

# Lecture 2: Factors for the establishment of different forms of government -

Decolonisation experience, Role of Local Political Elites and Masses, Cold War Developments

SAJC History Unit, 2023

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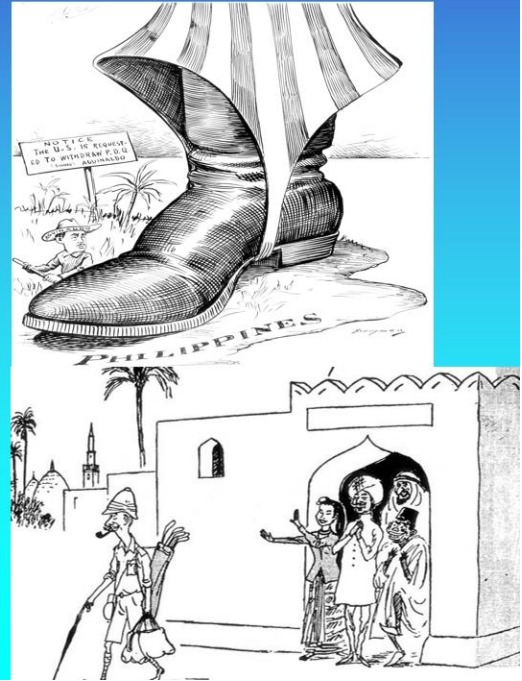
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# 1. Impact of the decolonisation process

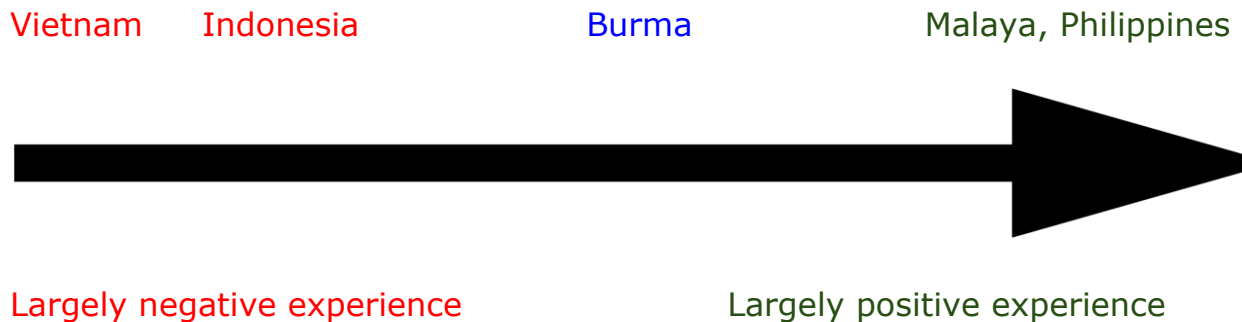
## 1.1 Overview

### DECOLONISATION : CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

- **Decolonisation** → direct opposite of Colonisation
- A **process** by which states occupied by a foreign power **gain independence** from colonial rulers.
- A process of change from colonial to independent status



Before we proceed further in this section, let us examine the following diagram:



- One of the first things we should observe from the diagram above is that decolonisation was not a uniform experience for Southeast Asia.
- Even between countries that are on the same end of the spectrum, such as **Indonesia** and **Vietnam**, it can be argued that Vietnam's experience was even more negative than Indonesia's. As History students, we need to be aware of the *diversity* of experiences that contributed at least partially to the *different forms* of governments that emerged in Southeast Asia over time.

- Democracy got off to a somewhat better start in the newly independent **Philippines** and **Malaya**, but even in these countries there were issues, such as the de facto disenfranchisement of the Malayan minorities.
- It is important that beyond the immediate post-independence years, decolonisation had a long-term impact that could possibly be seen around a decade after a country's independence.
- In the **short term**, decolonisation generally had the following impact:
  - **New governments** in the independent states **under revolutionary leaders who had been popular since the pre-war period**;
  - The emergence of domestic political (and ethnic-religious) **divisions**;
  - The continued **legitimisation of the military** as a political institution in some countries.
  - Singapore and Malaya were exceptions, where new parties were formed, and the British put in place constitutional processes.

Stop and consider for a moment: **Could the decolonisation experience alone fully explain the form of government that Southeast Asian countries adopted over time?**

Some food for thought:

- It may be easier to draw a link between the decolonisation experience and the **type of government** adopted during the **immediate post-independence years**.
- Even within the immediate post-independence period, there were **other factors at play** in determining the form of government that Southeast Asian leaders adopted initially. As we delve deeper into the developments of the respective Southeast Asian countries, look out for the **impact of the Cold War**, **the role of Southeast Asian leaders** and the **masses**.

## 1.2 By Case Study: Decolonisation experiences for Southeast Asian states [Summary]

Year of attaining independence	Country	Path to independence	Manner of attaining independence
1946	Philippines	Peaceful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>American tutelage of Filipinos in democracy prior to 1940: seen as their “daughter republic.”</li> <li>Granted independence by the USA after negotiations with the Filipino nationalists.</li> <li>Independence was guaranteed in the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, promising independence in ten years’ time.</li> <li>WW2 slightly delayed this to 1946.</li> </ul>
1947/8	Burma	<p>Ultimately peaceful but under a threat of violence</p> <p>A hasty retreat by the British</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A combination of negotiations between the British and the strengthened Burmese nationalists led by the AFPFL (“Anti Fascists People’s Liberation League) and British attitude to Burma made independence possible.</li> <li>AFPFL helmed by Thakins and Aung San: moderate, Western educated intellectuals who believed in a socialist cum democratic principles.</li> <li>British reluctance and loss of will to retain control of Burma [due to loss of India, economic devastation of Burma], and the threat of violence</li> </ul>

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			<p>by the AFPFL led to independence in 1948.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assassination of Aung San in 1947 was a setback.</li> <li>Appointment of a reluctant <b>U Nu</b> &amp; setting up of a new govt overnight.</li> </ul>
1949	Indonesia	Violent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Armed resistance by the Indonesian nationalists (called the Indonesian War of Independence) as the Dutch were unwilling to grant independence.</li> <li>The Dutch saw the East Indies as crucial to its economic recovery after World War 2.</li> <li>Negotiations between the Dutch and nationalists led by Sukarno and Hatta</li> <li>International pressure on the Dutch led by the USA to leave, which they did in 1949.</li> </ul>
1954	North and South Vietnam	Violent and protracted warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After a guerrilla war to drive out the French starting in 1946, Vietnamese nationalists led by the Viet Minh finally won victory in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954.</li> <li>The French agreed to leave Indochina but the international community, including USSR and PRC, arranged to split Vietnam into two. North Vietnam would be under the Communist-leaning Viet Minh and South Vietnam under an anti-</li> </ul>

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			<p>Communist regime supported by France and the USA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vietnam was ultimately unified in 1975 after North Vietnam conquered South Vietnam.</li> </ul>
	Cambodia	<p>Gifted with independence when France withdrew after its defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.</p>	
	Laos		
1957	Malaya	Peaceful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peacefully negotiated between the British and Malayan nationalists.</li> <li>The Malayan Communist Party attempted to drive the British out (the Malayan Emergency) starting in 1948 but was suppressed by the British by 1954.</li> <li>Peaceful negotiations with moderate Malayan nationalist leaders could continue. These Malay, Chinese and Indian leaders showed they were willing to put aside their difference to both fight the Communists and work as a united body to negotiate with the British, thus fulfilling the British conditions for independence, which was granted in 1957.</li> </ul>
1965	Singapore	Peaceful	<p>A two-stage process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The British wished to leave S'pore and so handed S'pore to Malaya to form Malaysia, as it was thought that S'pore was too small to function on its own. So in 1963, S'pore joined Malaysia and the</li> </ul>

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			<p>British departed (marking the decolonisation of S'pore).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relations between S'pore &amp; M'sian authorities deteriorated to the point that M'sia expelled S'pore in 1965 to be an independent state.</li> </ul>
1984	Brunei	Peaceful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The British wished to leave Brunei and so proposed Brunei be joined with Malaya to ensure its stability. The Sultan of Brunei refused to and insisted on independence; thus Brunei became an independent monarchy when the British finally departed in 1984.</li> </ul>
-	Thailand	Never colonised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Its current political system can be traced to 1932 when a group of civilian and military officials removed the political powers of the monarchy in a bloodless coup.</li> <li>Since that time, power in Thailand was held by the people (i.e., non-royals).</li> <li>For most of the 20th century after the coup, the military dominated Thai politics, with civilian leaders only occasionally coming to power.</li> <li>However, in the last two decades, encouraged by the king, there was growing trend to encourage democratic principles, holding elections and recognising civilian leadership even among the military.</li> </ul>

## 2. Impact of the local political elites: Overview

### 2.1 Role of Japanese Occupation on local political elites

- During the Japanese Occupation, many local elites were **co-opted into the Japanese administration**, even freeing some of them from exile and granted them positions of power within the Japanese administrations in Southeast Asian countries.
  - These measures provided indigenous leaders with **opportunities to make themselves more prominent figures in politics** - such opportunities were virtually absent under the Western administrations that preferred power to remain in the hands of the colonial governments.

### 2.2 Two Categories of Political Elites

- By the end of WW2, power had become concentrated in the hands of certain groups in each country, who became the political elites in the post-war world.
- SEA political elites can be organised into two groups:
  - **Those who had traditionally been elites** in their own societies and had continued their elite status during colonial rule and in the negotiation for independence. There was thus **elite continuity** for Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand as these traditional elite took on the reins of governance in their country after independence. They also viewed the colonial powers more favourably and sought negotiation rather than confrontation to gain independence.
  - The **new elite who were usually anti-colonial nationalists** during colonial rule and had faced colonial persecution. They gained elite status at a relatively later stage beginning from the Japanese Occupation, where they gained crucial administrative and leadership experience and began to gain a national following. When WWII ended, these new elite then displaced the traditional elite in their country as they were enjoyed greater support from the masses. Hence there was **lack of elite continuity** between colonial and post-independence period in Indonesia, Vietnam and Burma.



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- The following table will illustrate the differences between the traditional and new elites and the impact on their governing style and effectiveness.

<b>Traditional Elites (Elite continuity): Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand</b>	<b>New Elites (Elite discontinuity): Indonesia, Vietnam, Burma</b>
The political elites came from groups that had traditionally already been elites in their own societies. They generally owed their political legitimacy to this factor.	The post-war political elites were relatively new in power, generally coming from a politically insignificant pre-war backgrounds. Their background was the ranks of the intelligentsia than coming from traditional political elites.
The elites inherited political power from the colonial governments, so found the task of nation-building easier. Their populations were also generally more tractable and obedient to authority (with some exceptions, e.g., post-war Malayan-Chinese society was very politicised and provided the bulk of the Malayan Communist Party's membership)	Had a far more chaotic experience of independence, and faced a greater challenge to impose national unity on their more diverse countries.
These elites generally opted for socially and politically conservative policies.	These elites opted for radical or 'populist' policies that were more revolutionary in character.
These countries generally experienced internal stability (although this did not prevent instances of internal violence from breaking out, e.g., Malayan Emergency and Hukbalahap Rebellion in the Philippines)	These countries frequently experienced social upheaval.

Table 1. The differing experiences stemming from elite continuity and discontinuity

## 2.3 Role of Western Education on Political Elites

- The **rise of the local elites** could also not have been made possible without the **introduction of western education** and their **exposure to global ideological currents** (i.e. western ideologies like democracy and communism).
- The provision of western education was a **colonial legacy** and generally had the following characteristics:
  - Dual system of education, where the local elite had access to tertiary education and masses only received a rudimentary level of education.
  - Western ideals like democracy and universal suffrage were downplayed especially for the masses.
- In spite of the limited provision of education during the colonial period, its **significance to the development of nationalism and rise of nationalist leaders** were still evident:
  - A **Western-educated class of elites** soon appeared, consisting of teachers, lawyers, journalists and civil servants.
  - Western education provided one important style in which opposition to colonial rule developed in SEA. The language of the rulers became the medium between men drawn from different parts of the colony and also the language of dialogue between them and the government.
  - Hence the connection between Western education and rise of nationalism is evident: The **first signs of discontent usually appeared in educational institutions**. SEA nationalist leaders were also drawn from the Western-educated intelligentsia.

### 3. Impact of mass political participation: Overview

#### 3. 1. What is Mass Political Participation?



#### WHAT IS "MASS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION"?

- General population (citizens) engaging in various political activities.
- Politics was no longer only confined to the elites .
- Increasing participation of the general population.
  - Forming political parties
  - voting during elections,
  - mass organisations
  - mass demonstrations / protests, petitions



#### 3.2. Role of the Colonial Experience and Japanese Occupation on Mass Political Participation

- The colonial experience and Japanese Occupation gave rise to increasing political awareness and consciousness among the masses.
- During the Japanese Occupation, the Japanese left much of the existing administration intact to exploit the economic resources of the region for their war efforts. The Japanese also needed to enlist the help of local leaders to garner a higher degree of support among the locals for the Japanese regime.
- People sought to influence the state's political structure through mass political participation e.g. formation of political parties/ organisations, voting in elections or participation in political demonstrations/ petitions.

## 4. Cold War Developments: Overview

### 4.1 Why was SEA important in the Cold War?

- The fact that 4 communist insurgencies broke out in 1948 in SEA seemed to suggest that a worldwide communist insurgency was taking shape.
- This was in addition to the Korean War (1950) and the establishment of PRC in 1949.
- The US saw SEA as the crucial frontline/bastion in the global Cold War and hence it was necessary to prop up key democratic allies in the region.

### 4.2 Formation of Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), 1954

- Cornerstone of US defence strategy in SEA, bound together in a mutual defence pact between the US, Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, Thailand and UK. + Philippines
- Military aid and advice, strategically focused economic aid and a measure of political and administrative support and manipulation played key roles in this strategy to protect a region that was viewed, by 1950, as a crucial frontline in the Cold War.
- SEATO did not receive unanimous support in the region and was not totally effective.
  - Policy of non-alignment of Burma, Indonesia and Cambodia decided to adopt neutral stance instead of supporting this network that was seen to be a classic example of neo-colonialism<sup>1</sup>.
- SEATO was primarily a simple policy of building security blocs of friendly nation around perimeter of communist world but by the 1950s, USA realised that this was still not enough to curb communist subversion from within decolonising 'Third World' nation-states. Laos and Vietnam would justify such concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> Neo-colonialism refers to the continuing control of former colonies by the Western colonial powers through indirect means e.g. use of economic, political, cultural, or other pressures

### 4.3 Impact of Cold War on Decolonisation Process

- Growing concern for security in the context of the Cold War intensified pressures for independence, as the **US** anticipated that **efforts to sustain colonial rule would generate instability** and **provide fertile ground for communist agitation**, while independent govts would align themselves with the Western powers.
- **Analysis:** The repercussions of the Cold War **worked in favor of a swift transfer of power**.

### 4.4 Impact of Cold War on Early Nation-Building

- The emergence of nation-states in the 1950s was **moulded by the political, economic & military assistance received from America or China or Russia**. Even after the demise of formal colonialism, Britain in particular was able to exert considerable influence over its former dependences & the region beyond, the international relations of SEA countries now **revolved round Cold War rather than neo-colonial considerations**.
- Key **US Cold War allies** in SEA:
  - Close **Thai-US** relationship that had been established during WWII.
  - Policy of building anti-communist bastion in **Laos**, in defiance of the terms of Geneva Conference which had affirmed neutrality of Laos in Cold War.
  - Attempt to bolster viable non-communist regime in **South Vietnam**.

### 4.5 Overall Impact of Cold War Developments in SEA

- **Positive:**
  - Ultimately, local nation-states had, survived intact. There was an unspoken consensus on **maintaining integrity of nation-states** even though SEA was a frontline in the Cold War.
  - This was because **USA's overwhelming concern** was for nation-building, **encouraging unity and strength** of these states **to counter communism**, which was believed to prey on weaknesses and instabilities of new nation-states.

- **Negative:**
  - Destabilising effects of Cold War on local nation-states; especially in the northern area of mainland SEA, where both ideological camps sought to build a network of alliances amongst the minorities through exploiting local ethnic grievances to achieve their own self-serving motives.
  - For instance, US stimulated the rise of a separatist movement amongst the minorities of the Central Highlands (the Hmongs) of Vietnam in 1964 to counter communist threat in Vietnam and Laos.

## 5. Putting them together: Impact of decolonisation experience, role of local political elites and masses, and Cold War developments

Syllabus Content	Learning outcome
Establishing different forms of government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• decolonisation experience</li> <li>• role of political elites</li> <li>• mass political participation (masses)</li> <li>• Cold War developments</li> </ul>	Evaluate the factors that shaped the establishment of different forms of government across Southeast Asia over time.

- The main purpose of Lecture 2 is to answer the following question type – **Which factor contributed most to the establishment of democratic governments after independence in Southeast Asia (with the exception of Vietnam which established a Communist government)?**
- The factors to be considered in answering this question type are:
  - Impact of decolonisation experience
  - Role of local elites
  - Mass political participation
  - Cold War developments

- Looking at the three factors, some general observations can be considered to jumpstart your eventual weighing of factors:

Factor	Observations
Impact of decolonisation experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This factor is <b>event-based</b>, which means you need to understand the various turning points and the actors that were responsible for how this event unfolded.</li> <li>You need to divide this factor into <b>smooth and violent paths</b> to independence for you to be able to start making comparisons.</li> </ul>
Role of local elites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This factor is <b>actor-based</b>, which means you need to understand the various contributions made by the actor.</li> <li>You need to divide this factor into <b>traditional and new elite</b> for you to be able to start making comparisons.</li> </ul>
Mass political participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This factor is <b>actor-based</b>, which means you need to understand the various contributions made by the actor.</li> <li>You need to divide this factor into <b>moderate and radical</b> for you to be able to start making comparisons.</li> </ul>
Cold War developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This factor is <b>event-based</b>, which means you need to understand the various turning points and the actors that were responsible for how this event unfolded.</li> <li>You need to divide this factor into <b>accelerate or hinder</b> the pace of decolonisation for you to be able to start making comparisons.</li> </ul>
<p>So for this set of four factors, you have two event-based and two actor-based factors.</p> <p>Next, you will need to start comparing them on two levels:</p> <p>a) Relative significance of the factors (i.e. which factor is more significant)</p> <p>b) The inter-connectedness between the factors (i.e. how one factor can lead to another)</p>	

- Now, we will be looking at a series of case studies for us to gather our evidence so that we can start to formulate our arguments and eventually judgement.
- Peaceful paths to independence
  - Philippines
  - Malaya
  - Burma
- Violent paths to independence
  - Indonesia
  - Vietnam

## 6. Peaceful paths to independence: Philippines

### 6.1 Impact of decolonisation process/role of local elite

- The Philippines' decolonisation was unique in that **it did not need to win independence**. In June 1945, the Philippine Legislature convened for the first time and elected **Manuel Roxas as Senate President**, establishing a **democratic government**.
- On **4 July 1946**, the **USA granted independence** to the Republic of the Philippines, the first Southeast Asian colony to be granted independence by their colonial power.
- To **ensure future trade relations** with the Philippines, the U.S. Congress passed the **Bell Act** on **30 April 1946**.
  - Under this, trade relations between the two countries were prolonged until 1954 when American imports would be subject to tariffs.
  - The Act also contained a clause which gave Americans the same rights to develop and utilise the natural resources in the Philippines.
  - This provision **provoked much nationalist opposition** because it openly **violated the constitution** which had **reserved the utilisation of natural resources for Filipinos**.
- The **Philippine Rehabilitation Act** provided **for financial aid** to the Philippines to cover war damages if the Bell Act was ratified. Despite the opposition, Roxas' leadership ratified the Bell Act.
  - This represented a clear case of the **USA tying their economic interests to the political interests of the Philippines**; it highlighted the extent of the USA's economic ambitions.
  - Elite economic interests thus continued to influence politics in the Philippines.

### 6.2 Impact of mass political participation

- In December 1942, the **Japanese** established a **united front in the Philippines**, the Association for the Service of the New Philippines (or **Kalibapi**) to **unify Filipinos behind the Japanese war effort**.
  - This organisation was similar to mass organisations like PUTERA in Indonesia and the AFPFL in Burma.



- The Japanese also sponsored the use of Tagalog during the war and this helped unify the Philippine people.
- With the exception of the elite who collaborated with the Japanese, most Filipinos refused to collaborate and thus, the Japanese adopted a harsher policy towards them especially because they had pro-American attitudes.
  - This different responses to Japanese rule highlighted the gap between the elites and the masses in the Philippines.
- The Hukbalahap ('Huk' for short) was formed as the People's Anti-Japanese Army and was a guerrilla movement that targeted the Philippine landlords as much as it sought to undermine the influence of the Japanese.
  - The Huk carried out a social revolution that aimed to destroy the power of the caciques, the powerful landlords of the Philippines.
  - At the end of 1944, the Huk had gained control of most of central Luzon and greatly assisted the USA in its reconquest of the islands. Manila was recaptured in February 1945.
  - Despite the assistance rendered to the USA, the USA disbanded the Huk after World War II.
- The Japanese Occupation had fuelled the growth of a Philippine sense of pride, based on the notion that the country was unique in Southeast Asia.
  - The use of Tagalog helped to promote this sense of pride.
- However, the establishment of the Huk reflected an important social impact of the Japanese occupation.
  - The occupation had heightened social, economic, and political tensions between tenants and landlords (the rich and the poor), patriots and collaborators.
  - World War II had thus brought into open the economic disparities that had been forged under American rule.
  - The Huk's emergence highlighted the geographical disparity between the central Luzonese peasantry and the Manila elite, exacerbating class conflicts. This would continue to plague Philippine politics after independence.

### 6.3 Cold War developments

- The Philippines decolonisation process was not affected by Cold War developments as the US as the colonial master had already been preparing the local elites for independence since the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup>C.
- US provided advice and assistance against the Huks during the Hukbalahap Rebellion:
  - The assistance of the American government wherein a ten-million dollar emergency loan was provided to pay the military.
  - The US also provided for advisory assistance and for the immediate delivery of equipment which modernized the Armed Forces of the Philippines.
- Hence, at most, the nature of US involvement due to Cold War concerns came in the form of supporting an independent Philippine government against a communist threat.

## 7. Peaceful paths to independence: Malaya

### 7.1 Impact of decolonisation process

- The British returned with a desire to re-impose political control, in order that the economy could be restored first before gradual self-government.
  - However, the British had also underestimated, just as they did in Burma, the impact that the Japanese Occupation had on the sense of political consciousness on the populace.
  - Following the end of World War II, politics became mass-based and was less concentrated in the hands of the elites.
- The British played a critical role in preparing the Malayan politicians for self-rule and the smooth transfer of power.
  - The British had intentionally nurtured democratic leaders as a moderate alternative to the Malayan Communist Party (MCP); their supervision of local elections and constitutional discussions also ensured the establishment of electoral norms and that various interests were represented by the government.

- The **gradual transfer of power** exercised by the British also enabled local leaders to **ease into legitimate political structures** in an environment of political stability and mutual compromise.

## 7.2 Role of **local elite**

- Important role of **Tunku Abdul Rahman**: He was a **crucial unifying force** between the **different races** and was **well respected by the British**.
- The role of indigenous leaders was at least as significant as that of the decolonisation process as Tunku Abdul Rahman played a critical role in convincing the British to grant independence.
  - After the **Alliance Party won** 51 out of 52 seats in the **1955 elections**, **Tunku Abdul Rahman** **pressured the British to accelerate the pace of independence for Malaya** + his **uncompromising handling of the Communists** as seen in his December 1955 meeting with Chin Peng to demand the Communist leader's unconditional surrender.
  - **1957**: British **granted independence** sooner rather than later, even though its **requirements of a non-communal, multi-ethnic Malayan consciousness had not yet been fully met**.

## 7.3 Impact of **mass political participation**

- During the post-war period, **clearer political identities were formed along ethnic lines** in Malaya: ethnically-divided people proved a persistent and serious challenge for the government. British policies provoked responses from the various ethnic groups and led to the formation of political parties along communal lines.
  - **1946**: formation of **United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)** in response to British plans for liberal citizenship rights for all races. UMNO was successful in **mass mobilising the Malays** and British had to back down.
  - **1949**: This in turn triggered the formation of the **Malayan Chinese Association (MCA)** as the Chinese realised they had to unite to **protect Chinese interests** and being side-lined. It was **anti-communist** and **pushed for right of citizenship by birth**.

- **1954**: Formation of **Malayan Indian Congress (MIC)** to **protect Indian rights and interests**.
- While communal politics became more pronounced in the post-war period, it did **NOT** prevent the Malaya and Chinese communities from working towards compromise and collaboration.
  - This was evidenced by the UMNO-MCA informal policy of co-operation in 1952 municipal elections. Won 9 out of 12 seats.
  - **Oct 1954: Formation of Alliance Party = UMNO+MCA+MIC**.
  - 1955 elections, the Alliance party won 51 out of 52 seats. It has been the governing party since the 1950s and the basis of the Barisan Nasional.
  - The **British granted independence to Malaya** on the **condition** that the **local government** was **able to unite the ethnic divisions** in the country through peaceful and democratic procedures. The Alliance Party fulfilled these conditions for the sake of independence.
- It is thus possible to conclude that the Malayan experience contrasted sharply and was very different as it **did not experience the limitations of inadequate constitutional preparation** and the subsequent political instability seen in other Southeast Asian countries.
- The **Merdeka Constitution of 1957** was a result of political consensus + accommodation + compromise amongst the three different races: '**Racial Bargain**' or 'Social Contract' that marked the foundation of independent multi-racial Malaysia.
  - What this '**Racial Bargain**' entailed: Under **the tacit agreement by the Alliance leaders**, it was agreed that the **Chinese would continue their dominance of the Malayan economy** as long as **they do not question or challenge the political dominance of Malays**, the bumiputra (or 'sons of the soil'). Islam was enshrined as the state religion, **Malay language given preponderance and Malays had special rights**.
  - **Uniquely Malayan** with the **underlying principle** that though Malay interests were to remain constitutionally guaranteed, large segments of the Chinese and Indian populations were also actively drawn into

the political process. This was what made for the successful operation of constitutional democracy in a multi-racial state.

- Although the 1957 Merdeka Constitution established **British parliamentary democracy**, with regular elections and political participation through the formation of political parties and electioneering, it had a **unique twist of institutionalising Malay dominance**: a **democracy in which the majority group has some special rights compared to others**.
- In the long run, this social contract would come under **increasing tension** (this will be covered in the section on National Unity).

## 7.4 Cold War developments

- The **communist insurgency** in the form of the Malayan Emergency **delayed the pace of decolonisation** in Malaya due to security concerns.
- Containing the Communist threat
  - **1948**: The **MCP**, led by **Chin Peng**, **launched an armed insurrection**. Aim(s): to **expel the British** and **set up a communist, independent Malaya**.
  - Effective British strategy of **containment of communism** through declaration of the **Malayan Emergency (1948-60)**.
  - Power handed to the moderate, non-communist leaders in 1957 led by the Alliance Party.
- Impact of Communism on Malaya's independence: The communist threat in Malaya did in the **short term**, **postpone independence**, but in the **long term**, it served as a 'double edge sword' that help to **accelerated the granting of independence** was seen as a **political way to fight the communists**.

## 8. Peaceful paths to independence: **Burma**



### 8.1 Impact of **decolonisation process**

- The **peaceful transfer of power** in Burma led to early independence but the **hasty retreat** of the British left behind an **unstable Burma**.
- Attitude of the British to Burma: They had **lost the will to govern Burma** due to its **severe economic devastation** and **loss of India** (jewel in the crown). In

contrast, Malaya was seen as a more economically viable colony that would serve British needs.

- Similar to Malaya as the British worked with the secular local leaders.
  - **British-Thakin collaboration** in decolonisation: The British decision to recognize, rather than suppress the Anti-Fascist Organisation (AFO), meant **that it allowed the Thakin leaders, led by Aung San** and his political vehicle (now renamed the Anti-Fascists Peoples Freedom League – **AFPFL**) to be **thrust into the forefront of the decolonisation movement.**
- Impact on post independent governance:
  - British left Burma in a state of **intense instability & insecurity**. Despite the traumatic **assassination of Aung San**, they undertook a **hasty retreat.**
  - The hasty decolonisation, attributed by the **growing unwillingness of the colonial powers to stay** as well as the **local powers impatience for full independence**, resulted in a **fragile and non-resilient democracy**. This would eventually result in a **weak foundation** for the successful establishment of **parliamentary democracy** and leave it **susceptible to threats / alternative forms of government.**
  - The country **could not hold elections** until 1951 and 1952 because of **insurrections** that nearly toppled the young government before its second anniversary.
  - Despite the **relatively peaceful transfer**, the **swift British withdrawal** had **failed to prepare the political elites** for democratic governance.
  - Although **deep-seated tensions** existed between the Burman majority and the other minorities such as the Karens, Kachins, and Shans, the **British had not facilitated a long-term design for power-sharing** among the various ethnic groups.
  - Subsequently, a Burman-led movement could not appease all minority groups for long and **civil war broke out in 1948** with the Christian Karens that has continued to this day.

- In the **absence of a strong leader**, the potent combination of the **Communist threat** and the **unrest from minorities** would pose severe **problems for U Nu's government** that was established in 1948.
- The table below illustrates some similarities and differences between the decolonisation experiences of Burma and Malaya, even though both were under the same colonial power.

a) Impact of the Decolonization Process	
<b>Malaya</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peaceful transfer of power</li> <li>• CPs estb democratic institutions &amp; processes</li> <li>• Gradual transfer of power due to econ/political interests</li> <li>• Alliance Party bridged communal differences to achieve independence</li> <li>• Security threats controlled</li> </ul>	<b>Burma</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peaceful transfer of power</li> <li>• CPs estb democratic institutions &amp; processes</li> <li>• Hasty and disorganised retreat due to loss of will to retain ctrl over Burma</li> <li>• Short term internal solidarity among nationalists</li> <li>• Deteriorating security situation</li> </ul>
	
STABLE DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES IN PLACE	A FRAGILE & NON-RESILIENT DEMOCRACY

## 8.2 Role of **local elite**

- The **Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL)** included both Thakin and non-Thakin organisations.
  - Its **leaders** were mainly the **Thakins** - **Aung San** and **Than Thun** who had brought different nationalist factions under the umbrella of the AFPFL in 1944.
- **October 1946**: AFPFL demonstrated its **willingness to curb Communism** when it **expelled its Communist faction** (also a tactical move to gain British support and patronage), which controlled the All-Burma Trade Union Congress after it tried to obstruct the settlement of the Rangoon police's strike against the British administration
- AFPFL also showed its **ability to manage the minorities** → **12 February 1947**: **Aung San** **secured the support of the leaders of the minority** Shans, Kachins, and Chins at the **Panglong Conference**.
- **Aung San** also **led the negotiations with the British** with success.

- The Thakins' prominence grew as the Thakins led by Aung San took the lead in working with the British in the decolonisation process.
- Aung San successfully led the delegations in 1947 to Britain to negotiate independence.
- **Elections for the Constituent Assembly were held on 9 April 1947.** The AFPFL won a landslide victory taking 248 out of 255 seats while the Burma Communist Party (BCP) took the remaining seven.
  - The AFPFL's legitimacy was boosted by this strong win.
- However, a major blow was struck to the core of the Thakin leadership with the assassination of Aung San and eight other key political leaders by a political rival on 19 July 1947.
- In contrast, U Nu, who took over as PM of Burma, was a very reluctant successor and a weak leader. "... I refused to take on the responsibility, partly because I did not feel inclined to accept it and partly because my knowledge of administration was nil." U Nu (1954)

### 8.3 Impact of mass political participation

- The invading Japanese were initially seen by many Burmese as liberators who were freeing Burma from British rule.
  - The Japanese promised independence for Burma; hence, when Japanese troops reached Bangkok (Thailand) in December 1941, Aung San announced the formation of the Burma Independence Army (BIA) to fight alongside the Japanese at the start of the Burma campaign.
  - The Thakins, who were leaders of the Burmese Independence Army (BIA) and included an influential group of military men that would come to be known as the 'Thirty Comrades', were seen as national heroes.
- The leadership of independent Burma came from a somewhat limited elite, mostly English-educated, who preferred democratic forms of government and socialist socio-economic goals.
- The Japanese appointed a Burmese government under Ba Maw to keep the revolutionaries under control and establish political control. Aung San was the head of the Burma Defence Army and the Minister of Defence.



- In the longer run, this Japanese policy gave the Burmese, and especially the Thakins, the administrative experience and access to govern the masses.
  - For example, from 1943-1944, Aung San and Than Tun continued to build up support for the Thakins in the worker and peasant organisations, using their positions in the Ba Maw governments as a cover while secretly organising anti-Japanese activities.
- The sheer diversity of political parties within the AFPFL would perhaps help us better understand how factionalism within the AFPFL would see the demise of parliamentary and usher in a military dictatorship some 14 years after Burma attained its independence from the British.
- Despite the broad-based support that the AFPFL had due to its diversity of political parties, the inherent diversity also presented a challenge in the form of differing political interests that would emerge and come into conflict with one another when the AFPFL was established as the ruling party in independent Burma.

## 8.4 Cold War developments

- Minimal impact on decolonisation process, where British peacefully (albeit hastily) transferred power to AFPFL.
- After independence, U Nu declared Burma's neutrality in the Cold War.

## 9. Violent paths to independence: Indonesia

### 9.1 Impact of decolonisation process

- Role of colonial power (Dutch)
  - The Dutch, unlike the British or Americans, had no plans to give up their Dutch East Indies colony after WW2, leading to a war of independence taking place from 1946 to 1949.
  - They saw the Dutch East Indies as crucial for their economic reconstruction after the devastation of World War II.
- Following the return of the Dutch and their attempts to reclaim Indonesia as a colony, Dutch military power soon proved superior and this led to the signing of the Renville Agreement in January 1948.
  - The Indonesian Republicans were forced to recognise Dutch military conquests and pro-Dutch governments were established in these areas.

- The agreement aimed to temporarily **cease hostilities** and **establish a ceasefire** between the two sides, but it was **short-lived** and the conflict resumed soon thereafter.
- It was a traumatic, **destabilising period** marked by revolutionary warfare between the Dutch and the nationalists. **The violent struggle for independence**, unlike the peaceful decolonisation process in Burma, Malaya and Philippines **resulted in an absence of any favourable conditions or patronage for any nationalist group or ideology**.
  - Only **after the successful repression** of the **Madiun Coup** did the **Western educated leaders** who wanted democratic norms **gain some "patronage" from an external power (USA)**.

## 9.2 Role of **local elite**

- Having to fight a war of independence in an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands meant that unity and coherence were major issues for the new state.
  - Beyond fighting for independence, the **leaders of various islands** and regions **had little in common** in terms of ideology, concerns and plans for the future. Since they had fought for their independence from foreign rulers, they also insisted on their rights to pursue their agendas.
- Unlike the US and to a lesser extent the British, the **Dutch** **did not have a policy of developing a politically mature class of indigenous elites** that could administer a state themselves.
  - The **Indonesians were hence less prepared for independence** than the Filipinos, the Burmese and the Malaysians and so after independence in 1949, they **experienced tremendous difficulties in creating and operating viable political systems**.
  - **Dutchmen** held the **majority of the seats** in the **national legislative body** during the colonial period, although they accounted for less than 1% of population.
  - **Political freedom** was **restricted under Dutch rule** and nationalist figures as **Sukarno**, Mohammad **Hatta** & Soetan Sjahrir were **under detention** during most of the 1930s
- **Sukarno** utilised **the mass organisation** and political opportunities to **rally the Indonesians against the Japanese and the Dutch**.

- In June 1945, Sukarno articulated the **5 Principles for Independence** or **Pancasila**, which would form the basis of independent Indonesia. The principles were: Nationalism, Internationalism, the Principle of Consent, Social Justice and Belief in God.
- It was perhaps the opportunities afforded during the Japanese Occupation and the **mass support the Sukarno garnered** during that time which emboldened him to proclaim independence, together with Hatta, on 17 August 1945.
- **Sukarno** and **Hatta** **would declare independence** of the Republic of Indonesia on **17 August 1945**.
- Upon independence, the leaders chose to establish **parliamentary democracy** – a trend mirroring the developments in Burma, Malaya and Philippines.
  - This was more due to the **commitment of the Republican leadership to democracy**. Like the Thakins in Burma, **Sukarno** and **Hatta** had since the 1920s **subscribed to the political ideology of democracy**. Democracy was also one of the 5 principles of Indonesia's Pancasila, which was crafted by Sukarno.

### 9.3 Impact of **mass political participation**

- In October 1945, Sukarno was temporarily side-lined in the Republican government due to his earlier collaboration with the Japanese. Under Sjahrir and Sjarfuddin, political parties emerged rapidly.
- Despite Sukarno returning to power swiftly, the **emergence of several political parties** with **competing interests** would result in **longer term rifts that plagued Indonesian politics**. These included:
  - The **Partai Komunis Indonesia** (PKI) and the **Partai Nasional Indonesia** (PNI) that were revived;
  - The Japanese-sponsored religious organisation **Masjumi** that became a political party;
  - The creation of the **Indonesian Socialist Youth Party** and **Socialist Party**.
- **Sukarno** and **Hatta** preferred **using diplomatic negotiations** to bring about an orderly transfer of power. In contrast, the approach preferred by those

outside Jakarta preferred more radical approaches – these groups represented an almost fanatical support for the Republic and had been politicised by the Japanese.

- The most prominent of the more radical groups was the **Pemuda (youth movement)**, an anti-colonial mass movement by the youth. Based in Java and Sumatra, the pemuda movement carried out large demonstrations against the British troops who were there until the Dutch returned.
- In 1946, a 'social revolution' occurred where Indonesians turned against one another.
- Collaborators with both the Japanese and the Dutch regimes were challenged by the youth and in some cases, attacked and killed.
- Outcome:
  - One of the consequences of the fractious nature of politics in Indonesia was that Indonesia's first parliament elections were not held until 1955, although independence had been recognised by the Dutch much earlier in December 1949.
  - The emergence of several political parties also contributed to the choice of democracy. Democracy would also provide opportunities for harnessing and channelling the mass mobilisation of the different groups during the JO and decolonisation period. Democracy's emphasis on consultation and consensus offered the best hope of persuading Indonesia's varied social and political groups to support the central government.
  - Notably, Sukarno's government would still have to contend with the multiple political groups and their hostility towards the Sukarno-led government.

## 9.4 Cold War Developments

- In September 1948, a turning point occurred when the Republicans were challenged by a **PKI coup in Madiun** but managed to put it down decisively. It is estimated that some 8,000 people died and another 35,000 were arrested.

- Republican leadership gained in prestige and were seen as anti-Communist and committed to democracy.
  - The ability to suppress the PKI coup was significant as it signalled to the US that the Republican government was anti-communist.
  - In the context of the Cold War, this gained the attention of the USA. They were unhappy with the Netherlands (an ally in Europe) getting bogged down in SEA. They wanted the Dutch to focus on the reconstruction of the Netherlands in Europe and help in the containment of communism in Europe.
  - In January 1949, USA, put pressure on the Dutch (they threatened to withhold Marshall Aid) to seek a resolution to the conflict in the East Indies and hand over power to the Republican leadership in the East Indies.
  - Given the Netherlands urgent need for aid from the USA, they had no choice but to grant independence to the Republican leaders.
  - On 2 November 1949, the Hague Agreement was signed and paved the way for the UN to facilitate the return of Sukarno on 1 July 1950 where the Sukarno-led Republican leadership and the Republican Army had by then established themselves as key political forces.

## 10. Violent paths to independence: Vietnam

### 10.1 Impact of decolonisation process

- By early 1945, the Vietminh leadership established a 'liberated zone' in the mountainous provinces of Tonkin under the leadership of their commander Vo Nguyen Giap.
- When the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, the Vietminh seized power from the Japanese; Emperor Bao Dai - who had been installed by the Japanese - handed power over to Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh.
- France's reluctance to relinquish control of Vietnam was evident in the Brazzaville Declaration of January 1944 that ruled out 'all idea of autonomy and all possibility of development outside the French Empire.'

- Like Aung San in Burma, **Ho Chi Minh** initially adopted a **moderate and conciliatory stance**, with both leaders having achieved a measure of internal stability with mass support.
- However, the British transferred power more swiftly than the French and this explains in part the **protracted struggle between the French and the Vietnamese**.
- It is evident here that policy of the colonial power played a crucial role in determining how Southeast Asian countries attained independence.
- **1946-1954: The Vietnam War of Independence**
  - September 1946: **Ho Chi Minh** initially tried to persuade the French to grant independence peacefully but when he **failed to reach an agreement with them**, **war broke out** between the French and the Vietnamese on 23 November 1946 when the French attacked Haiphong. At least 6,000 Vietnamese died during the attack.
  - **1954**: The Vietnamese scored a **momentous victory against the French** in the Battle of **Dien Bien Phu**, inflicting upon the French what was possibly one of the worst defeats suffered by a Western colonial power at the hands of an Asian country. The **French surrendered soon after**.

## 10.2 Impact of **local elites** and **mass political participation**

- As the **Japanese** and **Vichy France** were **in alliance** with each other during World War II, **Vietnam did not benefit from Japanese concessions** as much as their nationalist counterparts in other Southeast Asian countries.
  - Despite this drawback, the **Vietminh** **maintained strong support** among the people due to **widespread anti-French** and **anti-Japanese sentiments**. The Vietminh also received military aid from the Allies.
  - The **Vietminh** undertook the **highly popular task of seizing rice from rich landlords** and **distributing it to hungry peasants**. Slogans of 'National independence' and 'Destroy the paddy granaries and resolve the famine' gained popularity and won over those in the countryside, making them **more accepting of communism**.

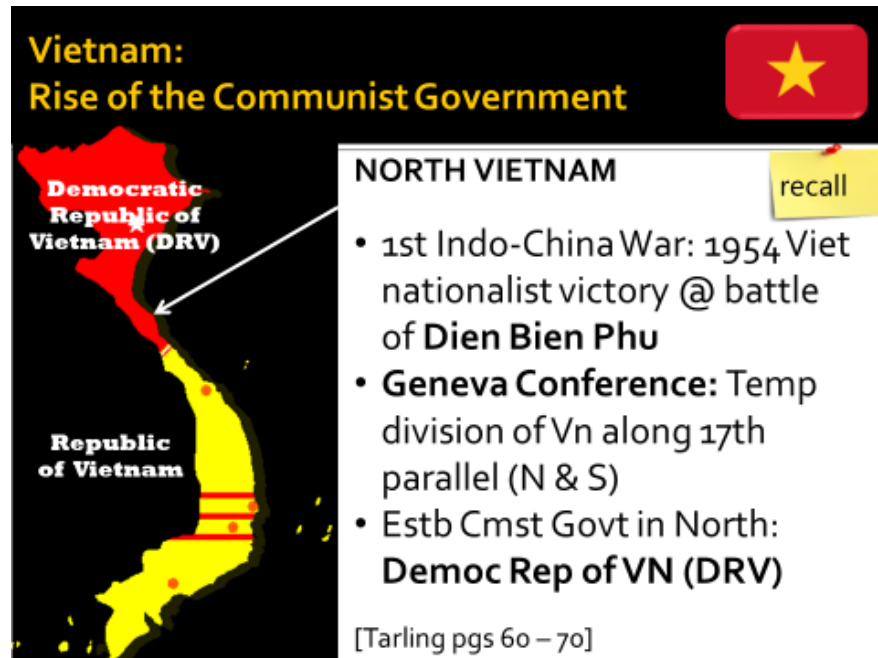
- By early 1945, the Vietminh leadership established a 'liberated zone' in the mountainous provinces of Tonkin under the leadership of their commander Vo Nguyen Giap.
  - Village heads stepped down and were replaced by communist-style People's Committees; this entrenched the Vietminh's influence in rural North Vietnam.
- When the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, the Vietminh seized power from the Japanese; Emperor Bao Dai - who had been installed by the Japanese - handed power over to Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh.
- In September 1945, Ho Chi Minh established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), with himself as president.
  - 10 out of 15 members from the cabinet were from the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP).
- Despite the groundswell of support for Ho and his party within North Vietnam, one of the greatest obstacles they faced was the lack of external support for the communist government.
- No country recognised the DRV at the point of its formation.

### 10.3 Cold War Developments

- In 1950, President Harry Truman approved National Security Council (NSC) Memorandum 64, proclaiming that French Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) was a key area that could not be allowed to fall to the communists and that the US would provide support against communist aggression in the area in terms of coordinating procurement, and dissemination of supplies and equipment. Accordingly, the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was dispatched to Saigon.
- In the long run, however, the French high command ignored the MAAG in formulating strategy, denied them any role in training, and refused to keep them informed of current operations and future plans.
- By 1952, the US would bear roughly one-third of the cost of the war the French were fighting, but find itself with very little influence over French military policy in Southeast Asia or the way the war was waged.
- Ultimately, the French were defeated at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu and withdrew from Vietnam. In 1964, MAAG Vietnam would be disbanded and its

advisory mission and functions integrated into the US Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), which had been established in February 1962.

- **1954: The Geneva Conference**



- At the conference, Paris declared Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) independent.
- Vietnam was temporarily divided at the 17th parallel, with the north controlled by the Vietminh, and the south controlled by the French.
- From 1955-1976, Vietnam was governed by two systems - the communist North under the Vietminh and the U.S.-controlled South.

## Final consolidation exercise

**Factors: Decolonisation experience, Role of local political elites, Role of the masses, Cold War Developments**

Which factor is most important and how are these factors connected?

