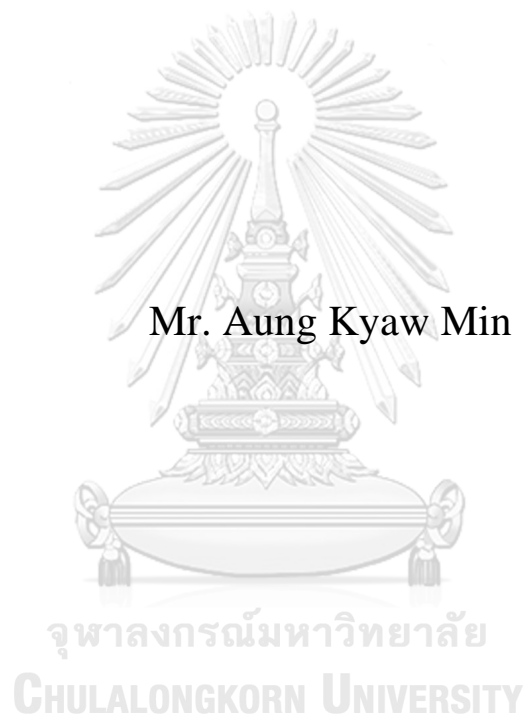


The Emergence of the Non-Aligned Foreign Policy of Burma
from the end of the Second World War to Bandung Conference



A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Southeast Asian Studies
Inter-Department of Southeast Asian Studies
GRADUATE SCHOOL
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การปรากฏของนโยบายไม่ฝักใฝ่ฝ่ายใดของพม่าในช่วงหลังสงครามโลกครั้งที่ 2 ถึง การประชุม
บันดุง



วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต
สาขาวิชาเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา สหสาขาวิชาเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา
บัณฑิตวิทยาลัย จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย
ปีการศึกษา 2565
ลิขสิทธิ์ของจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

อ่อง จอ มิน : การปรากฏของนโยบายไม่ฝักใฝ่ฝ่ายใดของพม่าในช่วงหลังสงครามโลกครั้งที่ 2 ถึง การประชุม
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ประเทศพม่าดำเนินนโยบายต่างประเทศที่ไม่ฝักใฝ่ฝ่ายใดตั้งแต่ได้รับเอกราช งานศึกษาเกี่ยวกับนโยบาย
ต่างประเทศของพม่าที่ผ่านมา ส่วนใหญ่แสดงข้อโต้แย้งว่านโยบายต่างประเทศที่ไม่ฝักใฝ่ฝ่ายใดของพม่าเริ่มขึ้นในราวปี
1950 เนื่องจากประเทศพม่ากลายเป็นอาณานิคมภายใต้จักรวรรดิอังกฤษในช่วงปี 1886 ถึง 1948 ประสบการณ์ของ
ลัทธิล่าอาณานิคมก็อาจมีบทบาทสำคัญในความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างประเทศในประเศพม่า ภายหลังจากได้รับเอกราช พม่ายังเผชิญกับ
ความท้าทายหลายประการ อาทิ ปัญหาการก่อความไม่สงบ ดังนั้น วัตถุประสงค์หลักงานศึกษานี้ จึงมีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อตรวจสอบ
การเกิดขึ้นของรากฐานทางอุดมการณ์ของนโยบายต่างประเทศที่ไม่ฝักใฝ่ฝ่ายใดของพม่าหลังสงครามโลกครั้งที่ 2 นอกจากนี้
งานศึกษานี้ยังจะค้นหาปัจจัยภายในและภายนอกที่มีส่วนกำหนดนโยบายนี้ ทั้งนี้เพื่อตอบวัตถุประสงค์หลัก บทความนี้ได้
วิเคราะห์ว่าสถานการณ์หลังสงครามโลกครั้งที่ 2 นำความท้าทายภายในและภายนอกมาสู่พม่าอย่างไร และสิ่งเหล่านี้ส่งผลต่อ
การเกิดขึ้นของรากฐานทางอุดมการณ์ของนโยบายต่างประเทศที่ไม่ฝักใฝ่ฝ่ายใดของพม่าหลังสงครามโลกครั้งที่ 2 การศึกษานี้
ใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพและระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงเอกสารเพื่อค้นหาปัจจัยทางประวัติศาสตร์ อิทธิพลภายนอกและภายในของ
นโยบายต่างประเทศของพม่า อิทธิพลของปัจจัยภายนอกโลก เช่น การเปลี่ยนแปลงของระเบียบโลกหลังสงครามโลกครั้งที่ 2
และความท้าทาย ปัจจัยภายใน และความขัดแย้งที่เกิดขึ้นภายในประเทศ อาจบีบบังคับพม่าต้องหาทางรอดของประเทศและสิ่งนี้อาจ
นำไปสู่การมีส่วนร่วมของพม่าในการเคลื่อนไหวที่ไม่ฝักใฝ่ฝ่ายใด และการจัดตั้งนโยบายต่างประเทศที่ไม่ฝักใฝ่ฝ่ายใดของพม่าในภายหลัง

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย
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สาขาวิชา เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา
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Advisor: Prof. Dr. SUNAIT CHUTINTARANOND

Burma has been practicing non-aligned foreign policy since its independence. Most of the literature studied on Burma's foreign policy argued that Burma's non-aligned foreign policy was initiated around 1950. As Burma became a colony under the British Empire from 1886 to 1948, the experience of colonialism might also play an essential role in foreign relations in Burma. After independence, Burma also faced numerous challenges, such as insurgency problems. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to examine the emergence of the ideological foundation of the non-aligned foreign policy of Burma after the Second World War. Moreover, this study will also find out the internal and external factors shaping this policy. To fulfil its primary objective, this paper will also try to analyze how the situations after the Second World War brought internal and external challenges for Burma and how these impacted the emergence of the ideological foundation of the non-aligned foreign policy of Burma after the Second World War. This study applied qualitative research method and documentary research methodology to find out the history factors, external and internal influences of Burmese foreign policy. The influence of the external factors of the world, such as the changing of the world order after the Second World War and internal challenges, factors, and conflicts happening within the countries, might force Burma to look for ways for the survival of the country and this might later lead to the involvement of Burma in the Non-Aligned Movement and the establishment of the Non-Aligned Foreign Policy of Burma.

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Field of Study:	Southeast Asian Studies	Student's Signature
	
Academic Year:	2022	Advisor's Signature
	

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Abbreviations and glossary

AFPFL	- Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
AFO	- Anti-Fascist Organization
BDA	- Burmese Defense Army
BIA	- Burmese Independent Army
BNA	- Burmese National Army
CBP	- Communist Party of Burma
BCP	- Another terminology for CBP
Doh Burmah Ah She Ah Yone	- We Burmans Association
GCBA	- General Council of Burma Association
KNDO	- Karen National Defense Organization
KMT	- Kuomintang
KNU	- Karen National Union
Pha Sa Pa La	- Burmese abbreviation of AFPFL
PVO	- People's Volunteer Organization
Red Flag Communists	- A communist faction led by Thakin Soe
SEATO	- Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
YMBA	- Young Burma Buddhist Association



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Chronology

- **1824 – 1826**

First Anglo-Burmese War

- **1852 – 1853**

Second Anglo-Burmese War

- **1885**

Third Anglo-Burmese War

- **May 1930**

Doh Burmah Ah She Ah Yone (We Burmans Association) was founded

- **1938**

1300 Revolution

- **15th August 1939**

The Communist Party of Burma (CPB), also known as the Burmese Communist Party (BCP), was founded

- **1st September 1939**

Second World War

- **August 1940**

Thakin Aung San and Thakin Hla Myaing went to Amoy

- **December 1941**

Japan initiated their operation to occupy Burma

- **26th December 1941**

Burmese Independent Army (B.I.A) was founded

- **1st August 1942**

B.I.A was changed into the Burmese Defense Army (BDA)

- **1st August 1943**

The state of Burma was founded under the Japanese, and Dr Ba Maw became State Chancellor, and BDA was also expanded to the Burmese National Army (BNA)

- **August 1944**

Communists, Socialists and BNA decided to form a league

- **4th – 7th August 1944**

Anti-Fascist Organization (AFO) was founded

- **1st March 1945**

AFO was changed into Anti-Fascist People's Freedom Organization (AFPFL)

- **1st May 1945**

The Allied forces reoccupied Rangoon

- **19th August 1945**

Naythurein People Conference

- **16th August 1945**

British civil administration resumed in Burma

- **February 1946**

The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) divided into two factions, and Thakin Soe founded the Communist Party (Burma), also known as Red Flag Communists, and Thakin Than Tun led the Communist Party of Burma (CPB)

- **10th July 1946**

The Governor-general announced Red Flag Communists as an unlawful organization

- **7th October 1946**

End of White Paper administration in Burma

- **10th October 1946**

Pha Sa Pa La (AFPFL) expelled the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) led by Thakin Than Tun from AFPFL

- **27th January 1947**

Aung San-Atlee agreement

- **12th February 1947**

Panglong Agreement

- **February 1947**

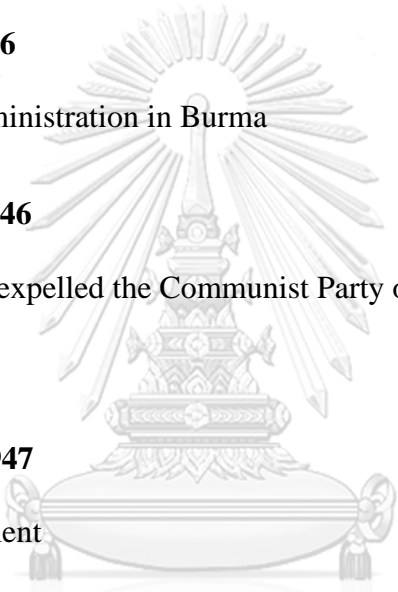
Karen Nation Union (KNU) was founded with the leadership of Saw Ba U Gyi

- **July 1947**

KNU formed the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO)

- **7th April 1947**

General elections held in Burma



- **10th June 1947**

First parliament meeting in Burma

- **19th July 1947**

Aung San was assassinated

- **29th August 1947**

Let Ya-Freeman agreement

- **17th October 1947**

Nu-Atlee agreement

- **4th January 1948**

Burma gained independence

- **February 1948**

Thakin Than Tun and CBP leaders attended Calcutta Conference

- **13th – 18th March 1948**

CBP organized a people conference in Pyinmana, Central Burma

- **29th March 1948**

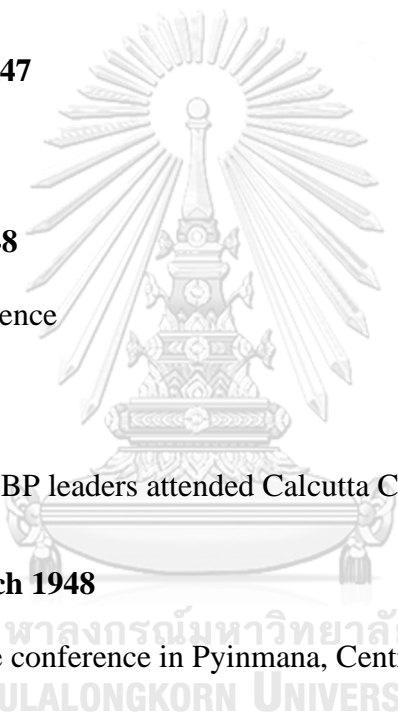
CBP initiated the armed rebellion

- **25th May 1948**

Prime Minister U Nu announced the “Leftist Unity.”

- **29th July 1948**

PVO initiated the armed rebellion



- **20th January 1949**

KNU initiated the armed rebellion

- **1950**

Kuomintang entered Burma

- **1953**

Burma's ceased American Aid

- **8th September 1954**

SEATO was founded

- **18th – 24th April 1955**

Bandung Conference



Chapter 1

Introduction

Burma had been influenced in so many ways by colonialism. Burma had been under the colonial control of the British Empire since the end of the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1886 until it gained independence in 1948. After the Second World War of around 1945 to 1948, Burma accelerated its independence movement. Burma gained independence on January 4th, 1948, and at the same time, Burma was also the first country in Asia to have left the Commonwealth of the British Empire (Tinker, 1961). We will need to look back at the moments before the independence of Burma. Moreover, it is also essential to consider how this particular period impacted the ideological foundation of Burmese Foreign Policy.

From the time of independence in 1948 to the current time, the foreign policy of Burma has been following the ideology of non-alignment. It could be argued that the idea of a non-aligned foreign policy of Burma emerged at the end of the Second World War. The years after the war could be regarded as years of uncertainty in the world as the world order had changed, and the Cold War was also emerging. Burma, at that time, was also accelerating its independence movement (Pluvier, 1974).

After the Japanese withdrawal from Burma in 1945, Burma and the British Empire faced their most critical issues as the independence movement gained traction. As the Second World War ended, the global order also changed in the world. The war had impacted and weakened the British Empire (Trager, 1966); on the other hand, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the superpowers in the world. The emergence of these two superpower countries and the ideological competition

between those two sides --the Western camp on the side of Capitalism and the Soviet camp on the side of Communism would result in the Cold War in the years after the Second World War. In Europe, the continent was divided into Eastern and Western blocs, divided by the Iron Curtin, and these could be regarded as the initiation of the Cold War. Such ideological conflict could also be seen in the neighbouring countries of Burma during this period. In China, a civil war raged between the Kuomintang (KMT) side, backed by the Western superpowers, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), supported by the Communist side.

Certain events, such as the Cominform and the Calcutta Conference, influenced the communist movements in Southeast Asia. The communist movements in Burma had no exception. The influence of those events also led to communist movements becoming widespread in the region. It was apparent that the changing of the world order after the end of the Second World War inspired the communist movements in the region.

Moreover, Burmese leaders might be concerned about the civil war in China. Aung San, in Burma's Challenge, wrote that:

“I also desire to appeal to the peoples of China, to Marshal Chiang Kai Shek, Mao Tse Tung, General Chu The and others of light and leading in China to unite firmly and unbrokenly for China's good as well as for the sake of Asia and the world... We appeal to them because we love peace in our country, the East, and the world. Similarly, I desire to appeal to India and her leaders, Mahatama Gandhi, Mr Jinnah, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, President Azad and

others to unite and march together as one to a free and happy India”(Aung San, 1946).

The writing of Aung San shows that Burmese leaders were concerned about the events in the world. It could be argued that such ideological struggle could not be negligible while considering foreign relations during that time. While these ideological conflicts were brewing in the world, this might also have impacted the foreign policy decision-making of Burma.

On the other hand, Burma also faced internal challenges while accelerating its independent movement. The possibility of a Civil War was one of those challenges. The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) was Burma's most influential and dominant political alliance during that time. After the Second World War, the faction between the communist and socialist sides was also emerging within the AFPFL (Maung Htin Aung, 1967).

Burma during that time might have thought that the involvement of foreign powers could also affect that situation. Therefore, it could be said that ideological conflict was also possible in Burma during that time since Burma also had its internal conflict aside from the ideological conflict, which is the potential conflict among the different ethnic groups. Moreover, Burma also had conflicts with ethnic groups such as Karen. For such internal conflicts, Burma leaders might be afraid of the involvement of the superpower countries, and this reason could be one of the factors that Burma chose the non-alignment foreign policy.

Burma's decision to leave the Commonwealth of the British Empire is a notable example reflecting the idea of the non-aligned policy of Burma initiated from the pre-

independence period. After gaining independence in 1948, the new Union of Burma also left the British Empire's Commonwealth (Cady, 1960). This decision to leave the Commonwealth after gaining independence could possibly be due to Burma's consideration of how to deal with the external and internal challenges of the Cold War. Burma during that time might think that avoiding the ideological conflicts of the Cold War could be the best feasible way for the survival of the newly independent country, and this consideration might also have influenced Burma's decision to follow the pathway of non-aligned foreign policy without joining any particular side of the Cold War. Burma might also have thought that remaining in the Commonwealth could be equivalent to staying on the anti-communist faction of the Western Capitalist side, and it could have an impact in being non-aligned in its foreign policy.

After the Second World War, Burma was influenced and challenged by both internal and external. This influence of internal and external factors might have influenced the emergence of the Foreign Policy of Burma. For this reason, this study will explore the emergence of the non-aligned foreign policy of Burma by analyzing the internal and external factors by exploring how Burma perceived the newly emerged world order, the ideological conflicts and how colonialism had an impact upon Burmese Foreign Policy decision making and Burmese perception of International Relations.

Most of the literature written about Burmese Foreign Policy has focused chiefly on the period of post-independence. When discussing Burmese Foreign Policy, they mainly focus on the period after 1948. Chi Shad Liang's *Burma's Foreign Relations Neutralism in Theory and Practice* was one of those books. The author stated that Burmese leaders proclaimed that Burma had practised a neutral foreign policy since

independence (Liang, 1990). Burma following the pathway of non-aligned foreign policy accelerated when Cold War was igniting around 1950, especially during the time of the Korean War (Liang 1990). Regarding Burmese Foreign Policy, Trager also wrote that during the early years of independence, Burma searched for solid allies, but when the Cold War escalated, Burma's Foreign Policy progressed more toward non-alignment (Trager 1966).

As most of the documents focusing on the foreign policy of Burma concentrated mainly on the post-independence times, it will need to explore the period before Burma's independence as well. It is needless to say that the 1950s was the period of the Cold War, and the Cold War and ideological conflicts might have impacted Burma's decision to follow the pathway of the Non-Aligned Foreign Policy. But as a country living under British Colonialism for over many decades, the influence of colonialism could also impact the Foreign Policy decision-making of Burma. For this reason, it is also imperative that we explore the pre-independent period of Burma after the Second World War.

Moreover, in this study, the term non-aligned foreign policy will be preferably used rather than neutralism. Neutralism was the ideology that emerged from the non-aligned movement (Garrett W. Brown; Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan, 2018), and non-aligned policy might be broader scope and term. Moreover, the non-aligned movement also aimed for anti-colonialism (Garrett W. Brown; Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan 2018). This study also aims for the post-colonial period and will preferably use the term non-aligned policy. Subsequently, the Burmese term "Bat Ma Lite", referred to as a Burmese Foreign Policy, is closer to Non-Aligned.

1.1 Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to examine the emergence of the ideological foundation of the non-aligned foreign policy of Burma after the Second World War. Moreover, this study will also find out the internal and external factors shaping this policy.

1.2 Research Questions

To fulfil its primary objective, this paper will also try to analyze how the situations after the Second World War brought internal and external challenges for Burma and how these impacted the emergence of the ideological foundation of the non-aligned foreign policy of Burma after the Second World War.

1.3 Research Methodology

Although this thesis title relates to Burma's foreign policy, this study will mainly focus on historical rather than foreign policy analysis. This study will not focus on policy formulation, decision-making, or implementation. Instead, this study focuses on historical events, influential actors, and documents. As this study primarily focuses on qualitative research, documentary research would be the primary methodology in this study.

This study's timeframe will mainly focus on the period of around 1945 to 1955. This period could roughly be the time in which Burma struggled for independence or the pre-independence period, and Burma gained independence or the post-independence

period. There were also prominent figures who were important figures in those periods, such as U Nu, who was the first Prime Minister of Burma after independence and also a prominent figure in the international relations of independent Burma.

According to Butwell, U Nu was the prominent figure and the most crucial foreign policy decision-maker of independent Burma. Butwell has written that:

“U Nu was his own Foreign Minister – he made Burma’s foreign policy. His colleagues influenced him – occasionally even got him to change his mind. But he made foreign policy – not the Foreign Office, not the Cabinet, not the party”(Butwell, 1963).

It was evident that U Nu played an essential role in the foreign policy decision-making of Burma, so the speeches and the writing of U Nu will be studied in this paper. As the first prime minister of independent Burma, the words, speeches and perspectives of U Nu will be necessary while studying the foreign policy of both post-independent and pre-independent Burma.

As this study also focuses on pre-independent Burma, Aung San would be another prominent figure who was also regarded as the independent architect of Burma. Studying these crucial figures, their autobiography and speeches will also give a clear understanding of the perception of these figures. Moreover, this study will also pay attention to the writing and speeches of communist leaders such as Thakin Soe and Thakin Than Tun. This will also give different points of view regarding those historical events. Moreover, this paper will also study the perspectives of prominent scholars on Burmese history.

This study will use a qualitative approach while applying the documentary research and using sources from both English and Burmese to find out the different perspectives on the Burmese Independence Movement, Colonialism and Foreign Policy and how they related to each other. After the analysis, it will be evaluated how the ideological foundation of the Non-Aligned Foreign Policy of Burma emerged.

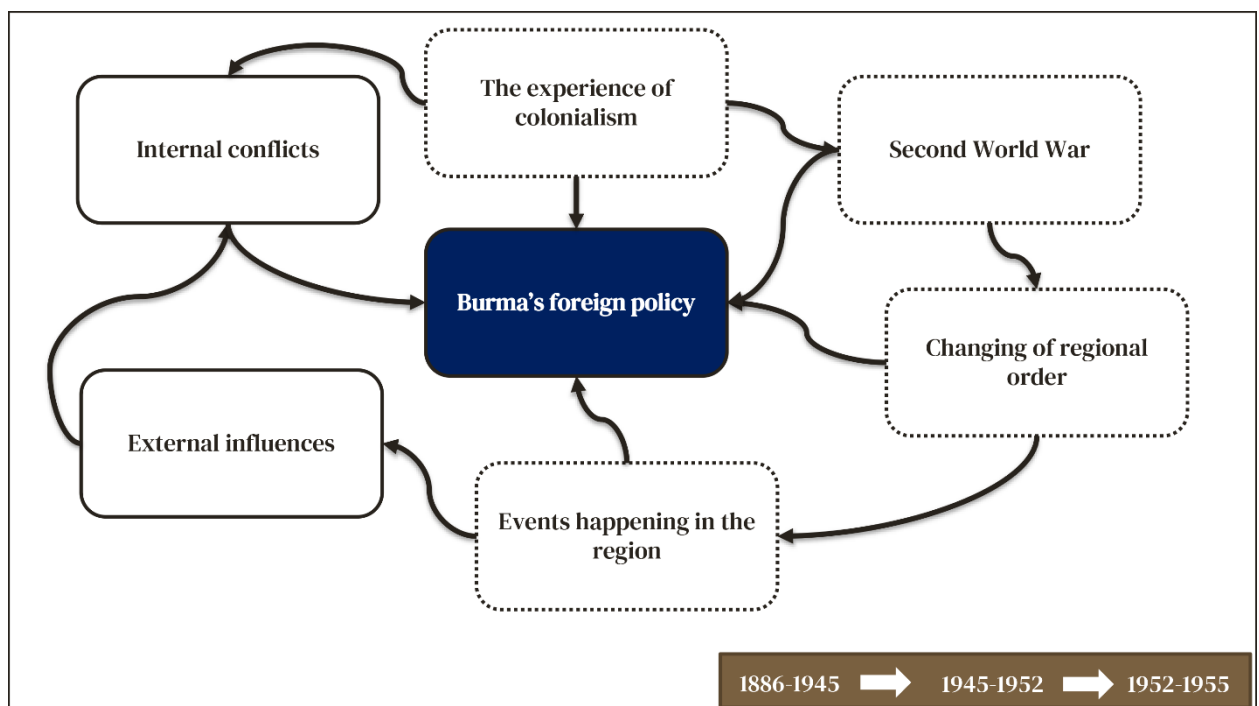


Figure 1 Factors to find out in relation to the foreign policy of Burma

1.3.1 Collection of documents and analysis

When collecting the documents for this study, primary sources will be mainly focused on. These sources might include official documents and memoirs of persons involved or experienced in those historical events. Apart from those primary sources, works of literature such as writings of historians on Burmese history, Southeast Asia history and World history will also be added to the study.

Regarding the language of the documents and works of literature, the document will be mainly collected with its original writing. When those documents and literature are initially written in English, documents in English sources will be collected, and when documents and literature are initially written in Burmese, the sources in Burmese will be collected. In some cases, when the original writing of the documents is difficult to find, translated sources will try to be collected.

Regarding the analysis of the historical documents, arguments, facts and opinions from that literature and documents will be discussed. Arguments from historians and writers will be quoted and discussed in this study. Quotes from the speeches will also be added and discussed as a reflection of the historical events.

1.4 Structure of the Study

This study will be divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is the introduction which was already discussed above and gave research objectives, questions, and methodologies. In the second chapter, it will be discussed the terminology of neutrality, neutralism, and non-alignment. Furthermore, this chapter will be the study of the literature on Burma's foreign policy. When discussing the terminologies and the literature on Burma opportunity, this chapter will also offer an opportunity to find out the Burmese context on foreign policy and the non-alignment.

The third chapter will examine the relations between Burma and the British Empire. Although the term relations is used, this part of the study will focus on analyzing Burma's experience of colonialism under the British Empire. Although this study mainly focuses on the period around the 1940s, studying the brief background history

of Burma under the British Empire will also allow having a brief understanding of the influence of colonialism under the British Empire.

The fourth chapter will discuss the period from 1945 to 1948 when Burma gained independence. This part will discuss the significant events of this period, and the rising internal conflict in Burma will also be studied there. More importantly, this part will also allow finding out the perspective of the Burmese leaders regarding the foreign relations of the newly independent country.

The fifth chapter will explore the internal conflicts that probably impacted Burma's foreign relations. This part will also study the underlying factors relating to those internal conflicts. The sixth chapter will study the events happening in the region and their impacts on the internal conflicts of Burma. Communist movements, which had the potential to influence the internal conflicts of Burma, will be studied in this part. The changing of the regional order and the impact of internal conflicts will be studied in this part of the chapter. Moreover, Burma joining the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) will be discussed in this chapter. Internal conflicts, regional orders and all these impacts will be explored in this chapter.

The last chapter of this study will discuss the previous chapters and analyse the objectives and questions mentioned above. And this chapter will also give an argument that the influence of the external factors of the world, such as the changing of the world order after the Second World War and internal challenges, factors, and conflicts happening within the countries, might force Burma to look for the ways for the survival of the country and this might later lead to the involvement of Burma in

the Non-Aligned Movement and the establishment of the Non-Aligned Foreign Policy of Burma.



Chapter 2

Literature review

Before discussing the Burmese perspective on the foundation of the foreign policy of the newly independent country, it will need to discuss the meaning and context of the terms neutrality, neutralism, and non-alignment. Although these terms look like each other, they have different meanings and contexts.

Fundamentally, neutrality is the legal position adopted by a state which does not take part in a particular war or prevent itself from being any part of the war (Garrett W. Brown, Iain McLean, and Alistair McMillan, 2018). Concerning neutralism and non-alignment, these terms were widely used during the Cold War. Neutralism could be roughly defined as the policy of non-alignment which countries practised during the time of Cold War as a rejection to take part in the Cold War, whilst non-alignment could be regarded as a position of the Third World countries as a result of the anti-colonial movement in which they tried to avoid taking in any position of Superpower countries during the time of Cold War (Garrett W. Brown, Iain McLean, and Alistair McMillan, 2018).

These terms: neutrality, neutralism and non-alignment, also have different backgrounds. Compared to the other two terms, the term neutrality has a much older background history and is also applied in international law (Sandra Bott, 2016). That term may refer to someone willing to abstain from taking a side between two parties, and subsequently, this concept is applied while abstaining from taking sides during the outbreak of wars. The legal and political concept of being neutral might vary

compared to non-alignment. Being neutral status could mean they will keep their status also for the upcoming armed conflicts(Muller, 2019).

With regards to the application of neutrality, Leos Mullar also argued in his book “Neutrality in World History” as follows:

“Permanent neutrality was also first employed in possible conflict zones between the great power. From the Vienna Congress to the outbreak of the First World War, neutrality was one of the most crucial elements of the international order. The legal status of neutrality became much stronger as international law became institutionalized in international agreements and institutions.”

(Muller, 2019)

Coming to the terms neutralism and non-alignment, the application and widespread of these terms came after the Second World War due to the Cold War and the ideological conflict. However, the term neutralism is a sixteenth-century word, and its application to political context is followed by the consequences of decolonization (Muller, 2019). Following the end of the Second World War and decolonization, the terms neutralism and non-alignment were formulated as a response to the ideological conflicts of the Cold War(Sandra Bott, 2016). The concept of these terms is also similar to that of neutrality. These terms also refer to not taking sides in a conflict and partaking in any side of the potential conflict during a peaceful situation. The possible reason that the term neutralism and non-alignment were widely used during the Cold War was that the “Cold War” was not such a war from a legal perspective and the law of neutrality was not applicable (Sandra Bott, 2016).

Moreover, non-alignment is not a legal term and is not codified in international law. Countries under the neutrality status must pursue a policy committed to being neutral in the upcoming conflicts and wars. The rights and duties of neutral states are also mentioned in the Hague Conventions of neutrality, and the neutral states must show their commitment to that (Muller, 2019). While neutrality is political and legal terminology, non-alignment is only political (Muller, 2019). As the term non-alignment was not codified in international law, the countries following the non-aligned policy do not need to assign to such commitment. In avoiding the bipolarity of the Cold War, the Third World countries preferred to apply the non-alignment. When India followed the neutralist policy, its leader Jawaharlal Nehru preferred to call it a non-alignment policy (Sandra Bott, 2016).

As the countries had to keep the commitment when they followed the legal term neutrality, the Third World countries try to avoid that semantic thing when they pursue non-aligned foreign policy. Regarding this situation, William C. Johnstone argued the following

“Hence both Nehru and U Nu, seeking concise descriptions of their basic foreign policy concepts, most often used the word “independent” U Nu, Nehru, and other leaders have constantly sought to escape from the semantic trap of neutralism by use of other terms to describe their foreign policy – such as “non-alignment” “un-committed” and the like, and by use of qualifying subjects such as “positive”, and “dynamic”.”(Johnstone, 1963)

It has been stated that Burma has followed an active, independent, and non-aligned foreign since its independence (Ministry of Information Myanmar, 2021). In both its constitutions of 1947 and 1972, Burma did not use any of those terms to depict the country's foreign policy and relations. In the 2008 constitution, it has been stated that the country will follow an active, independent and non-aligned foreign policy.

Literature regarding the foreign policy of Burma argued that neutralism or non-alignment was not the firstly chosen by Burma. Both Chi-shad Liang and William C. Johnstone argued that fact. In the book “Burma’s Foreign Relations: Neutralism in Theory and Practice”, Chi-shad Liang argued the following:

“Burma’s official foreign outlook since the early 1950s has been described as one of positive neutrality, but there is reason to believe that this policy was not the first choice. By 1952, Burma’s foreign policy had taken the neutralist form that was to characterize it for the rest of the decade The neutralist foreign policy did not develop until two years later.” (Liang, 1990)

Subsequently, William C. Johnstone also stated the following argument in his book “Burma’s Foreign Policy: A Study in Neutralism”.

“It is significant that in India and Burma, the oldest of the neutralists among the new nations, use of the label neutralist or neutralism to characterize their respective foreign policies was not the choice of Prime Minister Nehru or of Prime Minister U Nu in the first years after independence. Both leaders seem to have

realized from the beginning that the kind of foreign policy they wished their governments to pursue” (Johnstone, 1963)

Burma faced different challenges, such as insurgencies and geographical situations as a newly independent country. Although the literature discussed above argued that non-aligned foreign policy was not the first choice for Burma, there might be another possibility that some factors could be influencing or impacting the foreign policy decision of Burma. These factors could be both internal and external. With that matter, Richard Butwell, in his book *U Nu of Burma*, mentioned that:

“At the start of independence, Nu stated that the three most influential factors in shaping Burma’s foreign policy were geography, the pro-British orientation of some of the minorities, and the great regard of a majority of those in effective political life for the Soviet Union, especially its economic achievements and orientation.”(Butwell, 1963)

Chi-shad Liang also stated that insurgencies, internal affairs, and the Burmese economy were devastated by these situations. These circumstances, such as the instability of the country and the urgent need for economic rehabilitation, led Burma to pursue non-alignment in its foreign policy (Liang, 1990). William C. Johnstone also stated that Burma's geographical situation, such as China, also influenced the consideration of Burmese foreign policy (Johnstone, 1963). Chi-shad Liang also argued that in the first two years of its independence Burma looked for fruitful relations with the Western countries, and there was no significant result. As a result,

Burma had to pursue a non-aligned foreign policy (Liang, 1990). Chi-shad Liang stated the following that

“During the first two years, Burma’s foreign policy focused on seeking a beneficial alliance with the West. However, no such alliance with the United States or Britain resulted. Before long, a neutralist policy in foreign relations was formally adopted. The policy declares nonalignment with power blocs, friendly relations with all countries, acceptance of aid with no strings attached, and making an independent judgment of international issues. Essentially, Burma opposes war and imperialism. Colonialism, racial discrimination, and domination of one nation by another stand for peaceful coexistence based on complete equality, independence, noninterference in each other’s internal affairs, mutual respect, and mutual benefit.” (Liang, 1990)

The literature discussed above argued that Burma did not choose a non-aligned foreign policy at first, but there might be factors which led Burma to choose this policy. Regarding the period, the literature discussing the foreign policy of Burma focuses mainly on the post-independent period of Burma. It will also need to focus on the pre-independent of Burma to find out how Burmese leaders were foreseen and expected for the foreign relations of the newly independent country.

Moreover, the literature mentioned that internal conflicts, such as insurgencies and external factors, such as geographical situations, influenced the foreign policy of

Burma. Furthermore, it will also need to discuss Burma's experience of colonialism and its influence on the foreign policy decision-making of Burma.

When it comes to the terminology, whether neutrality, neutralism or non-alignment should be the most suitable for the description of the foreign policy of Burma, the term neutrality should be avoided as that terminology is a legal term. As political events primarily influenced the foreign policy choice of Burma, it should be chosen between the two terms, neutralism and non-alignment. Even prominent Burmese diplomats and political figures used both neutralism and non-alignment when describing the foreign policy of Burma. One reason could be that the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) emerged after the 1950s and 1960s, and that terminology might have been widely used after that period.

Nevertheless, the term non-aligned or non-alignment would be preferably used in this study for two reasons. The first reason would be that the main reason for the foreign policy of Burma would be to avoid the involvement of the superpower countries in their countries, so it would be better to reject joining any sides. The second reason would be that the Burmese terminology 'Bat Ma Lite (ဘက်မလိုက်)' or 'Gyar Nay Ye (ကြားနေရေး)' would be mostly suited with the term non-alignment. The literal meaning of these Burmese terms could be roughly defined as the rejection of joining one side (Ministry of Education: Department of Burmese (The Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma), 1979). In official usage, the term non-alignment or Bat Ma Lite is used (Ministry of Information (Myanmar), 2008). Therefore, the term non-aligned or non-alignment would be the most suitable for this study.

Before discussing the internal conflicts and external factors influencing Burma's foreign policy, Burma's colonialism experience will need to be discussed. In the next chapter, Burma's experience of colonialism under the British Empire will be discussed and determine whether it could impact and influence the foreign policy choice Burma.



Chapter 3

Burma's experience of British Colonialism

Most of the studies related to the foreign policy of Burma paid attention to the period after independence. As a country colonized, its experience of colonialism might also play an essential role in its international relations. Therefore, it will need to pay attention to the colonial experience of Burma under the British Empire. The term which could briefly illustrate Burma's experience of colonialism would be 'Wars'.

As Burma was put into British Empire after the Anglo-Burmese War, Burma gained independence after the Second World War. Then Burma again faced the challenge of civil wars just before the end of British colonial rule. The role of these Wars was vital regarding Burma's experience of colonialism. This bitter experience might later influence Burma's decision to follow the path toward the non-alignment foreign policy.

Burma encountered the experience the colonialism of the British Empire since the end of the first Anglo-Burmese War in 1826. The first Anglo-War was ended by signing the Treaty of Yandabo. According to the treaty, Burma had to hand over Arakan and Tanissarim Regions to the British(Bamaw Tin Aung, 1964).

After the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852, Lower Burma, including Rangoon, was under British occupation. British then combined those newly occupied regions with Arakan and Tanissarim. British formed all these territories and named them "British Burma"(Maung Htin Aung, 1967).

After the Third Anglo-Burmese War, the British occupied Upper Burma. Although the Upper and Lower Burma was administered by one Chief Commissioner, Sir Charles Bernard, the administration systems differed between the Upper and Lower Burma during 1886-1887(Maung Htin Aung, 1967).

From 1886 to 1897, Burma was mainly administered by the Chief Commissioner, and this time could also be regarded as the British Administration System starting to settle in Burma. In 1897, Burma became a major province of British India or the British Raj(Maung Htin Aung, 1967). After becoming a major province, the head of the British Burma administration was the lieutenant governor.

The promotion from Chief Commissioner to Lieutenant Governor also included modifications to the government. The legislative council assisted the Lieutenant Governor, and new government departments relating to social welfare were also added. Minto-Morley reforms (1909) of British India also affected the British Burma government. The legislative council of the Lieutenant Governor was modified by adding more members.

The British authorities considered giving more self-administration power to British India. However, the British Parliament in London still decided to grant such self-government power to Burma. In 1917, a delegation from the British Parliament surveyed that India should be granted self-government power, but Burma should be excluded from this.

Although a Burmese delegation of the Young Man Buddhist Association (Y.M.B.A) went to India to meet and discuss with the British delegation, the British Parliament still decided to exclude Burma from the self-government promotion of British India.

Although another delegation of Y.M.B.A. went to the British Parliament in London and discussed, it was not succeeded.

From 1916 to 1921, Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, and Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy of India, initiated the discussions, later known as the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (Maung Htin Aung, 1967). The Government of India Act was introduced in 1919 as a consequence of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, but Burma was not included in those reforms.

The British Government faced protesting from the Burmese people, and the parliament had to decide to grant Burma kind of a self-government system the same as British India (Maung Htin Aung, 1967). The British Government then formed a committee for Burmese Reforms led by Sir Frederick Whyte. This committee was later known as the Whyte Committee. In 1923, British Burma was granted the Dyarchy Government System.

As Burma was granted that government system after four years of British India experiencing the Dyarchy System, the Burmese people felt that they were given that government system too late and the Burmese people, especially the Burmese nationalists, thought that the self-government privilege they acquired was too little.

The Dyarchy Government system was divided into the two-independent body: the British authorities and the people. According to Montagu-Chelmsford Report, the Dyarchy System was suggested as the “Rule of the Two”. The Dyarchy System also introduced Burma as a parliamentary government system.

After a few years, British Parliament had meant to develop a constitutional system in India and Burma. In 1931, the British Parliament appointed a commission led by Sir

John Simon to analysis and make endorsements for further reformations. The reformation of the Government of India Act in 1935 initiated the separation of Burma from British India. In 1937, the Government of Burma Act took effect, and the first constitution of Burma was established. Burma and India were two different nations, and the British had difficulties governing these two nations together. British might have difficulties adjusting the administrative when ruling these two countries together. This might be the reason British separated Burma from India.

Before 1937, Burma was under the administration of the Lieutenant Governor, who was under the command of the Governor of India. After 1937, when Burma was separated from India with the Introduction of the first constitution of Burma, the Lieutenant Governor was promoted to Governor of Burma. It means that the administration system of Burma was also separated from British India. Sir Spencer Harcourt Butler become the Governor of British Burma. After that, Burma was separated from India, elections were held, and Dr Ba Maw became the first Prime Minister.



3.1 Resistance and independence movements

As soon as the British conquered Burma, they faced resistance from the indigenous people. Although the resistance of the local people was not an organized force, the British had some struggles controlling them. The traditional ideologies and techniques influenced those movements. These resistance movements were only targeted at the dethroning of the British Government. Moreover, the people who led those movements were descendants of the ruling class or people who connected with the

former king's family and their former retainers. Aung San mentioned the early resistance movements:

“The reactions of Burmese people against the impact of British imperialism in the early years of British occupation were in the form of blind instinctive unplanned rebellions against foreign rule unrelated to world developments abroad”(Aung San, 1946).

The involvement of the intellectuals and students could be seen at the start of the 1900s. The Young Man Buddhist Association (Y.M.B.A) founding in the early 1900s made nationalist ideologies rise. This association later turned into the name of the General Council of Burmese Association (G.C.B.A). The rising of nationalist ideologies could be the reason for the students' boycott in 1920. As a subsequent result, nationalist high schools emerged.

In May 1930, Doh Burmah Ah Seh Ah Yone (We Burmans Association) was formed. This association led to the foundation of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist ideologies. The main intention of the founding of this association was for independent movements. The member of this association took the prefix Thakin (Master) in front of their names. Later this association accelerated the nationalist and anti-colonial movements. The foundation of the Nagani book club was subsequently followed in 1937. The formation of the Doh Burmah Ah Seh Ah Yone encouraged the emergence of anti-colonialist ideologies. Also, it accelerated the independence movements of colonial Burma(Research Committee of the History of Doh Burmah Ah Seh Ah Yone, 2018).

Marxism and the student labour movements connected around 1938-39 when the 1300 revolution broke out(Thein Pe Myint, 2021a). In 1938, the 1300 labour movement occurred. The 1300 labour movement was a prominent example of the importance of the involvement of working-class people in the independent movements. Their involvement in political movements made a linkage with the students, intellectuals, and the people. As a subsequent, the 1300 labour movement turned into the 1300 general strike. One of the most important political organizations was founded the following year. On August 15, 1939, a group of young Burmese politicians and student leaders, including Thakin Aung San, founded the Communist Party of Burma (CPB). In the later stages of Burmese politics, CPB and the Burmese communists played essential roles.

3.2 Second World War

When the Second World War broke out in Europe, Burmese leaders intended to accelerate the independence movements. As Burma during that time was under the British Empire, Burma was put into the World War without the consent of the Burmese people. Burmese people, especially the Burmese politicians, stood against the war. They later initiated anti-war campaigns. Burmese leaders such as Dr Ba Maw and Aung San stated their opinion on which Burma was put into the war. They depicted their opinions in their writings.

Dr Ba Maw, in his book, stated that:

“One event after another showed that, without their consent, a colonial people can be involved in a total war and their whole life

turned upside down at the single will of the colonial power.... Burma, as a British-owned colony, was considered to have gone to war against British enemies as soon as Britain did so.... Very soon, the country was put into a state of war. All the Burmese resources were listed to be seized as the British willed”(Ba Maw, 1968).

Aung San also mentioned that:

“Until the beginning of 1942, Burma remained under British Rule for many decades. When Britain and France declared war against Germany in 1939, Burma also was declared to be a belligerent by the Government without consulting the Burma Legislature at all.... the Indian National Congress asked for the clarification of the British war aims- whether those aims applied Indian at all. Burma also did similarly” (Aung San, 1946).

When Burma was brought into the War, the Thakin leaders and Burmese politicians responded by initiating anti-war movements. Dr Ba Maw and the Thakin leaders founded the organization ‘Freedom Bloc’ in response to standing against the War.

Huge Tinker, in his book, stated the event in which Burma founded the freedom bloc:

“Meanwhile, after Dr Ba Maw’s downfall, his party linked up with the Thakins to form a new front called the ‘Freedom Bloc’. It adopted a policy of combative opposition to Burma’s participation in the war against Germany, which was carried into the bazaars and amongst the industrial workers”(Tinker, 1961).

This was also when the Burmese leaders realized they had to accelerate the independence movements. Young Burmese leaders such as Aung San looked for foreign assistance in fighting back the British Empire. In August 1940, Thakin Aung San and Thakin Hla Myaing went to Amoy, China, to look for contacts with foreign support for the independence movements. According to Dr Htin Aung, Aung San first intended to contact the Chinese Communists during his travel to Amoy, but he got the contact from the Japanese instead (Maung Htin Aung, 1967).

Later, the Japanese contacted those Burmese leaders, and thirty comrades got military training from the Japanese. On 26th December 1941, with the leadership of General Aung San and thirty comrades, a Burmese army was founded in Bangkok, Thailand. This is the initiation of the Burmese Independence Army (BIA). In December 1941, the Japanese initiated their military operation against the British forces to occupy Burma.

On March 1942, the Japanese could take control of the city of Rangoon. On 1st August 1942, the BIA had to reform as Burma Defense Army (BDA). Japanese Army then could successfully occupy Burma from the British and installed a government led by Dr Ba Maw on 1st August 1943. Dr Ba Maw was appointed the Prime Minister, and Thakin Mya became deputy Prime Minister. At the same time, Burma had to declare war on the United States and the British.

Later Burmese people realized that the Japanese occupation was much worse than that of the British. Therefore, they had to revolt against the Japanese. Aung San wrote that

“Now we occupied Rangoon (August 1942). We had been heartbroken about the Japanese behaviour towards our people all

along. We protested as much as possible to some of their authorities but in vain. Clashes between our soldiers and the Japanese soldiers mounted” (Aung San, 1946).

Before the arrival of the Japanese into Burma, some communists also tried to prepare to revolt against the Japanese. In July first week of 1941, Thakin Soe wrote a paper called “Insein manifesto” while in the Insein Prison. In this manifesto, Thakin Soe wrote to resist the Japanese and join the British and the Allies to fight back against the Japanese. On 19th April 1942, Thakin Soe, Thakin Ba Hein and Thakin Nu met with General P.S Wang of the Chinese Nationalist Army in the Mandalay Prison. Then on 1st May 1942, Thakin Soe, together with Thakin Thein Pe, planned to go to China to seek support to resist the Japanese. Nevertheless, they had to change their plans and decided to go to India, and on 17th June 1942, they went to India, where they met with the British authorities and the Indian Communist Party.

Huge Tinker mentioned how the communist leaders prepared to oppose the Japanese invasion that

“One group of the Communist Thakins opposed the Japanese right from the start. Tet pongyi Thein Pe (Thein Pe Myint) and Tin Shwe managed to make their way to India in July 1942. They contacted the British authorities, professing utter disgust with the Japanese” (Tinker, 1961).

Not only the communist leaders but also the Burmese people also realized that the Japanese occupation was much worse than being a colony under the British. According to Dr Htin Aung:

“The Japanese military rule lasted only three years, but to the Burmese people, it was more irritating than some sixty years of British rule. In addition to the widespread feeling that the Japanese had maliciously broken their promise of granting independence, the Burmese people were angry at being subjected to acts of tyranny and barbarous treatment” (Maung Htin Aung, 1967).

Therefore, Burmese leaders had to plan to resist the Japanese. On the first week of August 1944, a meeting was held at the home of Foreign Minister U Nu. Communist Party, Burma National Army and People’s Revolution Party attended that meeting and decided to form a league to revolt against the Japanese.

Another meeting was held in Pegu from the 4th to the 7th of August 1944, and this was the formation of the Anti-Fascist Organization (AFO), and in Burmese, it was called Pha Ta Pa¹. Another meeting was held on 1st March 1945 at General Aung San’s home, and AFO was changed to the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (A.F.P.F.L)², which became one of the crucial political organizations of post-independent Burma. They decided to revolt against the Japanese on 2nd March 1945.

On 27th March 1945, Burmese resistance against the Japanese was initiated. At the same time, the operation of the British and Allies to reoccupy Burma began. The Allied forces occupied Rangoon on 1st May 1945, and the British army initiated military rule. The British civil administration could resume again on 16th October

¹ ဖက်ဆစ်တိုက်ဖျက်ရေးအဖွဲ့ချုပ် (ဖတပ)

² ဖက်ဆစ်တိုက်ဖျက်ရေးနှင့်ပြည်သူ့လွတ်မြောက်ရေးအဖွဲ့ချုပ် (ဖတပလ) and changed the name into ဖက်ဆစ်ဆန့်ကျင်ရေးနှင့်ပြည်သူ့လွတ်မြောက်ရေးအဖွဲ့ချုပ် (ဖဆပလ)

1945. At the same time, Burma, with the leadership of Pha Sa Pa La, began independence movements.

3.3 Conclusion

As already stated, the Burmese experience of colonialism was influenced mainly by the Anglo-Burmese Wars, the World Wars and the civil war which Burma experienced just before the end of colonialism. The Burmese regarded the Anglo-Burmese Wars as the British' colonial expansion of their country. Aung San wrote:

“Burma was conquered by British imperialism in three Anglo-Burmese wars. I shall not discuss whether British imperialism was justified in subjugating our country. Suffice it to say, in President Abraham Lincoln's words, no nation has the right to rule another nation. Burma has since lost her sovereignty and independence”
(Aung San, 1946).

The words of Aung San reflect the perspective on colonialism that Burma was occupied by the British after three Anglo-Burmese Wars, and they have to prevent such kind a loss of losing sovereignty in the future. The experience of the world war added more concern for colonialism. As already discussed, Burma was brought into the world war without the consent of the Burmese people. Therefore, regarding the World Wars, the Burmese believed that they were brought into the World War without their consent. Aung San mentioned that:

“To us then, the war in Europe was a war between two sets of imperialists and could have no appeal of any kind. We therefore finally resorted to an anti-imperialist, anti-war campaign” (Aung San, 1946).

But Burmese leaders also took this opportunity as an acceleration for independence movements. But this brought a more intense experience of World War. Dr Htin Aung stated:

“For the past three years, Burma had been continuously a battlefield and exposed to bombing first by the Japanese and then by the allies; all her cities and large towns were reduced to rubble, and there was not a single small town left that did not have some scars of war.... The country’s economy was destroyed. In their retreat, the British had pursued a scorched-earth policy, and the oil wells, silver and tungsten mines, harbour installations, and rolling stock were blown up” (Maung Htin Aung, 1967).

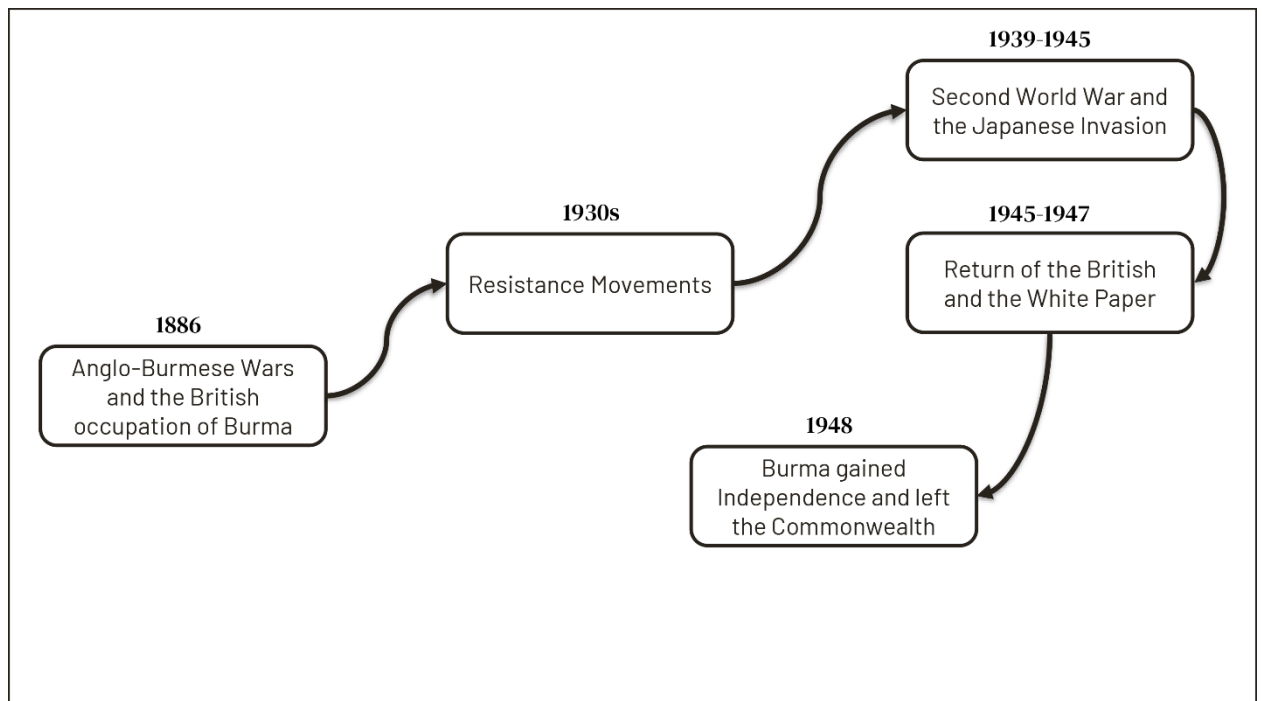


Figure 2 Burma's colonial experience

As shown in the above figure, Burma's concern regarding colonialism might peak during the Second World War. The experience of both Anglo-Burmese wars and the world wars marked a bitter experience for the Burmese leaders regarding colonialism. This Burmese experience of World War that standing on one side of the bloc could bring them into the War anytime might influence independent Burma's foreign policy of non-alignment. Burmese leaders might think that involving any type of war, especially the world war, could make their country lose its sovereignty. These concerns could still be seen in the speeches of U Nu during the post-independent period.

U Nu, in his Pyitawtha Speech in 1952, mentioned that

“During Second World War, you all might remember that the British government had declared war on Japan and Germany. Burma also had to declare without its consent. We had no reason to declare war. If the British lost the war, the country would be demolished and put into the hand of the Japanese. Even if they win, the country will still be devastated and remain under the British. Therefore, whether the British win or lose, we get nothing”(U Nu, 2016).

When the Japanese occupied Burma, Burma soon realized that being occupied by the Japanese was worse than being under the British (Bamaw Tin Aung, 1964). For this reason, Burmese leaders had to revolt against the Japanese. Since the first Anglo-Burmese War ended, Burma experienced colonialism under the British Empire. After the third Anglo-Burmese War, Burma was put under British Raj or British India. At the same time, Burma experienced inequality when compared to India. In 1919, administrative reforms in India, but Burma was still excluded from that. Burma could be separated from British India in 1937, 51 years after the end of the third Anglo-Burmese War. Regarding the British administration of Burma, Aung San stated:

“The system of British rule in Burma proceeded along roughly three stages: first it was a naked rule of bureaucracy, later dyarchy was introduced, and lastly since 1937, a glorified form of dyarchy was adopted” (Aung San, 1946).

At the same time, nationalist movements were also initiated around the 1900s. These movements later turned into independent movements. The Second World War became

the changing tide for the relations between the British Empire and Burma. Burma also experienced occupation by another colonial master, the Japanese. Stacking between the War of the Empires, the British and the Japanese, this experience might lead Burma to think about colonialism when considering foreign relations. In the next chapter, the pre-independent period of Burma from 1945-1948 will be discussed and also discuss how Burmese leaders perceived the foreign relations for the newly independent country.



Chapter 4

End of the Second World War, the return of the British and the Pre-Independent Burma

When examining the emergence of the ideological foundation of the foreign policy of Burma, we will also need to pay attention to the period before the independence of Burma after the Second World War, the events happening around that period as well as how these factors influenced the ideological foundations of the post-independent Burma. Certain events might need to be considered to find out about the pre-independent period of Burma.

As already discussed, several dynamics and changes were taking place in the world after the Second World War, which we need to pay attention to when considering the emergence of Burmese Foreign Policy. In this part of the study, we will find out the situation after the Second World War, the return of the British Empire and the pre-independent Burma

Most of the studies on this particular period, around 1945 to 1948, focused mainly on the independence movements of Burma. During the time of the Second World War, the British Government planned the plan for the ruling of Burma after the World War. The British Burma Government in exile laid out the plans for Post-War Burma during the exile in Silma, which later became known as the White Paper (McEnery 1990). Frank N. Trager's "Burma from Kingdom to Republic" also depicted the emergence of the White Paper document issued by the British Government for the return of British rule to Burma after the Second World War and its consequences. According to Trager, the British announced the White Paper in early May 1945 and later contested

it by the AFPFL (Trager 1966). In his book “The Union of Burma”, Hugh Tinker also mentioned that a civilian government resumed after the Second World War of around 1945, after which it was confronted by A.F.P.F.L (Tinker 1961).

After the withdrawal of the Japanese, Burma faced the return of the British. At the same time, Burmese leaders also accelerated the independence movement of Burma. The British Empire’s plans to rule Burma after the Second World War challenged this Burmese independence movement. According to White Paper, the British government planned to resume the Dyarchy government administration under the 1935 Burma Act and constitution and later grant the dominion status or self-government(Trager, 1966).

Consequently, that White Paper was confronted by the A.F.P.F.L and Burmese leaders. This White Paper might add more concern about the threat of colonialism to the Burmese leaders, which might have influenced the relations between the British Empire and Burma. This concern might also have impacted Burma following the pathway toward the non-alignment. This particular event also added internal tensions to Burma. Therefore, these internal challenges should not be neglected when discussing Burma’s consideration of non-alignment foreign policy. This part of the study will mainly focus on what happened between 1945 and 1948 and the perspective of the Burmese leaders such as U Nu and Aung San regarding the changing of the world order.

4.1 White Paper and rising of Internal Conflict

As discussed previously, the Burmese leaders contested the return of the British and the White Paper. According to Trager’s *Burma from Kingdom to Republic*, Dorman

Smith, the Governor of Burma during that time, was described by the opposition side, especially the communist side, as imperialist and capitalistic expansionist (Trager 1966). Tinker also depicted that the position of Communists with regard to the British during that time was ambiguous (Tinker 1961).

Bamaw Tin Aung, in his book *Colonial History of Burma*, also stated that “The British Empire prepared the White Paper to keep Burma as their colony... AFPFL initiated the people conference of Nay Thurein and other demonstrations to show their desire for independence” (Bamaw Tin Aung 1964). The AFPFL did not accept the whitepaper, and Aung San and Thakhin Than Tun also expressed their opinion to Governor Sir Dorman Smith. AFPFL, at the same time, also decided to put more effort into Burma's total freedom and independence (Lone Wa Lut Lat Yay).

John F. Cady's *A History of Modern Burma* also depicted some reflections on the Burmese independence movement regarding its relations with British Empire. One of the notable occasions written in this book was when Thakin Mya, Minister of Finance during that time, made a financial agreement with the British government, and the British government showed some gestures that Burma should cooperate with the commonwealth (Cady, 1960). But the internal tensions of Burma led Burma to leave the commonwealth eventually.

Another interesting juncture illustrated by Cady's book was that during the A.F.P.F.L meeting, the communist side doubted whether the British imperialist would give up their power over Burma (Cady 1960). On the side of the British, he also wrote that Britain was still showing gestures of cooperation with Burma even after Burma had decided to separate from the Commonwealth (Cady, 1960). After particular events led

to the decision, Cady stated that two treaties played a vital role in Burma's separation from the Commonwealth: the Let Ya – Freeman Agreement and the Nu – Attlee Agreement (Cady, 1960). The communist side of Burma condemned the AFPFL for signing those agreements that the communist side regarded the signing those agreements were tantamount to surrendering to the British imperialists (U Nu, 2013).

4.2 Burma's decision to leave the Commonwealth

Although Burma gained independence following the signing of such documents, the tension between the Communist side and the AFPFL was ignited (Butwell 1963). Such tension also led to Burma's decision to leave the Commonwealth as the communist side could point out the fact to show the public that the AFPFL had surrendered to the British Empire (U Nu, 2013). In U Nu's words, "there are two reasons we cannot agree with the dominion administration. The first one is if we agree with the dominion administration, we have to accept the British King as the head of state, which contradicts Burmese nationalism. Another one is that if we agree, Communists would point it this and mobilize the people and rebel against us" (U Nu, 2013). These sentiments of U Nu obviously reflect the situation of Burma at that time: the active nationalism, Burma's concern of colonialism, and the internal challenge of communism. Pha Sa Pa La (AFPFL) also stated that they wanted complete independence from Burma and that the British Empire did not understand their intention((Pha-Sa-Pa-La) A.F.P.F.L., 1947). This again depicts that Burma had internal and external challenges at that time.

The events which happened after the Second World War show that Burma had experienced challenges that were both external and internal. Consequently, Burma had to leave the Commonwealth of the British Empire. According to the literature and sources discussed above, Burma left the Commonwealth because living under the Commonwealth could not guarantee the full independent status which Burma desired during that time since the status of being under the Commonwealth might bring about internal tension and conflicts. Burma's leaders, such as Aung San, also perceived that remaining within the Commonwealth meant that the country could only have dominion status, which could not mean an independent status (Aung San 1946).

On the other hand, another possible reason was that living inside the Commonwealth, from the Burmese perspective, might mean taking the side of the Western Capitalist countries. This could affect Burma when avoiding the ideological conflict which had been escalating after the Second World War.

Both internal and external factors might have possibly influenced Burma's decision to leave the Commonwealth. The literature and studies discussed above depicted Burma facing internal and external challenges, which could later shape the foreign policy decision-making of an independent Burma. The events after the Second World War, especially the event of the White Paper, might also add more concern to the Burmese leaders with regard to colonial rule.

During the period after the Second World War, several confrontations occurred between the British Empire and the Burmese leaders, such as the case of White Paper and Commonwealth. At the same time, Burmese leaders had been struggling for independence and might have been concerned that the country would not be free from

colonialism and be colonized again. Such things might have impacted the relations between the British Empire and Burmese leaders, which later possibly led to Burma's decision to leave the Commonwealth of the British Empire. At the same time, the world order was then changing, and the next part will be studied how the perception of the Burmese leaders and Burma's was on the changing of the world order and the ideological conflict which ensued.

4.3 Pre-independent Burma and finding the ideological foundation of the Non-Aligned Foreign Policy

As mentioned in the previous part, most studies relating to the Foreign Policy of Burma have focused mainly on the post-independence period around the 1950s. This part will pay attention to the ideological foundations of the Non-aligned foreign policy of Burma by exploring the Burmese perspective. The previous parts also examined the period before Burma gained independence and how western colonialism, the Second World War, and internal challenges had influenced Burma. This part will find out the perspective of Burma on International Relations and Foreign Policy using sources in Burmese, especially the speeches of Aung San, U Nu, and the Burmese documents.

Although the 1947 constitution of Burma did not clearly mention the neutralism or Non-aligned foreign policy, it was stated that "The Union of Burma renounces war as an instrument of national policy... The Union of Burma affirms its devotion to the ideal of peace and friendly co-operation amongst nations founded on international justice and morality" (Government Printing and Stationary (Burma), 1947). While the

1947 constitution of Burma did not mention foreign policy, such as neutralism or non-aligned foreign policy, it stated that they would engage in friendly cooperation with all other countries worldwide. Although it did not mention whether these countries should have Communist or Western Capitalist leanings, this might mean that Burma would like to maintain good relations regardless of their ideological leanings. The potential of Burma's pathway toward neutralism could be seen there. During his speeches of around 1958, U Thant also stated that Burma had adopted positive neutralism since independence (U Thant, 2020).

Again, the Independence Manifesto mentioned that "As we now become an independent, we will devote the values of an independent nation. We value our freedom and will also value other nations' freedom. We will cooperate with our nations to promote and protect the world's peace" (Takkatho Sein Tin, 2010). Although Foreign Policy or Foreign Relations was not mentioned there, the termed "Lut Lat Thaw Naing Ngan Myar" or Independent Countries appear in the statement. Looking into it, it is pretty apparent that the influence of colonialism could be seen concerning the foreign relations of Burma. Burma's firm intention to maintain its status as an independent country could be seen there.

During the presidential address delivered to the First Congress of AFPFL on 20th January 1946, Aung San mentioned that "One thing that has come out of World War II is this. That the days of imperialism are numbered especially in Asia has been rejuvenated and is progressively coming into World Politics" (Aung San 1946). Looking into this, it could be said that Burmese leaders during that time already realized the changing of the world order after the Second World War. They also

realized that the changing of the World order could make Burma free from colonialism and become independent.

The leaders of Burma also saw the ideological conflict happening in the world. They might also have thought that keeping to one side of the ideological conflict might not be a good option for a newly independent country. This could be clearly seen in the speeches of Aung San. Once again, during the presidential address delivered to the First Congress of AFPFL on 16th May 1946, Aung San mentioned that “The Soviet Union and its supporters on one side and the Anglo-American combination on the other are fighting the furious battles of peace...I know, and everyone knows, that Burma cannot be immune from worldwide trends” (Aung San 1946). Aung San again, during the presidential address of the AFPFL Supreme Council Session in August 1946, stated that “As things appear to me, the Soviet Union and the Anglo-American Powers are engaged in keen competitions for the division of respective spheres of influence in while British imperialism seems to be the spearhead of the combination for domination of Southeast Asia, with U.S.A in the background consciously or unconsciously” (Aung San 1946). Three things could be found in the above-mentioned speech of Aung San. The first thing is Aung San and probably other leaders of Burma also realized that the ideological conflict was happening in the world. The second thing is that Burmese leaders also perceived that a small country like Burma could find it difficult to avoid the changing of the world order. The third thing is that Burmese leaders saw that changing the world order could be an opportunity for the freedom of Burma.

While Aung San was seen as the leader of Burmese independence, U Nu was the first Prime Minister of independent Burma. We will need to examine how U Nu saw International Relations from the Burmese perspective. In his speech in 1947, after being appointed as Prime Minister, U Nu also stated, “Some people might support imperialism and colonialism because they gained the parts of benefit from the exploitation of the colonies. But after 15 or 20 years, colonialism used to be followed by wars and destruction”(U Nu, 2016). In that speech, the concern of Burmese leaders with regard to colonialism is clearly evident. The Burmese leaders and Burma also witnessed the deterioration caused by the World War as the country became a battlefield, and for this reason, the Burmese leaders might see the World War as a result of colonialism.

U Nu, again during his speech for the drafting of the 1947 constitution of Burma on 31st July 1947, stated that “I do respect the Soviet Union as the leader of working-class people and the proletariat. But for the development of the country and the projects, I would like to remind you that we cannot rely only on the Soviet Union” (U Nu, 2016). In his speech in December 1947, he also stated that “We need alliances, and we cannot live alone and isolated. But we cannot regard all the powerful countries as alliances.... Sometimes being an alliance with a powerful country could also be a threat to us” (U Nu, 2016). From this speech, some ideological foundations of the non-aligned foreign policy and neutralism could be seen here. As there was so much influence of the leftist ideologies on Burma, politicians at that time might have been impressed by the power of the Soviet Union. U Nu possibly realized that and sought to remind them that it could be difficult for Burma to survive by adhering to only one side of a superpower. In this speech, once again, what was apparent was the Burmese

leaders' concern for the colonialism that depended so much on powerful countries might possibly lead to unexpected outcomes such as the country succumbing once again to colonialist rule.

Looking into these accounts, it is pretty evident that the Burmese leaders at the time might have had to seriously consider the question of colonialism whenever they considered foreign relations. Therefore, the ideological foundations of the Non-Aligned Foreign Policy of Burma should be paid attention to. Looking back into the speeches of Burmese leaders before the time of Burmese independence, two things could be significant indications that the concern of Burmese leaders for colonialism and standing on one side of the ideological conflict might not be suitable for a newly independent country such as Burma. These could be said to be the ideological foundations of the non-aligned foreign policy of Burma, and this could be the Burmese pathway toward neutralism and the non-aligned movement.

4.4 Conclusion

When there was potential for the Second World War, there was a famous saying in Burma that “English A Khet Burma A Chat”³ (The difficulties will be the opportunity)(Bamaw Tin Aung, 1964). It is needless to mention that Burma saw the Second War as the time for accelerating independence movements. The ideological foundations for independent Burma could be said to emerge during this period. After the Second World War, the British reentered Burma and had to confront Burmese leaders who were accelerating their efforts for the independence movements. The case

³ အင်္ဂလိပ်အခက်-ဗမာအချက်

of the White Paper shows that there existed intense tension between the Burmese and British leaders. Burmese leaders such as Aung San, even during the Second World War, aimed for the complete independence of Burma (Silverstein, 1993).

The relations between the British Empire and the Burmese leaders also showed that Burmese leaders, since that time, had the concern for colonialism that the country could not be free from colonialism and that they could succumb once again to colonialism. Nevertheless, the British did not seem to understand the intention of Burmese leaders, and Burmese leaders, on the other hand, also doubted the intention of the British Empire. At the same time, this also added more internal tensions in Burma. Eventually, Burma decided to leave the Commonwealth for the main reason that the status of dominion was the same as complete independence. The internal challenges, such as the contesting of the Communist side, also led Burma to leave the Commonwealth of the British Empire.

Most of the studies relating to the Foreign Policy of Burma and its Non-Aligned Foreign Policy mentioned that Burma had chosen the Non-Aligned Foreign Policy because it wished to avoid the ideological conflicts of the Cold War. This could be one possibility, but it would not be enough to state that. As a colonized country, it could be said that the shadow of the colonial period would also significantly influence the Burmese decision for its Foreign Policy. As a small and newly independent country, it was undeniable that standing on one side of the ideological conflict of the world could be risky for the country. Moreover, Burma would also encounter ideological conflicts within the country. It is needless to say that having challenges from within and outside of the country, Burma would face more challenges when

standing on one side of the ideological conflict of the world. But it would not be enough to say that Burma's avoidance of the ideological conflict reflected its intention to follow the path of a non-aligned foreign policy.

As discussed in the previous parts, Burmese leaders such as Aung San and U Nu also mentioned their concern for colonialism and the influence of colonialism in their speeches. These Burmese leaders also realized the changing of the world order, and they might also acknowledge that Burma could not neglect the changing world order. They also stated that the World Wars resulted from colonialism, and they might also realize that when small countries such as Burma become involved in such kinds of conflicts, it would be harmful to the country. This might possibly be the reason why the Burmese leaders warned in their speeches that it was imperative for them not to depend only on powerful nations.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) did not emerge during the time, but it could be found that Burmese leaders already realized what was happening in the world, and at the same time, Burma was also facing internal conflicts. Due to the internal and external challenges, Burmese leaders paved the way for the country toward the non-aligned policy. In this chapter, it has discussed the event after the return of the British. It also found out that Burmese leaders also realized the changing of the world order, and they also started to look for the survival of the country, which would gain independence soon. It was also mentioned that an internal conflict had been igniting at that time. The next chapter will find out about the internal conflicts in Burma and the changing of the regional order. It will also find out how these changes and factors influence Burma in choosing the non-aligned foreign policy.



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Chapter 5

Internal Problems and its impact on the non-alignment foreign policy of Burma

Internal conflict and insurgence have been significant challenges for Burma since independence. Even just before independence, Burma faced the potential problems of civil war. The most prominent would be the challenge of the communist. Another one would be the conflict with the ethnic groups. These conflicts and challenges during the time of the colonial period and independence movements later impacted and affected the foreign policy-making of independent Burma.

Although most of the studies relating to foreign policy analysis primarily focus on the international relations of a particular country, countries such as Burma, which was heavily impacted by internal conflict, have to consider internal conflicts regarding those countries' international relations.

In the previous chapter, it was already discussed the conditions of the return of the British and the challenge of the White Paper and its consequences. The previous chapter also gave a brief account of how the leaders of Burma perceived the changing of the regional order and the perception of those leaders on the international relations of the newly independent country. In this chapter, the internal conflicts of Burma and their possible impacts on the foreign policy of Burma will be discussed. This study will not focus on the insurgency problem of Burma, but this study instead focuses on the significant events of those internal conflicts, which could impact the foreign relations and foreign policy of Burma.

5.1 Communist Insurgency

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Communist leaders looked for help and cooperation from the communist parties from India and China before and after the arrival of the Japanese. Even after the withdrawal of the Japanese, these leaders accelerated independence movements. When the British initiated military rule and introduced the White Paper, Communists, together with Pha Sa Pa La, stood against the British for the independence of Burma. This was also when the internal conflict with the Communist leaders emerged, as mentioned in the previous chapter. There were two prominent communist leaders at that time, Thakhin Than Tun and Thakhin Soe.

Thakhin Soe having a stronger opinion regarding the independence movement, initiated the armed rebellion. He was concerned that Burma would not gain independence, but rather the British would only give the country dominion status. Regarding his opinion on the independence movement, he wrote a book named “the Danger of being a Dominion state”.

In that book, he wrote that being a dominion could not be regarded as an independent country, but rather this could regard as still colonized. He wrote in that book that:

“When Burma only gets the Dominion status, Burma could not have self-determination. The colonizers will only strengthen their expansion and exploitation upon Burma with the help of their followers in Burma” (Thakin Soe, 1946).

After the Burmese Communist Party conference in February 1946, Thakhin Soe and the other seven Central Committee members of the CBP separated from the

CBP(Thein Pe Myint, 2021a). Red Flag Communists emerged under the leadership of Thakhin Soe, and it was also the start of the armed rebellion of the Red Flag Communists. On 10th July 1946, the Red Flag Communists were announced as an unlawful organization by the government of the British Governor General. Huge Tinker mentioned the rebellion of the Red Flag Communists:

“The position of the Communists was obscure; one group led by the intractable Thakin Soe refused to compromise in any way with the British; there must be a People’s War against the Imperialists. The main body, led by Thakin Than Tun, hoped to bring about a Communist State by working from inside the AFPFL.... In July 1946, the Red Flags went underground and began a campaign of violence against the Government” (Tinker, 1961).

In response to the communist rebellions, the British military and Aung San administration had to initiate military operations by forming the Flush Forces, named the operation “Operation Flush”, and these operations were mainly carried out in Central Burma. Regarding this operation, Huge Tinker mentioned that

“In central Burma, it was necessary to launch a military drive (Operation Flush) of British, Indian, and Burman troops to clear the countryside of the Communist rebels, still euphemistically called dacoits, who had announced their intention of wrecking the elections by intimidation and the destruction of polling booths” (Tinker, 1961).

When the Red Flag Communists led by Thakhin Soe initiated their armed revolution, the Burmese Communist Party (CBP) led by Thakhin Than Tun remained in the Pha Sa Pa La. But the relations between CBP and Pha Sa Pa La didn't go too well. CBP thought there were some capitalists within the Pha Sa Pa La, and they accused and publicly criticized Pha Sa Pa La of siding with the British (Bamaw Tin Aung, 1964). On 10th October 1946, Pha Sa Pa La released a statement about the expulsion of the Communists from Pha Sa Pa La. Thein Pe Myint (Thakhin Thein Pe) wrote about this event in his book that

“As the Central Executive Committee of Pha Sa Pa La already decided to expel CBP from Pha Sa Pa La, the communist leaders didn't object and appeal. The communists just left the meeting of Pha Sa Pa La just like the Red Flags communists left the CBP. Thein Pe (Thein Pe Myint) shouted at Aung San that just stay at the hand of the tyrants (British). (Thein Pe Myint, 2021a)”

This event could also be found in the works of historical scholars. Dr Htin Aung, in his book, mentioned that

“The Communist Party broke into two factions, and Thakin Soe led one section away from the A.F.P.F.L. Thakin Than Tun and his faction, although remaining within the organization, were openly showing hostility to Aung San and the Socialist Party” (Maung Htin Aung, 1967).

Cady also stated that

“in October, the trouble-making Communists, including both the Than Tun and the Thein Pe factions, were completely and finally excluded from the council of the A.F.P.F.L., amid widespread recriminations”(Cady, 1960).

Therefore a few months after the initiation of the armed rebellion by the Red Flags Communists, the remaining Communists were expelled from the Pha Sa Pa La. As already mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, that internal conflict getting worse from later events. As a result of the signing of the treaties: the Nu-Attlee treaty and the Let Ya-Freeman treaty, their relations were getting intense. The Communist leaders accused Pha Sa Pa La that Pha Sa Pa La sided with the British and the independence brought by Pha Sa Pa La would not be genuine. This intensity was mainly highlighted in the aftermath of the signing of the Nu-Attlee treaty and the Let Ya-Freeman treaty.

Regarding the treaties, Huge Tinker mentioned that

“The Communists launched a big propaganda campaign against the newly signed treaty. Two features especially were attacked: the defence agreement and the commercial provisions. These concessions, the Communists declared, had safeguarded British interests in Burma” (Tinker, 1961).

Trager also stated that tension between that

“After the conclusion of the Nu-Attlee Treaty on October 17, the Burmese Communist Party gave every evidence of a change of line.

Its leaders denounced the treaty and the rightist elements in the AFPFL and called for armed revolution to secure freedom from capitalists, expansionists, and imperialists” (Trager, 1966).

Butwell also wrote about the consequences of the treaties that

“After the conclusion of the Nu-Attlee treaty, the Communists returned to a policy of open opposition to the interim government, possibly due to external encouragement by the Indian Communist Party. The Karens, one of Burma’s most important ethnic minorities, also were opposed to the agreement – but for reasons different from those of the Communists: they did not want the British to leave for fear of Burman domination” (Butwell, 1963).

Looking at the arguments from the literature mentioned above, it could be regarded that as the consequence of signing the treaty with the British, the Communists labelled the Pha Sa Pa La government⁴ as the British’s men or the followers of the British. Although Burma gained independence on 4th January 1948, Burma was on the verge of the initialization of a large-scale civil war.

Huge Tinker mentioned the insurgency problems Burma was facing after its independence

“The year 1948 opened with two enemies already in the field, the Red Flag Communists and the Mujahids, bands of Muslim

⁴ As the Pha Sa Pa La (AFPFL) won the majority of seats in the election, it became the dominant political force post-independent Burma. The term Pha Sa Pa La government in the later parts of this paper will refer to Burmese government as the Burmese government of post-independent period was mostly dominated by AFPFL or Pha Sa Pa La.

adventurers in the extreme north of Arakan, whose terrorist activities were already beyond government control, activities ostensibly devoted to the creation of a separate Muslim State.... A more vigorous threat came from the White Flag Communists... they adopted a thesis by H.N. Ghoshal that the AFPFL had become the tools of the British imperialists, thereby making it necessary to overthrow the AFPFL and set up a genuine People's Government" (Tinker, 1961).

Some historians argued that the reason Communists chose to initiate the armed revolution was following the Cominform, which was held in Poland in September 1947. One of those historians was Trager. Trager mentioned that the Communist movements in the world also influenced Burmese Communists. Trager stated that

"Their actions followed closely on the organizational meeting of the Cominform in Poland in September 1947, and the presentation there of the new left, or militant, line by Andrei Zhdanov.... At this time, the organized Communist movement in Burma sought the support of the centre of international Communism. Before this period, there was no public record of direct contacts between the Burmese Communists and Moscow leadership" (Trager, 1966).

In this regard, it will need to consider the relations between the Burmese Communist Party and other communist organizations. The previous chapter mentioned that Burmese communists met with the Indian Communists during Wartime. Regarding

the relations between Burmese Communists and Communists from abroad, Trager wrote that

“By 1947, the CBP was able to send delegates to external party conferences and to receive guidance and direction from abroad..... the Communists, following the 1947 Cominform ‘left strategy’, soon set out to rule or ruin both the AFPFL and Burmese Government”
(Trager, 1966).

While the left strategy from the Cominform influenced the Burmese Communists, Burmese leaders also feared that there would be Soviet influence on the ongoing armed rebellion of the Red Flag Communists and the Burmese Communist Party. U Nu also mentioned that

“The command to rebel which Zhdanov gave was not intended for the interests of Burma.... Stalin and the Soviets thought that Burma and India, after their independence, would join the bloc of the British and the United States. With this assumption, they first intended to make Communist governments in India and Burma. Another one was to take down the Congress government of India and the Pha Sa Pa La government of Burma, and the Soviets assumed that these governments were the followers of the Western bloc”(U Nu, 2013).

The words of U Nu showed his concern that the Soviet Union would support the Burmese Communists, which would worsen the current insurgency. In the previous chapter, U Nu’s speech at the Burmese parliament also mentioned that he did not

intend to join the Soviet bloc despite being willing to keep good relations with the Soviet Union.

U Nu, in his speech on 13th June 1948, mentioned that

“The idea of Civil War was brought by Goshal after his return from India. He wrote a 26-page paper with a typewriter. In that paper, he labelled Pha Sa Pa La as opportunists, traitors and sycophants of the British and the United States” (U Nu, 2016).

Johnstone, in his book about Burma's foreign policy, also stated that

“The policy of the Kremlin in 1948 served to support the view. Moscow’s instructions to Communists in Southeast Asia were to resort to violence against sham independence.... Moscow radio poured out diatribes against Thakin Nu, Nehru, and Sukarno as the ‘running dogs of the capitalist-imperialist warmongers and Burma was accused of remaining under the yoke of British imperialism” (Johnstone, 1963).

The connection of the Burmese Communists with the other communist organizations could be seen during the Calcutta Conference. From 20th February to 6th March, a communist conference was held in Calcutta. Thakin Than Tun, the chairman of the Burmese Communist Party and other Politburo members of the CBP attended that conference (YeBaw BaKhet, 2020). From 13th to 18th March 1948, a conference was held in Pyinmana, a town in central Burma, by the Burmese Communist Party and communists from the other counters also attended (YeBaw BaKhet, 2020). These

communists were amazed by the number of people who attended that conference, and then they encouraged the CBP leaders to initiate the revolution. On 29th March 1948, the Burmese Communist Party initiated the armed revolution.

It shows that the Burmese communists had connections with the communists from other countries, or it could be regarded that the communists abroad influenced the Burmese communists. Chinese communist party (CCP), for example, had relations with the CBP even before the time of the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. CBP even sent members to the PRC to take training there (YeBaw BaKhet, 2020).

This was not the only concern that U Nu and the Pha Sa Pa La government faced at that time. On 25th May 1948, U Nu announced the 15-point leftist unity policy during the people's conference. This also alerted Western countries that Burma would become a communist country. Huge Tinker stated how Burma was being alerted by the Western countries with the concern of inclining toward Communism that

“On 25 May, U Nu presented his own ‘Leftist Unity’ programme, echoing Aung San’s fourteen-point resolution of twelve months before... The final point was to form a League for the propagation of Marxist doctrine, composed of Socialists, Communists, Pyithu Yebaws (PVO) and others who lean towards Marxism... This announcement was headlined in the British and American Press as the signal for U Nu’s accession to Communism” (Tinker, 1961).

U Nu, in his biography, also stated that

“the 15-point leftist unity, especially the last point, the British newspaper and the Western people interested in that Leftist Unity.... one point stated the formation of an organization which intended to spread the Marxist ideology (Marxist League) and the British and American newspaper pointed out that fact and stated that Burma became a Communist country”(U Nu, 2013).

This showing that while Burma was facing the internal challenge of the Communist insurgency, the Western countries and the United States having the concern that Burma would become a Communist country. Then why the Pha Sa Pa La government did not join the Western bloc to tackle the communist insurgency of the country? Because the communist was not the only insurgency, the Pha Sa Pa La government faced. Another strong rebellion was led by the ethnic Karen people. This other internal problem will be the reason why Burma could not stand in the Western bloc either.



5.2 Karen conflict

Unlike the communists, the ethnic Karen people had good relations with the British. During the colonial period, these Karen people could join the military and the civil services. When Burma gained independence, the insurgency of the Karen people was another internal conflict. The conflict could be said to be intensified during the Japanese invasion of Burma. When BIA and the Japanese initiated the military operation in Burma, the conflicts between Karen and Burmese people happened.

Huge Tinker stated the conflict during the BIA period that

“in 1942, the BIA regarded all Karens as British collaborators, the enemy. In the mountains of Salween District, the Karens, led by Hugh Sengrim of the Burma Rifles, kept resistance alive after the British retreat. The BIA arrived at Papun, the district headquarters, and began to pacify the surrounding country. One party was ambushed, whereupon, on 4 April, Bo Tun Hla, the BIA leader, shot seventeen law-abiding Karen elders out of hand. In the Delta, there was an even more horrible massacre” (Tinker, 1961).

Brig. Gen. Kyaw Zaw also wrote in his autobiography on the Karen-BIA conflict that

“The incident took place in the Myaung Mya Township of Irrawaddy. It was around the middle of 1945 when the British and Indian troops withdrawing because of the Japanese offensive. To get an advantage for their withdrawal, the British spread propaganda that they would return within three months and therefore, they encouraged the local Karen people to resist the Japanese, and they also gave them some guns and ammunition. It was the initiation of the Karen People's revolt against the Japanese” (Brig.Gen.Kyaw Zaw, 2016).

On 25 August 1946, Karen leaders went to London to discuss with the British for the Karen State. Karen leaders intended to live within the British Commonwealth. On February 1947, Karen National Union (KNU) was set up with the leadership of Saw Ba U Gyi, a lawyer who graduated from Cambridge. Subsequently, Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO) was founded.

Regarding how the experience of the Karen-BIA conflict influenced later events, Huge Tinker also stated that

“The old BIA-Karen conflict was played upon, and in many areas, the Government was powerless to intervene.... Late in 1948, Karen para-military formations were quietly being raised. Their name was Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO)” (Tinker, 1961).

On 20th January 1949, the armed rebellion of the KNU was initiated. Pha Sa Pa La government might also have been concerned about the Western country's involvement in that rebellion. Most of the Burmese leaders of that time might believe that the British and Western countries secretly supported the Karen rebellion. Regarding the Karen rebellion after the independence of Burma, Brig. Gen. Kyaw Zaw also stated that

“My thought at that time was that the British were willing to support the Karen people with whom they had good relations. Therefore I thought the Karen rebellion was with the support of the British, and I fought against the Karen rebellion” (Brig.Gen.Kyaw Zaw, 2016).

Dr Khin Let Ya, daughter of Bo Let Ya, in her book about Bo Let Ya's biography, stated that:

“The British had introduced the idea of the racial division between the Karens and Burmese by supporting the Karen Christian minority. Many Burmese nationalists were suspicious and resented

the close relationship between the foreign missionaries and the Karens. Their resentment grew over the years, and conflicts slowly emerged in the open”(Dr. Khin Let Ya, 2019).

U Kyaw Nyein wrote forward in Thein Pe Myint’s book “Kyaw Nyein”, and he wrote that:

“Some of the cabinet members of the British government wanted Burma to stay within the Commonwealth. They were angry with Pha Sa Pa La for leaving the Commonwealth. If possible, they would like to take down the Pha Sa Pa La government and wanted Kachin and Karen to become government.... On the other hand, the British encouraged the Karen to rebel, and as a result, armed forces and police joined Saw Ba U Gyi’s KNDO”(Thein Pe Myint, 2021b).

Thein Pe Myint, in his book “Experiences of the Revolution Time” also wrote that “Saw Ba U Gyi together with U Saw, and Thakin Ba Sein boycotted the election. The English spies also contacted them (KNDO)”(Thein Pe Myint, 2021a). Looking into these writing from the people who had the experience of that period, it could be argued that the Burmese leaders of that time had concern for the Western countries regarding internal issues.

The armed rebellion groups in Burma, such as KNDO and the communists, might also hope for support from the countries and organizations with which they had good relations. For example, Burmese communists might hope for support from the Communist countries such as the Soviet Union and Karen; on the other hand, they

might also hope for support from Western countries. Hugu Tinker mentioned how Karen and Communists hoped the aid from abroad that

“The heart of Karen land across the Salween was still theirs, and morale remained high. Hopes were still fixed on the mirage of foreign aid, and their leaders were forever planning the advance they would make as soon as they had the tanks and planes which would assuredly come – from somewhere. The Communists also put their faith in foreign aid to bring them victory” (Tinker, 1961).

Karen had good relations with Western countries such as the United States. Kenton Clymer also wrote that

“In addition to charges that the United States was helping the KMT, the Burmese sometimes asserted that the Americans were also supporting the rebellions of the ethnic minorities, particularly the Karens.... Perhaps there was some assistance to the Karens and other non-communist groups in Burma. Karen delegations regularly called at the American embassy in Bangkok to request support” (Clymer, 2015).

The Karen insurgency was different from that of the communist. Although both groups rebelled against the Pha Sa Pa La government, the Pha Sa Pa La government seemed to have different concerns for these two groups; for the communists, the Pha Sa Pa La government might concern about the support from the communist countries to the Burmese communists and for the Karen Pha Sa Pa La government might also concern there would be support from Western countries to the Karen insurgencies.

As already stated earlier, the Karen people had good relations with the British and the United States, which could be why the Pha Sa Pa La government was reluctant to stand on one side of the Cold War. Another insurgency problem obviously showing that of Burma's concern for the Western country.

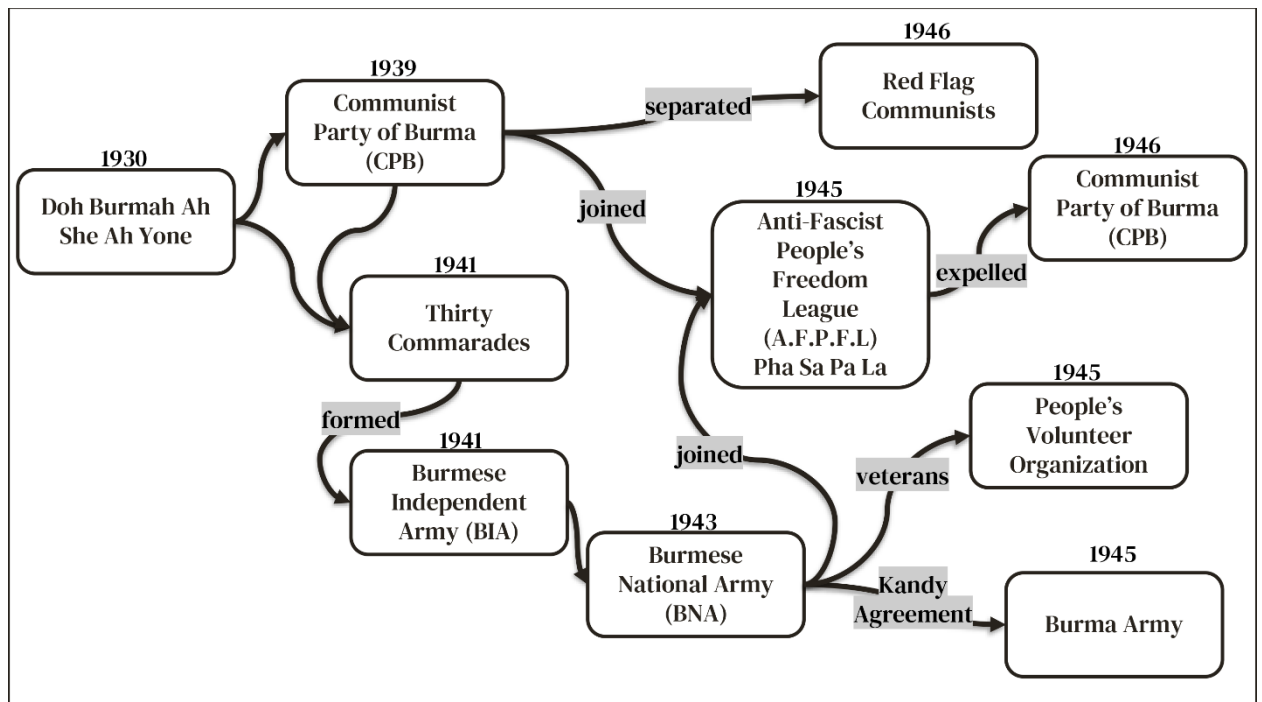


Figure 3 Timeline map depicting the internal conflict initiation in Burma

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5.3 Kuomintang Problem

Kuomintang (KMT) aggression was another conflict that happened in Burma. After the defeat by the Communist Party, Chinese Kuomintang fled to Burma. They were believed to be supported by the CIA of the United States. When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the People's Liberation Army troops entered the Yunan Province, a province close to the Burmese border. As a result, members of the

Kuomintang Eighth Army led by General Li Mi entered Burma. On January 1950, the KMT troops invaded the Kengtung (Menggen) Province of Burma.

Huge Tinker stated how the KMT forces entered Burma territory that

“After the Chiang Kai-shek regime collapse in Yunnan towards the end of 1949, several Nationalist troops shuffled over into the Wa States and Kengtung... These troops were concentrated on the road leading to Siam, with headquarters at Tachilek” (Tinker, 1961).

Around 1951, the KMT troops got in contact with Taiwan. When the KMT troops in Burma got more potent, they also got weapons and ammunition support from the United States. In May 1951, the KMT troops in Burma initiated an offensive against mainland China, but it was unsuccessful. At the end of 1951, the number of troops was over 6,000. Since February 1952, they have had an airfield in the Mong Hsat District of the Shan State. Then they decided to do military operations in Burma. They also joined forces with the Karen.

Butwell also wrote about how Karen and the Kuomintang joined forces that

“These Kuomintang elements became even more active in 1952, moving further southward and westward as they crossed the important Salween River; they also joined forces with the rebellious Karen National Defense Organization” (Butwell, 1963).

This also added concern for the Pha Sa Pa La government regarding the involvement of the Western countries in the armed conflicts in Burma. Erin Murphy wrote about the relations of KMT in Burma with the US:

“The US support of the KMT would have long-term effects on US-Myanmar relations for decades. Once the Burmese discovered US government involvement, they complained to US embassies all over Asia. This would begin to feed their smouldering paranoia about foreign interference within their borders and fears of invasion by powerful countries”(Murphy, 2022).

Kenton Clymer also emphasized the KMT and US relations:

“Just after the outbreak of the Korean War on 25 June 1950, Burma claimed that KMT intransigence was ‘due to American backing’..... The extent of American involvement with the KMT at this point is not entirely clear. Six months later, there would be no question, but as the Burmese suspected, some American intelligence agents may already have been working with the KMTs.... the US Army Liaison Group in Hong Kong had issued letters to various American military attaches introducing them to Li Mi. Later, it would become known that Americans in Hong Kong constituted an important part of the CIA’s efforts to support the KMT.... Unbeknownst to American diplomats in Burma, by the end of 1950, the United States government was certainly involved with the KMT” (Clymer, 2015).

As the Kuomintang invasion became a significant problem in Burma, the Burmese military also had to do military operations against the KMT troops. In April 1953, Burma had to complain to the United Nations over the Kuomintang’s invasion of

Burma. The Burmese government's cessation of American aid also happened in 1953 (Butwell, 1963).

The Kuomintang problem is another problem faced by Burma after independence. This problem of KMT was quite different from that of the Communists and Karen as they were forces from abroad. As the KMT also had good relations with the United States, this would add more concern to the Burmese leader that the conflicts of the Cold War could affect Burma.

5.4 Conclusion

The different internal conflicts show the dilemmas of the Pha Sa Pa La government regarding foreign relations and foreign policy. As different conflicts had different kinds of relations or influence from the superpower countries, this might be the concern of the Burmese government that the involvement of the superpower country might worsen the conflict. The figure below shows that different internal problems in Burma had different influences from power blocs.

At the same time as the communist movement and conflicts were happening in the region. This would be another concern for the Pha Sa Pa La government that such conflict could spread and intensify the current internal problems. The next chapter will find out what was happening in the region during that time as a reflection of the communist movements and the conflict relating to the Cold War that happened in region during that time. Although most of these events did not directly connect with the conflicts in Burma, it will also need to pay attention to study what was happening in the region during that period.

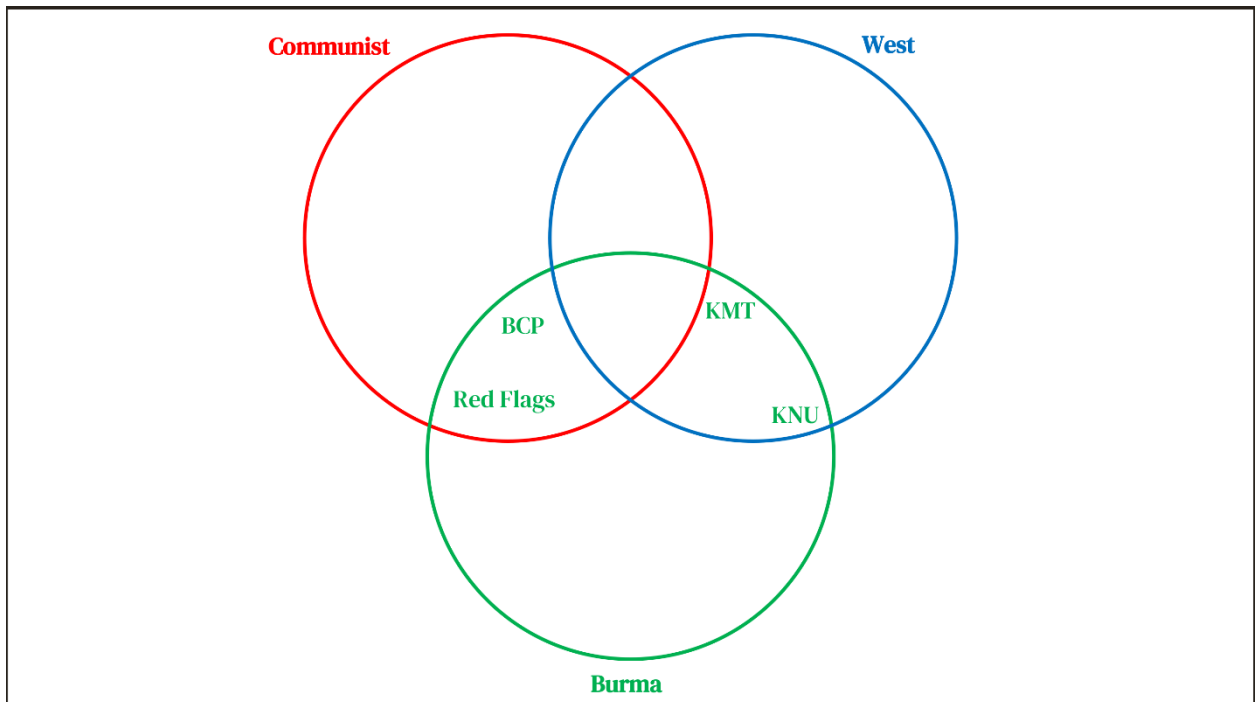


Figure 4 Burma's internal problem and external influences



Chapter 6

Changes in the region and its impact on the emergence of the non-aligned foreign policy of Burma

The year after Second World War brought so many changes and impacted the region. The independence movements, the wave of communism, and the Cold War impacted the region. It also marked the changing of the world order. These events might directly or indirectly impact Burma, and they could impact the foreign policy decision-making of Burma. As already discussed in the previous chapters, Burma also had internal conflicts at that time. Burmese leaders might have concern that these internal conflicts might get intense with the things happening in the region. Some conflicts discussed in this part were not directly connected to Burma's internal conflicts but were discussed as a reflection of the conflicts happening in the region.

The previous chapter also mentioned that the Communist movements abroad also influenced the communist movement in Burma. The internal conflicts alone could not be the reason that Burma had to choose the non-alignment foreign policy. As the Cold War was initiated, communist movements were also inevitable in Southeast Asia and Asia. In this part of the study, it will discuss the events and conflicts happening in the region during that time and their possible impact on the foreign policy of Burma. The connection and influence of the superpower countries to the conflicts in the region will find out by using the literature from the scholars of Southeast Asian history.

6.1 End of the Second World War and the Communist Movements

In the year of around 1940s, nationalist and anti-colonial movements emerged in the region. It was also the same time that the Communist movements were initiating. The Soviet Union and other communist movements inspired these Southeast Asia Communist movements. Pluvier wrote about Southeast Asia's revolutionary movements that

“Among South-East Asia’s social revolutionary movements, the communist-oriented groups were the most prominent and active...Their significance was emphasized even more by the circumstances that communism was a worldwide movement, inspired by the example and the achievements of the Soviet Union and, since the late 1940s, the Chinese revolution...Yet the international character of communism affected the position of the South-East Asian communist parties”(Pluvier, 1974).

Like Burma, communists played an essential role in the resistance movements against the colonial powers. But the end of the Second World War brought the changing tide of those movements. The communists accelerated their movements, and internal conflicts happened in some countries like Burma. This intensity could be regarded to be accelerated after the Calcutta conference.

Thakin Than Tun's political report to CBP stated, "In the Eastern countries, resistance against the colonialist has been initiated. The colonialists also used forces to annihilate these resistance movements. The case of Indonesia is a good example" (Thein Pe Myint, 2021a).

Thein Pe Myint also stated that “British and the United States recognized our independence. But we valued more from the recognition of Indonesia and Vietnam who are currently struggling for their independence” (Thein Pe Myint, 2021a). The remarks of the Burmese communists showed that although there was no evidence that the communist movements and independence movements in the region had connection with the Burmese communist insurgency, they had somehow influenced the Burmese communists.

6.2 Calcutta Conference and its consequences

One of the events that happened after the Second World War, which influenced the communist movements in the region, was the Calcutta Conference. That conference also impacted the communist movements in the region. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the communist insurgency in Burma got more intense after the Calcutta Conference.

Pluvier wrote that

“In the years immediately after the Second World War, this representation of communism as a huge conspiracy closely supervised by the Soviet Union was proved correct, as far as South-East Asia was concerned, by the simultaneous occurrence of communist-led rebellions in Burma and Malaya, the Madium affair in Indonesia and the intensification of the Hukbalahap guerrilla activities in the Philippines. In this respect, special attention has been paid to the South-East Asian Youth Conference, held in

Calcutta in February 1948... it was generally believed to have been the occasion where Moscow's command to create confusion was passed on to the local communist parties" (Pluvier, 1974).

Ang Cheng Guan also wrote about the Calcutta Conference that

"Against this backdrop, the Calcutta Conference of Youth and Students of Southeast Asia Fighting for Freedom and Independence convened from 19 to 26 February 1948. Because this conference placed much emphasis on the use of violence, contemporary analysts linked the conference to the communist-led insurgencies that erupted in Burma, Malaya, and Indonesia soon after"(Guan, 2012).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the communist insurgency in Burma got intense after the Calcutta conference. Not only in Burma but also the countries in the region, the communist movements were believed to intensify after that conference. In Burma, the Burmese Communist Party initiated the armed revolution after the Calcutta conference. This might also be the reason that communist movements and revolutions in Asia, especially in Southeast Asia, might have an influence on one another. Two of those communist movements will be highlighted in this part.

6.3 Initiation of the First Indo-China War

The first Indo-China War was one of the most significant conflicts that broke out in Southeast Asia after the Second World War. It was the armed rebellion of the Viet

Minh against the French. When Viet Minh was founded in 1941, it was also the same year that the Burmese Independent Army (BIA) was founded. Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the Viet Minh, was already planning for armed resistance to the independence movement.

Chi-shad Liang wrote that”

“They (Burma’s leaders) even supported the Viet-Minh in 1946-1948 in their national liberation struggle against the French, though they were aware that Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh were Communist in character and received help from the Chinese Communists” (Liang, 1990).

D.R. SarDesai wrote that

“A new organization, the Viet Minh, was initiated to unite all political groups to pursue the goal. A military force was organized under the leadership of Vo Nguyen Giap. By September 1944, the Viet Minh had an army of five thousand men and the three mountainous provinces... Ho Chi Minh could see that the day of his country’s independence was not too distant..... When Japan surrendered to the Allies on August 14, 1945, the Viet Minh emerged from the sidelines to the centre of politics”(SarDesai, 2016).

Ang Cheng Guan wrote that

“On 2 September 1945.... Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).... Ho’s government was unable to control South Vietnam as the French were able to regain power there with the support of the British.... The weakness of Ho’s provisional government and the narrow-mindedness of the French – who had no intention at all of relinquishing control over Indochina – resulted in a series of abortive negotiations between March and September 1946, eventually culminating in the First Indochina War, or what the Vietnamese call the ‘War of Resistance against the French’, which began on 19 December 1946” (Guan, 2012).

D.R. SarDesai mentioned that

“In March 1949, France announced the birth of the Republic of Vietnam as an associated state within the French union, along with the Laos and Cambodia.... The new state was recognized by Great Britain and the United States. The Soviet Union and China reacted by recognizing the DRV, bringing the Cold War to Indochina” (SarDesai, 2016).

The literature mentioned above shows the involvement of the superpower countries in the conflict of the first Indo-China War. The first Indo-China War was one of the intense conflicts of the Cold War that happened in the region. With the involvement of the superpower countries in that conflict, that war brought large-scale devastation to the region. When the first Indo-China war broke out, it was also the time that the Red flag communists also initiated the armed revolution. Although Burmese leaders

supported the independence movements in the region, the first Indo-China War might have alarmed the Burmese leaders that the involvement of the Superpower countries could worsen the conflict.

This might also make Burmese leaders avoid standing on one side of the bloc of the Cold War. U Nu, in his autobiography, mentioned that he and Ho Chi Minh had good relations during his visit (U Nu, 2013). In one of his speeches in 1958, U Nu also mentioned the war in Vietnam (U Nu, 2016). U Nu mentioned that “it is not easy to stand as an independent country and to protect the sovereignty. The cases of Korea and Vietnam were the good lessons” (U Nu, 2016). This showing that even though Burmese leaders had good relations with the Vietnamese leaders, the events that happened in the first Indo-China War, especially the involvement of the superpower countries, might alert the Burmese leaders during that time.

6.3 Malaya Emergency

Malaya Emergency was another conflict in the region at the end of the Second World War. In the year 1948, Burma gained independence, and in the same year, the Malaya Emergency occurred. Malaya, during that time, was still under British rule, and the British authorities had to handle that issue.

D.R. SarDesai stated that

“In June 1948, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), consisting overwhelmingly of the ethnic Chinese and under the leadership of Chen Ping, began an insurgency... The MCP may have been

inspired to launch the revolt by the Communists in mainland China” (SarDesai, 2016).

This showing that the communist movements in the region had an impact on other communist movements in the region. The year 1948 was also the same year that the Burmese Communist Party went underground and initiated the armed revolution. Although there was no such evidence of the relations between the Burmese Communist Party and the Malayan Communist Party, they both seemed to be inspired by the communist movements in mainland China.

Cheah Boon Kheng wrote that

“From 1951 onwards, however, the situation changed, and the Malaysia Communist Party (MCP)’s armed revolt began to take on a true Cold War dimension. Not only did it re-establish contact with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), it also got in touch with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), both of which started to influence it and involve it within the global Cold War conflict” (Kheng, 2012).

This also states that the communist movements in the region were supported by the Communist countries. Even though Burmese leaders did not mention the Malayan Emergency, this conflict might also alert that the communist movements have a connection with each other, i.e., even though there was no arm support, those movements might inspire each other. Although both the Burmese communist leaders and the Pha Sa Pa La government leaders did not mention the communist movement

in Malaya so much, this was also an example that the communist movements were happening in the region during that time.

6.4 The formation of the People's Republic of China

On 1st October 1949, after the victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the People's Republic of China was founded. Although Burma was the first non-communist country to recognize the PRC, it could not be said that Burmese leaders did not have a concern regarding the formation of the PRC.

One of the examples of such concern could be found in Butwell's book. In his book, Butwell mentioned that

“U Nu, in a December 1948 radio speech, expressed concern over the influx of refugees from China, describing them as a threat to peace in his country. Nu dispatched his Foreign Minister, Dr E Maung, to Britain and the United States to discuss the Chinese Communists' rise to power and the problems it posed for Burma's government” (Butwell, 1963).

As already stated in the previous chapter, Burma had the Communist insurgency problem even before the time of Independence. When PRC was founded, the Burmese Communist leaders looked for the support of the CCP. Chi-shad Liang also stated that

“After the Chinese Communist victory in 1949, the dominant party, the BCP, led by Thakin Than Tun, came to look increasingly to Peking instead of to the Communist Party of India for ideological

guidance and support. Two of the top leaders of the CBP, Ko Aung Gyi and Bo Than Swe, were sent to China to establish regular channels of contact with Peking” (Liang, 1990).

This might be why Burmese leaders were concerned that Burmese communists got support from the Chinese communists. Some of the Chinese communists, on the other hand, also labelled U Nu and Pha Sa Pa La as capitalists and imperialists. This might also raise Burmese leaders’ concerns with the Chinese Communists.

Chi-shad Liang also wrote about how Chinese communists labelled Burmese leaders:

“Liu Shao-chi, a leading figure in Communist China, signalled the Chinese design at the Australasian Trade Union Conference in Peking in November 1949. At the same conference, Liu also condemned U Nu, along with Sukarno of Indonesia and Nehru of India, as ‘stooges of the imperialists” (Liang, 1990).

The communist insurgency might not be the only problem with which the Burmese leaders were concerned. The Kuomintang was another problem that probably the Burmese leaders worried about at that time. As the Chinese communists occupied mainland China, they stationed communist forces along the Burmese border.

Johnstone also mentioned that

“On May 28, 1949, another editorial, “Border Confusion” in the Nation newspaper stated in part... The head of the Kachin State, Sima Duwa Sinwa Nawung, said that 10,000 Chinese Communists

are within thirty miles of the Burma border waiting for a chance to cross it” (Johnstone, 1963).

At the same time, the nationalist Kuomintang also fled into the territory of Burma. At that time, Burma leaders might be concerned that there would be a conflict between the Chinese communists and the Kuomintang forces in Burma’s territory. On October 1950, during the Korean War, Chinese communists crossed the Yalu river and got involved in the Korean War. Burmese leaders at that time might have been concerned that the Chinese communist might get involved in the conflicts in Burma.

The rise of the PRC could alarm the Burmese leaders for the communist movements. As the Burmese leaders worried the CBP had relations with CCP. Moreover, the emergence of such a powerful country in the neighbourhood might also be alerted the Burmese leaders. They had to consider how to deal with a country with the largest population in the world. This could make Burma avoid joining one bloc of the cold war, and this factor might influence foreign relations with Burma.



6.5 Burma’s rejection of joining the SEATO

As a result of the Cold War, organizations also emerged in the Southeast Asia region. Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was one of those organizations. That organization was primarily intended for the collective defence in Southeast Asia and was led by the United States. In September 1954, the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, or Manila Pact, was signed in Manila. Following the signing of the treaty, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was founded on 19th February 1955.

The creation of the organization also raised the concern of the Chinese leaders as such kind of organization might challenge communist China in the region. Butwell wrote about China's concern:

“The Southeast Asian defence alliance (SEATO), sponsored by the United States, he said, “increases the chances of a third world war because it heightens the tensions in Asia, intensifies China’s fear of America encirclement and diminishes the chances of peaceful cooperation. Nu clearly opposed SEATO from the start” (Butwell, 1963).

Although Thailand and the Philippines were involved in the organization, Burma and Indonesia refused to join the organization. Even before independence, Burma refused to join the British Commonwealth, and again, after the SEATO formation, Burma refused to join. Burma was also concerned that joining such organizations might put Burma into a world war at any time.

Chi-shad Liang wrote that

“Burmese Prime Minister U Nu asserted: ‘We will not be a party to the proposed SEATO. We must not be caught in the clash of swords. On September 13, 1954, five days after the formation of SEATO, he reaffirmed: ‘In foreign relations, we refuse to align ourselves with any power bloc, and at the same time we are friendly with both’” (Liang, 1990).

Apart from the Burmese leaders' concern for the world war, China would be another reason why Burma rejected to join such a regional organization. Chi-shad Liang also wrote that

“SEATO had been bitterly denounced by China...Hence Burma could not take the risk of offending Peking by joining SEATO. In addition, Burma’s preoccupation with stabilizing and improving its own internal conditions at that time did not permit it to join SEATO” (Liang, 1990).

There might be two possible why Burma did not want to join SEATO. The first reason could be that joining SEATO could be regarded as joining the Western bloc in the opinion of the Burmese leaders. As Burmese leaders always worried joining one bloc could bring Burma into the war anytime. Another reason could be because of the concern of China. As some of the Chinese communists labelled U Nu as imperialists, they might also have the concern that Burma would join the organization, which they regarded as a challenge for them.

6.6 Burma joined the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)

Although Burma rejected to join SEATO, Burma was involved in a few regional cooperations, such as the Bandung conference and Colombo Plan. In 1952, Burma expanded its membership in the United Nations by joining specialized agencies of the United Nations (Johnstone, 1963). In the same year, Burma started to join the meetings for the Colombo Plan as a full member, whilst Burma joined the Colombo Plan meetings as an observer in the years 1950 and 1951 (Liang, 1990).

An Afro-Asian conference was held in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955. The main objective of the conference was to oppose colonialism and promote cooperation among African and Asian countries (Natasa Miskovic, 2014). It was believed that the 1955 Bandung Conference led to the establishment 1961 of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (Liang, 1990). The Bandung principles could be issued from that conference, which was the origination of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM).

Burma was one of the leading countries which organized the Bandung conference. U Nu was one of the prominent figures in planning that conference (Johnstone, 1963). Regarding the Bandung conference, Burmese leaders might believe it was a platform free from any bloc of the Superpower countries. U Nu, in his autobiography, stated that he could meet the leaders of Asia and Africa and had the opportunity to create good relations with them (U Nu, 2013). It could say that Burma decided to join the Bandung conference as they would like to have good relations with newly emerged nations in Asia and Africa.

One of the reasons Burma decided to join such organizations was the conflicts in the region. As the Korean War happening in the year 1950 and U Nu during that time made a speech at the parliament on 5th September 1950; in that speech, he said:

“in the circumstances, it is to join an organization which can come to our aid in time of need. In the present world set-up, there are two blocs: the Anglo-American bloc and the Soviet bloc. Our policy of non-partisanship precludes us from joining any of these two power blocs. The right course and the only course for us to take is to join the United Nations Organization”(Thakin Nu, 1951).

The speech of U Nu showed the intention to avoid joining any organization which have the involvement of the United States or the Soviet Union. On the other hand, this also showed Burma leaders' view on the United Nations that such kind of organization could be free from the influence of any blocs of the Cold War. They might have the same view regarding the Bandung conference and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Another reason could be Burma's geographical situation that Burma could not stay away from regional cooperation because of its geographical situation. In the same speech, U Nu also mentioned:

“Take a glance at our geographical position – Thailand in the East, China in the North, India in the West, and stretching southward, Malaya, Singapore and so on. We are hemmed in like a tender gourd among the cactus. We cannot move an inch” (Thakin Nu, 1951).

Such reasons might influence Burmese leaders in such kinds of cooperation, such as the United Nations and the Bandung Conference.

6.7 Conclusion

The period after the Second World War and the start of the Cold War was a period of conflict in Southeast Asia. Some of the events discussed above did not have a direct connection with Burma. Still, they were discussed as a reflection that conflicts were also happening in the region, and the involvement of the superpower countries could

be seen according to the literature mentioned previously. Both large-scale and small-scale conflicts were happening in the region at that time. Burmese leaders of that time might also realize that such conflicts were happening in the region at that time, and they might also have been concerned about the involvement of the superpower countries.

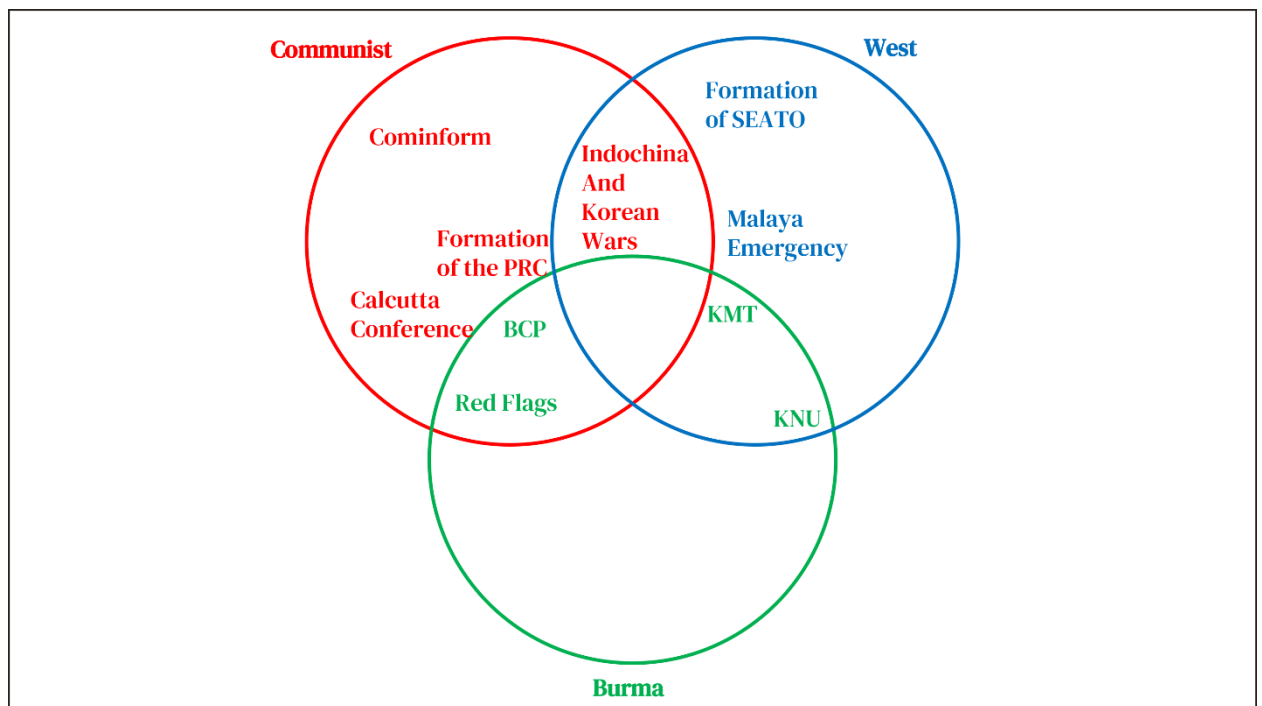


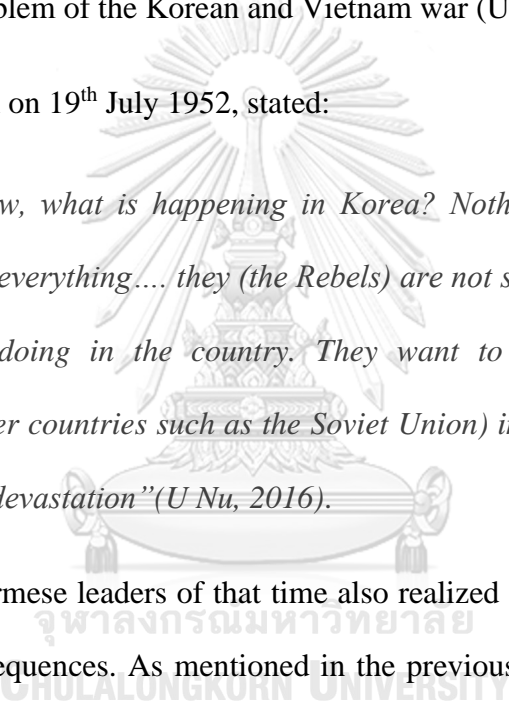
Figure 5 Conflicts and events happening in the region and Burma's internal challenge

In the previous chapter, it was discussed that the internal conflicts of Burma had influence or relations with the superpower countries. This chapter discussed the conflicts in the regions, and the literature mentioned previously also argued the superpower countries had influenced these conflicts. Even though most of the conflicts and events that happened in the region (except the Calcutta Conference) had

a direct connection or relations with the internal conflicts of Burma, these conflicts will also need to be paid attention to because of the Cold War in the region.

This is another example of why Burma's leaders decided not to join any bloc of the Cold War and followed the non-alignment foreign policy. Burmese leaders' realization of the events happening in the region could be seen in the speeches of U Nu. During his speech at one of the people's conferences, Prime Minister U Nu pointed out the problem of the Korean and Vietnam war (U Nu, 2016).

U Nu, in his speech on 19th July 1952, stated:



“Right now, what is happening in Korea? Nothing left. The war destroyed everything.... they (the Rebels) are not satisfied with what they are doing in the country. They want to invite them (the Superpower countries such as the Soviet Union) into our country to bring the devastation” (U Nu, 2016).

This shows the Burmese leaders of that time also realized what was happening in the world and its consequences. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Burmese leaders during that time were concerned with foreign countries' involvement in their internal affairs. The speech of U Nu mentioned above also showed such concern. The conflicts in the region might also raise the concern of the Burmese leaders. In the last chapter, all the discussions above will be summarized and discussed as a final discussion on the research questions.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In the previous chapters, three main factors were discussed in finding out the emergence of the non-aligned foreign policy of Burma. The first factor discussed was the experience of the colonialism of Burma. This experience could be seen in the decision of Burma to leave the Commonwealth.

When the Bandung conference was held in 1955, Burma was one of the leading countries of that non-alignment movement (NAM). According to U Thant, this was the first time Burma practised its non-aligned foreign policy internationally (U Thant, 2020). Nevertheless, Burmese leaders such as Aung San and U Nu had the intention of choosing the non-alignment policy as their primary choice of policy. One of the examples would be Burma's decision to leave the British Commonwealth. Although it could be roughly discussed that Burma's decision was because Burma decided to become a Republic, and when staying within Commonwealth, Burma had to accept the British Crown as head of state. But this argument would not be sufficient enough.

As Burma lived under a British colony, these colonial experiences might also have had an impact on that. While Burma being under the British, had to declare War on the enemy of the British without the consent of the Burmese people and Burma was put into the World War. When Burma was invaded again by the Japanese, Burma had to declare war on the Allies. This experience might make Burmese leaders realize that staying within Commonwealth might put the country into the War anytime if a war breaks out.

According to Dr Htin Aung:

“Two bitter memories of 1886 always remain in the Burmese mind, namely the loss of their sovereignty and their unintentional involvement in the Anglo-French rivalry of the nineteenth century. Therefore in 1947, it was feared that remaining within the British Commonwealth would sooner or later involve them in some rivalry or conflict.(Maung Htin Aung, 1965)”

This argument of Dr Htin Aung vividly highlights the decision of Burmese leaders to leave the Commonwealth. It could be roughly described that Burma’s decision to leave the Commonwealth was due to the experience of colonialism. On the other hand, it could also say that decision was proof that Burma had already decided to avoid aligning with any superpower bloc.

The internal conflict was another dilemma that put Burma to choose the non-aligned foreign policy. Burma leaders during that time might think that choosing one side of the bloc could turn the internal problem into a large-scale conflict. For this reason, the internal factor was discussed in this paper as a reason for the emergence of the non-aligned foreign policy of Burma.

Conflicts between the Pha Sa Pa La government and the communists and ethnic people happened simultaneously. Communists had good relations with communist countries such as the People’s Republic of China, and the ethnic Karen people had good relations with the British and the United States. This dilemma could make Burma avoid standing on one side of the bloc. In the study, it was also discussed that Burmese leaders such as U Nu also described their fear of the involvement of foreign countries. U Nu seems to be believed that communist countries such as the Soviet

Union encouraged the Burmese communists and CBP to initiate the armed rebellion. It could be seen in U Nu's biography and his speeches.

Other conflicts, such as the Kuomintang invasion, also put Burma to avoid standing on one side of the bloc. As the United States supported the Kuomintang, Burma even had to cease the aids from the United States. At the same time, communist movements such as the Calcutta conference and Cominform were happening worldwide, and these movements more or less had an impact on the communist movements of Burma.

Some literature argued that Burma's practice of non-aligned foreign policy could be obviously seen around the time of the 1950s. U Nu, in his speech delivered in Parliament on 5th September 1950, mentioned that

“The principle on which we acted was the Government's policy of non-partisanship. To be quite outspoken, this policy will appeal neither to those who are fascinated with the Anglo-Americans nor to those who are infatuated with Soviet Russia. Nevertheless, Government must steadfastly pursue this policy of non-partisanship—the reason why is expressed in a nutshell by our Burmese Proverb - ကိုယ့်ဝမ်းနာကိုယ်သိသိ - only. Nobody knows better than ourselves the precise condition of our country. Looking at ourselves, we find we cannot afford to be either like those who are infatuated with the Anglo-Americans or those who are infatuated with Soviet Russia” (Thakin Nu, 1951).

In that speech, U Nu used the Burmese proverbs *ကိုယ့်ဝမ်းနာကိုယ်သာသိ* which literally means that one will only know its own problem. He might mean that Burma was facing internal conflicts at that time, and nobody would know better than Burma. On the other hand, he might also mean that other foreign countries should not be involved in Burma's internal affairs.

Therefore, it could be argued that at the end of the Second World War, internal conflicts such as the communist insurgency and the rebellion of the ethnic people make the Burmese leaders of that time in the dilemma of standing on one side of the bloc of the Cold War could put the country into much more severe conflict any time.

Burmese leaders' realization of the changing world order could be another reason why Burmese leaders chose the non-alignment policy. In the study, it was also mentioned that Burmese leaders realized the changing of the world order even before the time of independence. At that time, the first Indo-China War was already initiated, and the rivalry between the Western bloc and the Soviet bloc.

U Nu, in his speech on 13th June 1948, mentioned that:

“As the wars devastated our country, we want peace in the world. We did not stand with the partisans among the superpower countries in the world. We only supported the unity among British, America and Russia” (Thakin Nu, 1951).

In this study, the conflicts in the region or external factors were discussed as a reflection that the conflicts were happening in the region and might be directly or indirectly influenced on the foreign policy of Burma. At the same time, Burmese

leaders realized that the changing of the world order was happening at the same time and with the experience from the World War that country was put into devastation by standing on one side of the bloc, Burmese leaders might decide to avoid standing on one side of the bloc. This could be said to be the ideological foundation of the foreign policy of independent Burma.

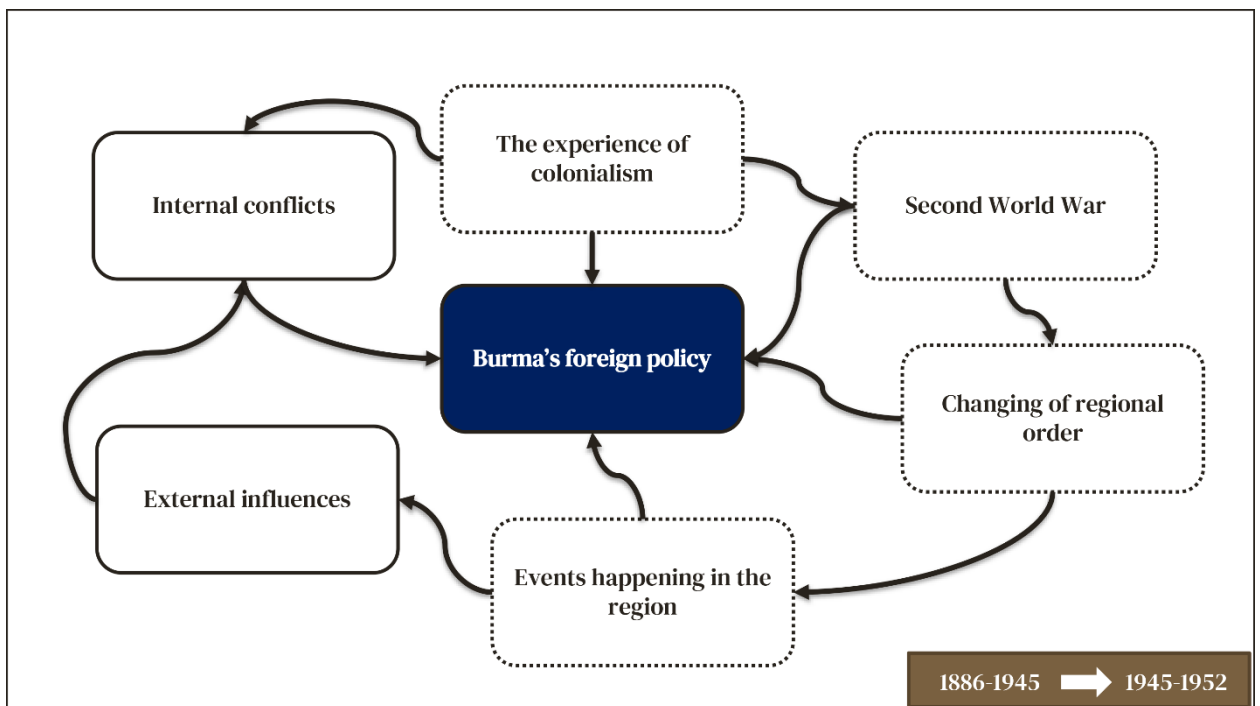


Figure 6 Factors influencing Burma's foreign policy

The figures above illustrated that both internal and external factors impacted Burma's foreign policy. Looking at the speeches of Burmese leaders such as Aung San and U Nu discussed in the previous chapters, it was obvious that they also had a concern that the country might bring into the world war again and the danger of colonialism. At the same time, other factors, such as colonialism and events in the region, also added more concern for the Burmese leaders regarding the foreign policy of Burma.

In the years of around 1952, Burma started to participate in international organizations. This reason could be seen in one of U Nu's speeches in 1952. U Nu, in his Pyitawtha Speech in 1952, stated that

“Although our country is small, we would like to participate in the world's affairs as much as possible. ပုစွန်ဆိတ်ကလေး ဘယ်လိုငယ် ပင်လယ် ကူးတတ်တယ်။ We don't want to be followers or sycophants of any superpower countries. For this reason, we publicly announced that our country wouldn't join any bloc and practice a non-alignment policy.”(U Nu, 2016)”

In that speech, he used the Burmese proverb ပုစွန်ဆိတ်ကလေး ဘယ်လိုငယ် ပင်လယ် ကူးတတ်တယ် which meaning that even a tiny prawn could swim across the ocean. He might mean that even though Burma is a small country, it should involve in international affairs. In 1952, Burma faced the Kuomintang problem, which might have encouraged Burma to get involved in international affairs. It was also the time that the Korean War broke out. As discussed in the previous chapters, Burmese leaders had concerns about the world war, and the decision of Burma to be involved in the international might mean preventing the country from being brought into the regional conflicts.

In the same speech, U Nu depicted how he perceived the principles of non-alignment.

Four essential principles of the non-alignment (ကြားနေဝါဒ) were

1. *We must be flexible in any affairs in the world and decide carefully and justify all these affairs, whether right or wrong.*
2. *We must build good relations with the international community as much as possible.*
3. *We will accept any aid from any country when these aids are without strings and which won't give any harm to our sovereignty.*
4. *Our Union will give any help to any other nations within our limit''(U Nu, 2016).*

Looking into these two speeches of U Nu, it could be seen that Burma during that time had internal conflicts, and Burmese leaders such as U Nu were concerned about these. They were concerned about foreign countries' involvement in Burma's internal affairs. At the same time, they were concerned that another world war could break out and Burma might be involved in those wars.

As discussed previously, the foreign policy of Burma has been impacted both by external and internal factors, while other factors, such as the world war and colonialism, were also influenced. At the same time, Burma avoided aligning with any camp of the Cold War and left the Commonwealth and denied joining SEATO as a result. On the other hand, they also joined the Bandung conference and other cooperations.

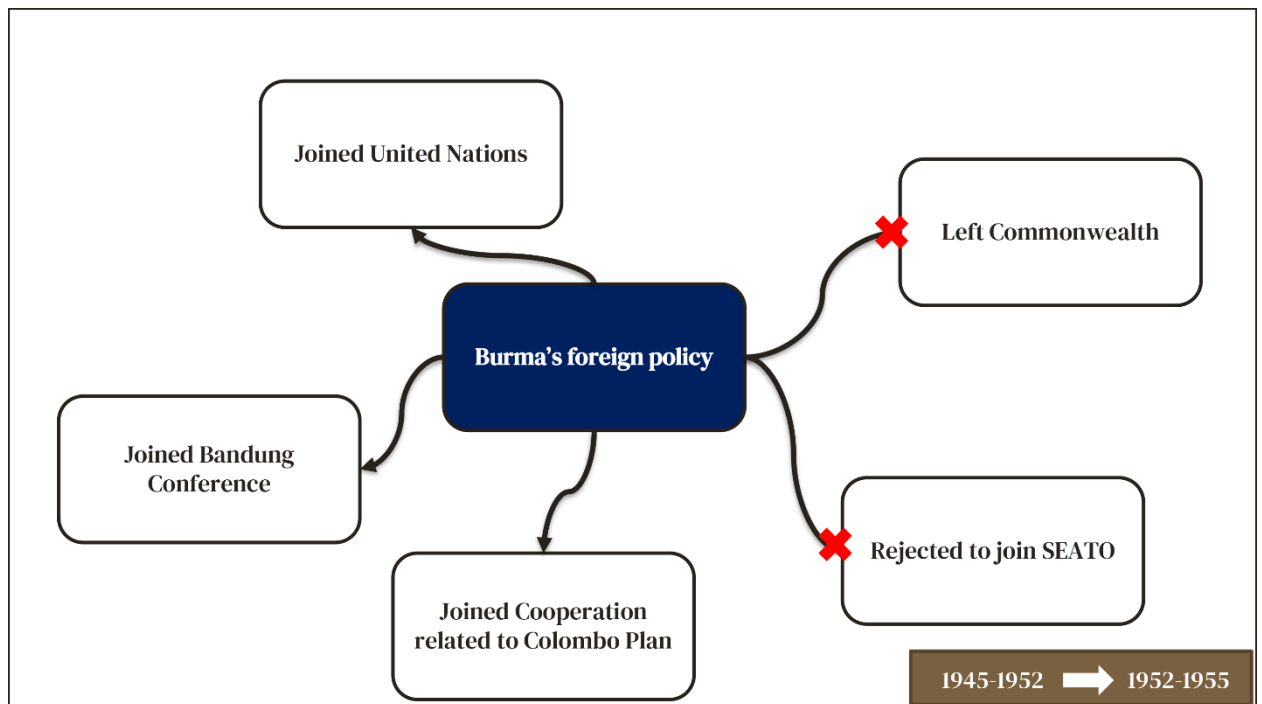


Figure 7 Results of Burma's non-aligned foreign policy

Therefore it could be finally argued that the influence of the external factors of the world, such as the changing of the world order after the Second World War and internal challenges, factors, and conflicts happening within the countries, might force Burma to look for the ways for the survival of the country and this might later lead to the involvement of Burma in the Non-Aligned Movement and the establishment of the Non-Aligned Foreign Policy of Burma.

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