership role of the Burma Socialist Programme Party in the new dispensation by stating that the state had adopted a single party system and the Burma Socialist Programme Party would be the sole political party, and it would lead the state (Constitution of the Union of Burma, Art. 11). The constitution established a unitary system with fourteen units consisting of seven states and seven divisions as unit of governance.\(^7\) Three levels of government were established below the national level at the state and division, township and ward, and village tracts. People’s Councils were established at these levels. The principle of governance continued to be guided by democratic centralism. The hub of administrative authority and decision-making power was entrusted to two bodies: a Council of State and a Council of Minister. Both these bodies were elected or nominated by *Pyithu Hluttaw*.

Under the constitution of 1974, elections for the *Pyithu Hluttaw* were first held in January-February 1974. After the election the Revolutionary Council was formally dissolved on 2 March 1974, twelve years after it was formed. Unlike the three General Elections of the parliamentary democracy era which were multi-party elections, the elections under the new constitution were one-party elections. Only the independent candidates could stand against the military’s civilian mufti, the Burma Socialist Programme Party during the elections (Taylor, 1996, p. 176). The party won state, 77.69 per cent in Karen State, 86.9 per cent in Arakan State. The only exception was the Mon State where 90.62 per cent support for the referendum was registered (see Taylor, 1996, p. 175).

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\(^7\) The former Myanmar Proper was reorganised into seven ‘divisions’ viz. Irrawaddy Division, Magwe Division, Mandalay Division, Pegu Division Rangoon Division, Sagaing Division and Tenasserim Division. The ethnic minority areas were grouped into seven states were viz. the Karen state, the Shan state, the Kachin state, the Karenni state, the Chin state, the Rakhine state, and the Mon state. The last three states were drawn up by the constitution of 1974.
thumping majority in the elections. New rulers and officials were installed. Ne Win was elected the chairman of the Council of State and as provided in the constitution under Art. 66, he automatically became the president of the ‘Socialist Republic’. A Council of Minister with Sein Lwin as prime minister was also constituted.

The new rulers and officials were however the former military leaders only their military positions and titles relinquished but still maintaining the same psyche, the same objective and ideology of isolationism. The constitution and the elections gave the quasi-civilian military regime the much needed constitutional and civilian character. Notwithstanding it, like the previous military regime, Ne Win with help of his cohort organisations got penetrated into all aspects of the Myanmarese life and controlled all executive, administrative, legislative and judicial bodies at all right down to the level of the township council. From newspaper to novels, poetry, and drama, were subjected to rigid censorship, imported books were screened for political purposes and no opposition was tolerated.

The isolationist ideology of the Revolutionary Council continued to charm the quasi-civilian military regime or the one-party state of the Burma Socialist Programme Party. The new government continued to be as isolationist as it was though some relaxation could be seen in the economic affairs. Behind these developments, there existed uncontested power and leadership of Ne Win who was the head of the state from 1962 to 1981 and the chairman of the Burma Socialist Programme Party from 1963 to 1988. By then Ne Win had been corrupted by hunger for power and he became irrational in many of his decisions. In other words, the quasi-civilian government of the military was another manifestation of Ne Win’s lust for power, despotism and isolationism. His supremacy was secured by successfully turning the two most powerful organisations in the state viz. the military and the Burma Socialist Programme Party as his cohort forces. He had both military and civilian agencies under his command. He kept his subordinates divided, mutually

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73 Under the provision of the constitution of 1974, elections for the Pyithu Hluttaw were held four times between 1974 and 1985.
74 Article 66 of the constitution of 1974 states that the Chairman the Council of States shall be the president of the country. Ne Win held both the post, besides being the chairman of the Burma Socialist Programme Party and therefore, he was qualified to hold the third one, that is, the president-ship on the country.
suspicious and controlled political rivals through regular purges thus fortifying his political power base (Yawnghwe, 1997, p. 99). For instance, Aung Gyi, Tin Pe, Tin U and Tin Oo who were his colleagues and potential rivals to his ambition of uncontested power were purged at different times when he doubted their subordination and loyalties. The shrewdness of Ne Win was that along with the leaders, officers closely connected to the purged leaders were also dismissed. Opposite to it was the spoil system of granting positions, ranks and offices in the military, the state apparatus, party organisation and administrative bodies to his loyalists and supporters. It was patron-client norms of authority arrangement, rather than merit and efficiency which were given preference in the new administrative set up. Ne Win established a close monitoring over everything it suspected in the country under an agency known as the Military Intelligence Service (MIS). The Military Intelligence Service kept suspicious eyes not only against the people but also over everyone within the military and the Burma Socialist Programme Party. Such an administrative organisation crippled the state due to extensive nepotism, inefficiency and corruption. Ne Win fortified his political power base, but the system became conflict-ridden, crisis-prone and weak.

By 1970, Ne Win had become the most known and feared personality in Myanmar. There was an attempt to oust him in 1976 but it was unearthed. The hold of Ne Win over the military and the Burma Socialist Programme Party was again firmly consolidated. For instance, at the Third Congress of the Burma Socialist Programme Party held in 1977, Ne Win came in third in elections for the presidency, but this outcome was not honoured as he quickly installed himself as president after dissolving the entire Central Committee of the party (Mya Maung 1990, p. 606) The chairman of the Council of State represented the supreme ruler up to 1981, but this convention was changed by Ne Win when he chose not to run in the election of the Fourth Party Congress (ibid.). The presidency was ceremonially and nominally transferred to one of Ne Win’s loyal supported General San Yu, but Ne Win kept the real position of supreme ruler by assuming the chairmanship of the Central Committee (ibid.). Ne Win’s despotic and authoritarian rule based on isolationist ideology continued until his retirement from formal politics in 1987.
The supremacy of Ne Win in the country and over the public life during that time was clearly exhibited when many of his xenophobic and idiosyncratic decisions based on numerology or astrology or personal whims crept into state decisions and policies. These included the decisions to change the traffic system of the country from left-hand drive in 1972 and the demonetisation of certain kyat notes and their replacement by odd-numbered denominations such as 15, 25, 35, 45, 75 and 90 kyat note, the number nine being considered to be the lucky number of Ne Win. In other words, Ne Win had established himself the supreme power in Myanmar. Simultaneously the effectiveness of the state was gradually reducing because the ‘best and the most efficient’ who would have steered the country forward had been sidelined. The suspicion, fear and paranoid tendencies in the leadership of Ne Win and fear of contestation to his authority caused widespread isolationism, fear, force, coercion, torture and killing. People preferred to shun politics and public life and for the foreigners Myanmar became a hermit state.

Although the constitution of 1974 was framed nicely (at least theoretically) to pacify dissents and resistance to the military government or seek to gain legitimacy, it was not successful in pacifying the opponents of the military rule practically. Rather the Burma Socialist Programme Party government had to continue to rely on strict control, force and repression for extracting ruling right. It can be observed that the operation of the constitution of 1974 and ascendancy of Ne Win to supremacy in Myanmar completely dashed away any hope of restoring democracy. More importantly it was disappointing for the supporter of democracy in Myanmar that there developed personalization of military rule to become the ruling affairs a one-man right concentrated into the hand of the Ne Win.\(^{75}\) Isolationism had become an instrument to fulfil Ne Win’s dogged ambition to stay in power. Consequently Myanmar occupied high state–society dichotomy and low state response of state to social demands and aspirations. Isolationism had converted Myanmar a totalitarian state.

\(^{75}\) As Yawnghwe (1997, p. 99) says: “Notwithstanding the green uniforms at the top of the hierarchy, military at the top of the hierarchy, though, the military was neither all-powerful nor fully autonomous. Rather, it was highly submissive toward and dependent upon one man”.
After coming to power the military worked to impose a strong and disciplined state to eliminate ills of Myanmar. In practice the state became more and more isolationist and vehemently closed. Security and protection of the Union became the priority of the government. The dominance of security concern in state policy in turn had its impact on state structure and functions and on the state’s relation with the society. The state became a strong institution, but the society was drastically weakened because it was tightly regulated, and in the wake of protest it was forcefully suppressed and subdued. The ideological justification and force, however, could not sustain the isolationist state of Ne Win. Under the Revolutionary Council, the Myanmar state was rather a form of totalitarianism but still maintained isolationist characters. The government of the Revolutionary Council was a purely military junta ruling a country based on force.

Having felt his position in the national affairs of the country epitomised and secured and the Myanmarese citizens being subservient to him, Ne Win created a quasi-civilian military regime or one-party state by undertaking a cosmetic political change from military rule to a civilian control one under the constitution of 1974. However the government of the Revolutionary Council of 1962-1974 and the quasi-civilian military government of 1974-1988 can aptly be termed as ‘same government with different names’ in the sense that in both the regime it was Ne Win who occupied and exercised incontestable, but often irrational power or authority. Ne Win continued to be the de facto head of the state though he changed his positions from time to time. In fact the government of the Revolutionary Council and the one-party state under 1974 constitution were different forms of military regime and General Ne Win, with his ability to dominate the armed forces and the Burma Socialist Programme Party, he remained the real ruler of Myanmar state in 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. During this period Ne Win ruled as well as reigned Myanmar without being restricted by the sanctity of the office he held.

During the twenty-six years of military rule (1962-1988), the regime closed off the sphere of politics from the society at large. The military controlled state allowed only the Burma Socialist Programme Party and its affiliated organisations to exist. It actively suppressed other social groups deemed antithetical to self-righteous
role of socio-economic and political emancipation of the country. All potential oppositions to the regime were eliminated. Freedom of expression and movement for reforms were entirely denied. The civil society became dysfunctional. The Revolutionary Council relied on force, fear and other power of the state to exclude the larger section of society from the political arena. The constitution of 1974 outlawed all political activity not authorised by the state. The government became isolationist in a bewildering pace. Isolationism was upheld by tight social control and repressive measures. The input functions of the state were closed for the citizens. The government did not reflect people’s demand and wishes in its policies, programmes and actions. In fact the state and the people stood in opposite pole. The isolationist political system operated on the theory of zero-sum game vis a vis the society. With the military dominating all state structure and intermediary institutions and with all social associations outlawed, the state exhibited a very high degree of autonomy vis-a-vis society; the autonomy of the society from the state was severely circumscribed (Yawnghwe 1997, p. 98). The military government of Ne Win was not accessible for the ordinary people and it was unresponsive for anything done.

The quasi-civilian military regime of Ne Win continued to follow isolationist ideology. The worst development from the perspective of restoration of democracy in Myanmar was Ne Win corrupted by the lust for power. Consequently the isolationist ideology of the military turned into a policy of Ne Win’s power craze. Isolationism became an end in itself, not the means for modernisation and preservation of unity. There was politicisation of isolationism. The junta was highly successful in institutionalising discipline, secrecy and intimidation as methods of control that no one dared call attention to obvious injustices or errors (Wakeman and Sa San Tin, 2009, p. 73). This paved the way for isolationism to remain too long. It resulted in the evaporation of stability and legitimacy of the state because it was not based upon willing support of the people. Protests and demonstrations erupted from different sections of the society. In the long run, the pursuance of isolationism weakened the state and hindered the development of the country. There cropped up challenges and

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Kyaw Yin Hlaing (cited in South 2008, p. 176) mentions the National Security Act of 1964: “...that outlawed all existing political organisations, and...allowed only the BSPP and its affiliated organisations to exist ... Furthermore, the government also created [a number of government organised non-governmental organisations,] claiming they were more formal channels for the public to make their needs and problems known to the higher levels of government”.

political and economic crises. Isolationism proved counterproductive vis a vis global trend of democratisation, globalisation and modernisation. Military failed to act as agent of modernisation and nation-building.

It may be mentioned here that military regime of Ne Win’s model of nation-building was vague and inconsistent. While the ideology of the ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ implied a socio-economic approach to nation-building, but in actual practice the military relied on force, war and repression. The Panglong spirit was completely sidelined to the priority of excessive centralism and rigidity. The government neglected the social, political and cultural aspects of nation-building. The isolationist state only gave command. It did not encourage the contending groups to initiate and innovate, but only suppressed to bow or surrender. The new constitution of 1974 declared that the people have the right to preserve and protect their languages, culture, and religions, provided that they respect the unity and solidarity of the national groups, security of the state and the socialist social order. However, Ne Win lacked the political and cultural sensitivity to accommodate the demands and aspirations of the minorities. Moreover personalization of power in the hands of General Ne Win severely undermined the state capacity to respond to social demands, needs and aspirations and this also led to the subsequent malfunction of many of state organisations. Certainly these cannot be expected from a military regime. The uniqueness of Myanmar’s isolationism gradually faded to become an ordinary and mostly employed tactics of enjoying uncontested power. There was gradual shift in the concept of security from security of the union in favour of regime security and personal security of the military leaders. The accommodative capability of the state was not employed to make Myanmar a nation.

In other words Myanmar continued to encounter constraints of legitimacy and stability. Myanmar achieved independence in 1948. The early years of independence under parliamentary democracy were turbulent in Myanmar. Economically Myanmar’s infrastructure was devastated by the World War II. During the period of parliamentary democracy under U Nu’s leadership, territory was seized by the armed communist insurgents and ethnic insurgency against the state erupted. Besides the movement of politicised ethnicity, there also developed infighting within the ruling
Anti-Fascist People Freedom League coalition government ultimately leading to split of the party in 1958 into two rival factions. As a result of this political impasse, the erstwhile Prime Minister U Nu transferred power to the military as a ‘caretaker government’ from 1958 to 1960 on understanding that democracy could be restored in near future. Luckily enough, Myanmar returned to parliamentary democracy for two more years till the military seized power in 1962.

The political leaders faced the immediate task of nation-building and reconstructing a war devastated country. While the task was daunting, the state suffered from institutional and personnel weakness, enfeeble leadership and defects of the party politics. The leadership of U Nu tried to build consensus through a combination of acquiesce, appeasement and ultimately, offensive measures, to meet the task of nation-building, but the political divisiveness among political leaders based on ideological rift and personal rivalries marred all the good intentions of U Nu. The ethnic minority elites who could not accommodate within the power structure of the Union wanted more and more autonomy or complete secession from the Union. The government faced chronic legitimacy crisis and it became more concern with security agenda which, in turn, affected development efforts of the government. The economy continued to deteriorate. It was amidst such development that the Myanmarese military gradually grew as parallel centre of power and as credible alternative to the inefficient civilian government. The military hated party politics and considered the state under the democratic leadership weak and inappropriate to solve problem in Myanmar.

The context for the military to occupy direct political role was provided by failure of the democratic process and its actors. The military acted as caretaker government from 1958 to 1960. In March 1962 it seized power by force and established a military rule that lasted for more than five decades. Initially military’s taking over power of the state was guided by good motives, though isolationism remained the ideology of the state. The isolationist ideology affected structural and functional pattern as well as state’s relation with the society. The state denied the society any share in the political system. The political system was shut off from the society by a combination of force and ideological and philosophical rhetoric under
two documents known as the ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ and the ‘System of Correlation of Man and His Environment’. The military under the leadership of Ne Win established an isolationist political system in pursuance of modernisation and unity. The structural pattern of such isolationist political system was direct military rule from 1962 to 1974 under the Revolutionary Council and quasi-civilian military rule under the constitution of 1974. As a part of domestic isolationism, Myanmar also shut off itself from the world outside because the former would be ineffective without the later.

The military’s role of socio-economic and political construction based on isolationist ideology was however transformed into a philosophy of dictatorship with Ne Win’s yearn for power corrupted his sincerity. Being skilled in personnel management, by purging his opponents, political rivals and open-minded elements within the military, he ascended at the epitome of power in Myanmar. The Tatmadaw and the Burma Socialist Programme Party were transformed his cohort organisations in the quest for uncontested power. Isolationism was politicised which vindicated the reason for the longevity of isolationism and political and economic crises that developed within isolationism. It was because the state had become a club of inefficient cohorts, and its policies reflected the xenophobic and idiosyncratic will of Ne Win. The centralised, rigid and paranoid isolationist regime created political and economic crises. The state continued to encounter crises of legitimacy, nation-building and stability.