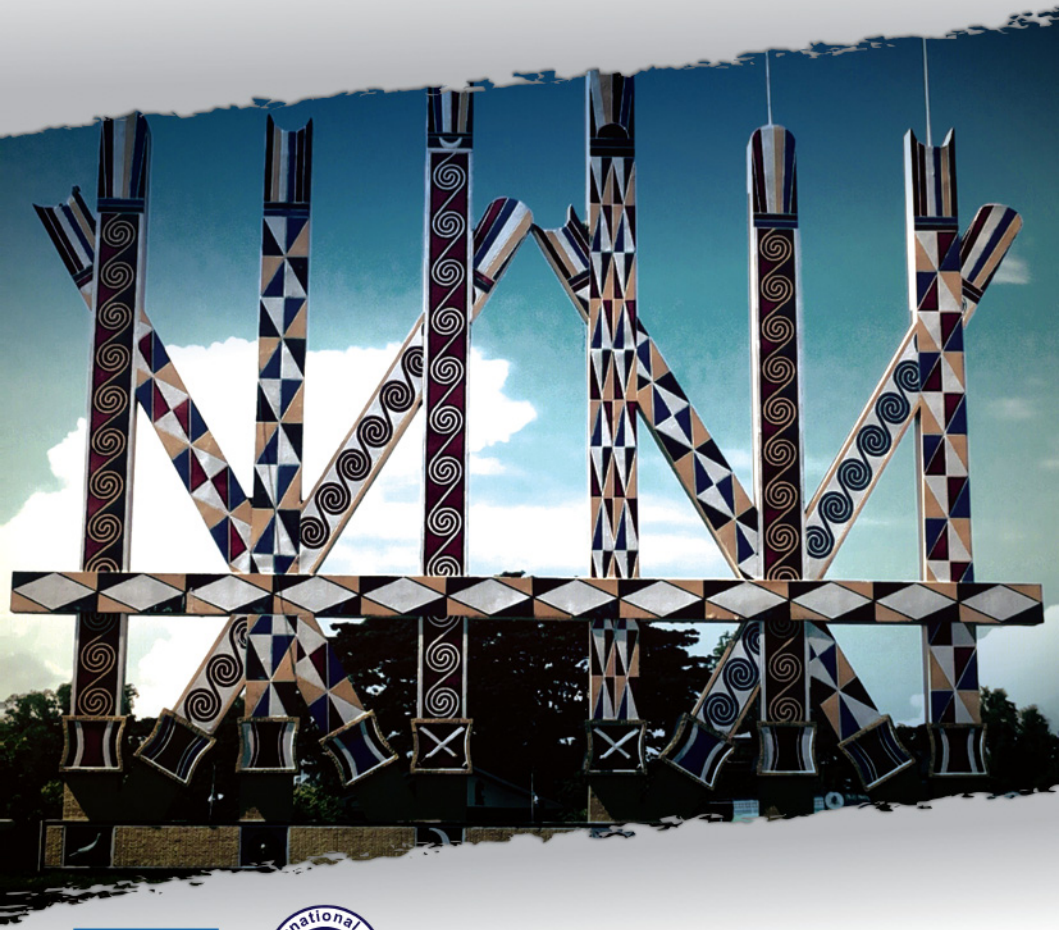
The Kachin Conflict

Testing the Limits of the Political Transition in Myanmar

Carine Jaquet



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While much has been written in the media about the legal, economic, and political reforms in Myanmar; academic research about the Kachin conflict, as well as firsthand information remains scarce. Analyzing the causes of the conflict and current impediments to peace in Kachin territories provides an illustration of the limits of the transition process. This research examines the personal experiences of a strong sample of influential Kachin people, shows the complexity of notions of war and peace in the collective Kachin memory, as well as the reinterpretation of these by local leadership for political ends.

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Notes

Throughout the document, the term "Burma" is used when the text refers to the country and "Burmese" for the people, before 1990. "Myanmar" is used for the country after this date, as the country was officially renamed in 1990. The same applies to "Rangoon" and "Yangon."

"Myanmar" refers to citizens of the country as a whole. "Bamar" is used to describe the ethnic group that has dominated governance of the country and is the most numerous in the country.

Contents

Introduction

The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and its armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), were among the first large ethnic armed groups to reach out and sign a ceasefire brokered by then-prime minister, General Khin Nyunt, in 1994. Yet, by mid-2011, while many other ethnic armed groups had joined the government's successful – and unprecedented – ceasefire initiatives, the KIA was returning to warfare. The shift in the KIO's attitude, from cooperation to one of outright hostility, stemmed from various political issues analyzed in this research. This conflict results from the constant frustrations among a number of Kachin leaders and their perception of aggression coming from the central government.

In the wider context, the conflict in Kachin State should not be misinterpreted as an isolated series of events caused by a handful of disillusioned ethnic leaders. In fact, the real reasons are more emblematic of attempts by successive governments to dominate minority ethnic populations, create a unified country and identity, and also take control of the territory vis-a-vis natural resources. To understand the current situation and explain the motivations of key players, it is crucial to explore the fundamental misunderstandings between the two sides, summed up in the contrasting hopes of the Bamar-dominated central government, and ethnic groups at the outer edges of the country. There are a number of similarities between the root causes of this conflict and those experienced by other ethnic minorities in the country for decades. The KIO's key claims bear a likeness to those of other ethnic armed groups demanding, for several decades, the devolution of political power. Through extensive field work including interviews and a comprehensive review of media reports and academic literature, this paper explores some aspects of the origins of Kachin politics and analyzes the root causes of conflict as well as the divergent views of the key players.

The roots of the conflict in Kachin State between the KIO and government troops go back to grievances over control of the territory (and its lucrative

natural resources) and the preservation of ethnic identity after the end of British colonial rule in 1948. At the 1947 Panglong Conference, the Kachin along with Shan and Chin representatives agreed in negotiations led by General Aung San to the formation of a Union of Burma in return for promises of full autonomy in internal administration and an equal share in the country's wealth. The Panglong Agreement, signed on February 12, 1947 – now celebrated as Union Day in Myanmar – granted "full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas" (the colonial administrative term for borderlands) in principle, and provided for the creation of a Kachin State by the country's Constituent Assembly. But the promised autonomy and wealth-sharing failed to materialize and the Panglong Agreement later took on a mythical dimension. After the assassination of General Aung San and the Independence of the country, a series of rebellions among various ethnic groups intensified the atmosphere of growing mutual suspicion. During the late 1950s and 1960s, the Kachin, along with other ethnic minorities, finally rebelled amid growing discontent and a sense of betrayal prevailed over perceptions that the Rangoon-based government was ignoring ethnic interests and realities. A new border demarcation agreement with China, and the promulgation of Buddhism as the state religion, upset a number of Christian minorities, including the Kachin. In 1961, a group of young Kachin nationalists established the Kachin Independence Organization and started what became known as the first Kachin armed conflict. In the following year, 1962, a military coup led by General Ne Win set the seal on growing mistrust of the central government among several ethnic groups and ushered in decades of conflict. As an efficient fighting force, the KIO quickly gained control over large areas of Kachin and Northern Shan States. Alongside a number of military truces, KIO leaders took part in various rounds of ceasefire negotiations with the Rangoon-based military regime in the early 1980s. It was not until 1994, however, that a substantive ceasefire agreement was struck. The ceasefire was maintained from 1994 to 2011, a period during which a number of Kachin and Bamar leaders were able to improve their economic circumstances thanks to the exploitation of natural resources such as jade, gold, teak, and others. Increasingly, large Myanmar businesses profited from the situation and the region was militarized, creating tensions and a context favorable to the building up of popular support for resistance. Still hoping to achieve sustainable and mutually agreeable political arrangements, Kachin representatives demonstrated keenness to become involved in a political dialogue and even participated in the decade-long National Convention process that ended with the drafting of the country's controversial 2008 Constitution, in a period during which a number of other ethnic armed groups were still fighting the military junta. However, Kachin representatives maintain that they were allowed no significant input, and

that little attention overall was paid during the drafting process to addressing ethnic grievances.

In many cases under successive military regimes from the early 1980s, ethnic complaints were deepened by official neglect or betrayal of earlier pledges. In the lead-up to the 2010 elections, the military junta backtracked on earlier promises to the KIO and other ethnic armed groups, demanding they transform their armed units into "Border Guard Forces" (BGF) under control of the Tatmadaw - the Myanmar Armed Forces. The KIA refused to accept the ultimatum. As a result of the stand-off over the border guard dispute, the government's Union Election Commission refused to register a Kachin political party led by former KIO leaders to contest the general election of 2010, and shortly afterwards, the government declared the ceasefire null and void, setting the stage for a resurgence of hostilities.

After seventeen years of ceasefire, a minor skirmish near the Taping River hydroelectric project on June 9, 2011 became the ultimate trigger for the resumption of war. Within a few days, violence escalated and thousands had to flee their homes. Soon after, the fighting spread to eastern and southern areas of Kachin State. Amid fierce fighting, government troops managed within less than two years to reclaim a number of strategic locations formerly under KIA control, including the vicinity of the KIA headquarters at Laiza, securing access to strategic locations including lucrative jade mines around Hpakant, about eighty miles west of Myitkyina. More than 100,000 civilians had to flee their homes due to fighting or fear of it.

Fighting in Kachin state flared back up just months after President Thein Sein came to power in March 2011.The new civilian government almost immediately began negotiating a series of peace agreements with ethnic armed groups declaring that a nationwide ceasefire with all ethnic armed groups would be a priority for this first civilian administration, to be signed under his tenure. After fighting escalated in Kachin State in late 2012, both sides finally began uneasy rounds of talks. In May 2013, the KIO signed a tentative agreement, although it stopped short of a ceasefire. While fighting largely subsided in most of the major ethnic areas from early 2012, tensions between the KIA and government troops continued to simmer, erupting in local-level conflicts in pockets of Kachin and Northern Shan States, generating suspicion over the government's stated intentions to achieve peace. Central to the Kachin position have been persistent doubts about whether Minister U Aung Min, a key reformist from the President's Office team who has largely led the talks since 2013, is really able to make commitments regarding military aspects of a peace

agreement while not being officially in control of the Tatmadaw. Since resuming the old conflict with the government, KIO leaders have insisted on political dialogue to officially reach a degree of political autonomy, in line with the aspirations of the Panglong Agreement.

By convincing the majority of groups involved in armed struggle against the Tatmadaw to sign ceasefire agreements, the predominantly civilian government of President Thein Sein succeeded in winning some credibility, both nationally and internationally. But amid this striking shift, it is also important to consider how three inextricably interwoven but highly delicate reform processes are at the heart of the emerging new dynamic: political change, economic transformation, and the peace process. At the same time, several old fault lines have re-emerged, among them the conflict in Kachin and Northern Shan States. To all sides in the peace process, the rekindling of this old conflict serves as a powerful reminder of the fragility of certain aspects of the transition process led by the Myanmar (quasi) civilian administration. Yet, the conflict does not appear to have a significant impact on the economic reforms since extraction of natural resources in Kachin State continues amidst fighting. Besides, a large volume of business is done at Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw levels, so these important centers experience a very marginal impact from the conflict.

The setback to conflict and blockage of peace process with the KIO shows that some structural political issues remain, such as the recognition of local power structures and decentralization. National reconciliation will require a significant shift in attitudes of all parties and ability to compromise. The fact that some of these pivotal issues have not been addressed for more than four years after the new government took over its functions invites questioning of the depth of the contemporary political transition. Obviously, each ethnic political and armed group has its own (vested) interests in negotiating peace with Nay Pyi Taw. Some wish to end an armed conflict that has lasted several decades as a priority. They consider that the political dialogue has been initiated with the peace talks and that sustainable political arrangements will follow. Others, like the KIO, doubt that the ceasefire agreements systematically pave the way to negotiation of further decentralization and officially secure increased political power. They have experienced decades of political stalemate and hence demand stronger guarantees from President Thein Sein and his Tatmadaw. The pivotal issues raised by the KIO tackle the most sensitive areas such as the future of the ethnic armed groups and potential reform within the army, the long term arrangements for redistribution of national resource income, and the degree of political autonomy ethnic minority groups can expect in the newly born democratic system. The KIO is currently testing the depth of the political will for

peace in a government that is mainly made of former junta members and military officers but also has leading reformers who clearly appear in favor of a peace deal as soon as possible. Starting in 2013, a number of military attacks interfering with – and apparently contradicting - the peace process created, for a number of domestic and international observers, the impression that there is a difference of intent between the civilian administration and the military leadership, while the KIO has been perceived as unwilling to strike a peace deal. Thus, analyzing the causes of the conflict and current impediments to peace in Kachin territories provides an illustration of the limits of the transition process. Ultimately, the findings highlight certain trends of continuity in the role played by the Armed Forces in politics since Independence.

While much has been written in the media about the legal, economic, and political reforms in Myanmar; academic research about the Kachin conflict, as well as firsthand information remains scarce. This research attempts to highlight a more nuanced reality, mainly through data collected in the field. It illustrates the personal experiences and beliefs of a strong sample of influential Kachin people, and also examines the Kachin's reinterpretation of those experiences and beliefs for political purposes. It indicates the complexity of Bamar-Kachin relations through modern history, the roots of mistrust, misunderstandings, and fundamentally diverging points of view. The overall objective of this paper is to question, and in some cases deconstruct, some overly simplistic versions of the current armed conflict by proposing a more empathic vision of the local realities. As the following sections present a number of unpublished sources, their content can inform future research on the dynamics of the conflict in the area and its protraction, and provide unique firsthand material to support practitioners to understand an under-documented and seldom independently analyzed situation. These experiences of the conflict show the complexity of notions of war and peace in the collective Kachin memory, as well as the reinterpretation of these by local leadership for political ends.

After presenting briefly some salient elements of the Kachin context, this paper aims at highlighting historical, cultural, social, and economic dimensions of the current conflict, through the lenses of personal experiences of those who directly contributed and experienced it. This requires examining the ways Kachin individuals, communities, and leaders live, perceive, and speak about the conflict. Each side felt deceived by the other at various points over the years leading up to recent hostilities. Both miscalculated the price of war in terms of economic, human, and political costs; and both utilized armed force as a way to force their political agenda on the other side. Media coverage of the conflict in Kachin State from media outlets inside the country has been relatively scant and

poor due to language barriers; safety and security issues; difficulties and cost associated with accessing conflict areas; and state-ownership and control of TV and radio stations by government affiliates. Ethnic media report regularly from the conflict areas via radio and online media but are widely seen as politically partisan. Overall, it appears that the Kachin political opposition has been perceived by Bamar as difficult to deal with, while government-friendly or nationalistic media have generally portrayed the Nay Pyi Taw administration as enthusiastically pursuing peace through its nationwide ceasefire plan.

This research, which was first commissioned by an international organization working on the peace process in Myanmar, proposes an analysis of the views, appeals, and experiences of war and peace in Kachin areas at a certain point in time. It is based on observations, interviews, and primary and secondary sources in English, Myanmar, Jinghpaw, Lisu, and Shan languages – including media, academic papers, and various unpublished sources. It encompasses analyses based on data collection in various locations in Kachin and Northern Shan States between May 2009 and December 2013. It also relies on over a decade of study, research, interviews, and observations of Myanmar by the Myanmar-language-proficient author. A number of the sources have been collected during missions conducted by the author for professional purposes, while she was working for international organizations in the aid sector in these geographic areas. A particular challenge in the data collection process was gaining access to official primary sources (both Tatmadaw and government); however this was counterbalanced by interviews and open sources used to inform the analysis. The paper focuses on the experiences of political and religious leaders, civilians, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). It also has a particular focus on KIO/KIA's views, as the main political and armed group among the Kachin opposition. Most of the interviews quoted in this research have been conducted with members of the Burmese and Kachin political, military, and religious elites, within both government and KIO controlled areas. The paper does not aim at proposing a comprehensive summary of the varied views of the Kachin people, but rather at highlighting some perspectives, with a particular focus on those of decision-makers. As such, it is a canvas of testimonies, an unprecedented documentation of the Kachin conflict experience at a point in time. It highlights some aspects of the Kachin politics, through personal lenses. Hence, the methodology used is closer to the participant observation approach found in anthropology than the purist external observer tendency of political sciences. This methodology has been chosen as the author feels that these original testimonies, in various meaningful contexts, have an intrinsic value. The present paper aims at providing a picture of the situation, during a limited period of time, between the resumption of the conflict (June

2011) and the end of the research work (July 2014), in a particularly fluid political context.

The first part, based on secondary sources, succinctly describes some aspects of the Kachin historical and social contexts with particular attention to the emergence of the modern Kachin political formulation. This contributes to illustrating the relationship between Kachin political identity and armed conflict, as it became a justification for gaining control over a resource-rich and strategically important territory. The research then focuses on data collected in the field and presents the various empirical experiences and re-interpretation of the conflict in a highly politicized, and polarized, context. It demonstrates hardly reconcilable views of the past and present conflict, the KIO's view to pursue the same struggle since the 1960s, as well as the KIO's perception of being isolated and under attack. In the last part, the research proposes an explanation of the various hindrances to peace, as well as some economic and political incentives for the warring parties to postpone ending the current armed struggle. By exploring a number of hindrances to peace, and the elements of continuity in the Kachin claims, the paper attempts to explore some limits of the current political transition in Myanmar.

Chapter 1
Kachin history, perceptions, and beliefs: contextual elements

The population of Kachin State people is estimated to comprise approximately 3 percent of Myanmar's total population, according to preliminary results of the 2014 census, although not all areas could be surveyed due to the conflict, and final results have not yet been made public. Kachin State, which borders both India and China, is the country's northernmost region and the furthest point from Yangon. Most members of the Kachin ethnic groups are located in Kachin State although their presence can also be found in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, India, and in Yunnan, China. Nonetheless, the ethnonym "Kachin" is only used for those populations based in northern Myanmar, i.e., Kachin State, the north-western part of Shan State, and Sagaing Division. In Kachin State, Kachin populations live alongside Shan, Bamar, and some Rakhine (especially in the mining areas like Hpakant) peoples. Descendants of Nepalese, Indians, and Chinese can also be encountered there. In spite of their political weight, the Kachin are currently a minority in Kachin State, accounting for about only 38 percent of the population; Bamar and Shan are the other main ethnic groups in the region (Holliday 2010: 119).[1]

Aspects of the local culture – such as the language, religion and cultural habits – have been reified for political purposes, to forge a common feeling of belonging. As with other minority groups in Myanmar, these elements contribute to shaping the identity. For political leaders, they offer, since the creation of an independent Myanmar, a means for developing narratives that are fundamentally distinct from those of the Bamar people. Ethnic identity has been

[1] Along with Mon State, Kachin State is one of the ethnic States where the main ethnic group is actually a numerical minority.

The Jinghpaw

As anthropologist Francois Robinne, director of the IRASEC, has noted, when asked about one's ethnic group, a "Jinghpaw" is more likely to say that he or she is "Kachin," than a "non-Jinghpaw," who would mention their own sub-group and, overall, be more reluctant to be called "Kachin" – not only because it reifies the dominance of the Jinghpaw group but also because the term is perceived as emanating from British and later Burmese authorities (Robinne, 2007: 62–63). Countrywide, the catch-all term "Kachin" has been increasingly used and Jinghpaw dominance in representation of the Kachin is apparent. The use of their language as a common medium of expression, and the prestige and wealth of some Jinghpaw clans, tends to put them in a position of greater power in relation to other Kachin sub-ethnic groups.

The notion of "clan" is still strongly correlated to the notion of "belonging." The actual number of clans and Kachin ethnic groups (often referred to by the Kachin as "tribes") is still subject to academic debate due to the porous nature of the categories and the confusion over clan names, ethnonyms and ethnic groups. It is commonly stated that there are five main Jinghpaw clans: the Marip, Maran, Nhkum, Lahpai, and Lahtaw. In addition, there are several sub-ethnic groups that tend to recognize themselves, or are recognized in some cases by external observers, as Jinghpaw, including the Lisu, Zaiwa, Lawngwaw Lachid, and Nung Lungmi (Robinne 2007: 64-65).

used to cement local power legitimacies and to maintain a degree of autonomy from the central government. Essential to the political context are concepts of Kachin identity and how closely those notions are linked to political issues and the struggle for power.

Since Myanmar gained independence, Kachin identity has been structured around various elements,especially its religion and language, that differentiate it from the Bamar ethnic majority. A "self-conscious" Kachin identity started to emerge with the arrival of Christian missionaries and British colonization in the late nineteenth century, as in other areas of the country and in other countries of Southeast Asia. The process gained momentum over the years, and by the time of Independence, the self-identification of peoples in Myanmar's border areas had become structured around the notion of ethnicity, with strong religious components. The complexity of Kachin identity and intra-ethnic group dynamics are based on selective historical facts and perceptions. These are instrumental in supporting the current conflict rationale for the Kachin, and their attitudes to conflict and peace.

The term "Kachin" itself appears to be recent in origin. Used since the late eighteenth century and only coming into widespread use since the nineteenth century, the term represents a complex, multi-ethnic reality. It commonly refers to a group of tribes recognizing themselves as, or having close relations with, the

Jinghpaw group of the Tibeto-Burmese ethnic family. This recognition involves the belief in shared forefathers of the various ethnic sub-groups (Hanson 1913: 13). Hence, the term "Kachin" usually includes the dominant Jinghpaw ethnic sub-group, but also the Lanwngwaw, Rawang, Lachid, Zaiwa, and, sometimes, Lisu groups (Robinne 2007: 59). Yet, these groups do not share the same native tongue, nor the same alphabet.

1 - The Panglong Agreement: unfulfilled promises of the post-Independence era

> "The Tatmadaw soldiers want to cover all our Kachinland […]. In the 1940's there was no Bamar in Kachin lands, no Burmese troops either, they came after Panglong." (Religious leaders' complaint to the United Nations Special Representative on Human Rights in Myanmar, Myitkyina, February 15, 2013).

During World War II (1939 - 1945), Burma became a major battlefield and in March 1942, the Japanese fascist troops took Rangoon and the British administration collapsed. The Burma Independence Army (BIA) led by a number of Bamar leaders, including General Aung San, the father of the current opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize awardee Aung San Suu Kyi, initially fought alongside the Japanese, as they considered this would free them from the British. Some ethnic groups (like the Kachin), trusting in promises of autonomy, remained loyal to the British. The BIA switched alliances and the Allies, with BIA support, won the war in July 1945. Once peace was restored, a particularly delicate task of the central administration was to bring the ethnic levies – including Kachin soldiers – back under its central control into a centralized army resembling the pre-war one.

Negotiations took place with the British to gain the country's independence. The political parties and ethnic groups each had their own vision and expectations on achieving Independence. Many armed groups had been formed throughout the country during and after World War II. The early post-war context presented some interesting similarities with the current one, including a diversity of views among the leaders from different ethnic groups that could be exposed in absence of authoritarian rule; the peace makers' challenges to capture and respond to numerous ethnic political demands; and finally the issue of demobilization of the combatants and their tentative reintegration.

When the British departed in 1948, traditional relationships between the center and the periphery, as well as between the ethnic minorities, dramatically evolved. Kachin region was placed under the direct administration of Rangoon for the first time in the country's history. The foundations of modern Burma, as a nation based on recently constructed ethnic identities, had already started. For the Kachin elites supportive of the KIO, political administration in pre-colonial history set the context, and provides material for a historical justification of the current conflict.

Kachin state was created on January 10, 1947, but administrative recognition from Rangoon was not followed by promised autonomy. In February 1947, a number of Bamar and ethnic leaders (including some Kachin) participated in the Panglong Agreement, an initiative led by Aung San that aimed to pressure the British to grant early independence to the country by demonstrating that Aung San could unite ethnic groups (Walton 2008). This Agreement was intended to pave the way for a constitution granting the Kachin, Chin, and Shan ethnic groups greater autonomy. But this project seems to have disappeared following Aung San's assassination later that year. Soon after, the government dismissed Kachin calls for autonomy, creating a view among Kachin that "Aung San's promises disappeared with him" (Manam 2011). Kachin leaders today see the Agreement as an unfulfilled obligation that lies at the core of their current grievances (Manam 2011).

The former vice chairman of the KIO, Dr. Manam Tu Ja, observed the following of the role played by Aung San, as captured now in the common Kachin memory:

> "To understand the current grievances of the KIO, one needs to go back to the Kachin pre-colonial history. Before the time of British colonization, all ethnic nationals were living separately from the Bamar in their own territories. But the British occupied the whole country, and since then, the ethnic groups became mixed. The government started to rule with one policy for the Bamar and another policy for the ethnic groups, with a dominion status for the Kachin. After the Second World War, General Aung San planned the Independence. The ethnic leaders accepted him because they wanted a federal union. He promised to give them self-determination and autonomous rights. They trusted Aung San. He showed he was standing for their cause with the promises of Panglong and the

visits he made to Shan and Kachin States. He could not write it up in the constitution as he was assassinated on the way."[2]

Nonetheless, other sources show that Aung San's priority was to maintain the unity of Myanmar as a nation, and some of his public statements reveal that his approach to ethnic politics may not have exactly converged with the Kachin political grievances. In a speech in Rangoon, in 1947, about the characteristics of a nationality, he expressed the opinion that the Kachin (referred to in the below extract as Jinghpaw) could not create a nation, because of inherent characteristics:

> "Whereas common language is an essential factor in a National Community, it is not so in a Political Community. Now, how many nationalities are we going to have in Burma? Strictly speaking there can be only one. Of course, there can be distinct races and tribes within the nation. They are called national minorities. Perhaps by stretching a point we may regard the Shan States as a National Community. But there are no other communities within Burma. For instance, the Jinghpaws. They do not possess all the requisite features of a nation. Particularly for economic reasons they cannot stand as a separate nation."[3]

Yet, it has become an accepted narrative for the Kachin that Aung San was supportive to their independence demands. This agreement was maintained as an almost mythical status and has driven nationalist messages. For example, in a public meeting organized on June 27, 2014, the representative of a group of local non-government organizations (NGOs) operating in Kachin and Northern Shan States gave their perspective of the current peace process, based on the reminder that the nation could only possibly be built according to the "spirit of the Panglong Convention."[4]

[2] Interview by the author in May 2013 in Myitkyina.
[3] Bogyoke Aung San's address at the convention held at the Jubilee Hall, Rangoon, on May 23, 1947, in Silverstein (1993: 156).
[4] Strategic Management Team (consortium of local NGOs) meeting in Yangon, June 2014.

2 - The context of the creation of the KIO

The Kachin and Shan States are resource-rich territories with abundant supplies of precious metals, gems, minerals, and timber. For this reason, the Kachin economy has drawn outside interest for centuries, creating opportunities to establish alliances, and triggering conflicts among the various ethnic groups.

After Independence in 1948, the political awareness of the Kachin leaders underwent a political transition, correlated to emerging territorial issues, particularly along their shared border with China. The Communist revolution in the newly proclaimed People's Republic of China followed Mao Zedong's defeat of Kuomintang troops in 1949. The Kachin found themselves under pressure due largely to movements of Kuomintang troops – covertly supported by the United States – across Myanmar's border into Northern Shan State, to seek refuge and to launch attacks into China. Throughout the 1950s, concerns over the activities of Kuomintang troops and border demarcation claims from China instilled long-lasting feelings of bitterness expressed by Kachin leaders (Kozicki 1957). Later, in 1960, when Myanmar's President Ne Win and Chinese leader Zhou Enlai signed a Boundary Agreement, some lands adjacent to the Chinese border passed to Chinese control, without prior Kachin consent. This, according to the British journalist Martin Smith (1993: 158), "was a major factor behind the sudden outbreak of the Kachin uprising."

Furthermore, Burma's then-prime minister U Nu decided to promulgate Buddhism as a "State Religion" in 1961, putting the majority-Christian Kachin leadership at odds with much of the country. General Ne Win, who seized power after a military coup, placed Buddhism at the center of nation-building and mixed in leftist ideology to create the country's political doctrine – the Burmese way to socialism. The rationale behind this choice can still be debated, as mentioned by professor of politics, Robert Taylor (2009: 290): "How much the state's leaders in the 1950s consciously used Buddhism as a religious weapon against state's rivals and how far they genuinely believed that the faith should be upheld to the state, cannot be known." Given their tenuous affiliation with a newly independent Burma, the Kachin felt that respect for their identity was at risk.

Meanwhile, tensions between the central government and Kachin leaders intensified as their political views diverged. On October 25, 1960, what was to become the most influential Kachin political institution, the KIO, was created by seven Kachin students studying at Rangoon University, with the declared goal "to retain the rights of the Kachin."[5] Some months later, the Kachin Independence Council met for the first time in Lashio in Shan State on February 5, 1961, which was subsequently named "Revolution Day" as the group decided to demand an independent state and "drive out external elements."[6] An armed wing, the KIA, was created by members of the Kachin Rifles who had experienced discrimination in the then Burma Independence Army (BIA) from leading Bamar officers (who had fought for independence alongside the Japanese in World War II). The KIA was initially led by a handful of veteran soldiers and former officers who fought alongside the allied forces, including the US Army (Robinne 2007: 259-261). At that time, the Burmese Army was struggling to unify and professionalize its forces (Callahan 2003). During its first years of existence, the KIA made quick progresses. According to Smith (1993: 191): "The KIO […] within a decade developed into one of the most successful and best organized of all armed opposition movements in Burma." Amid a rapid increase in its mobile battalions, the KIA took control of large and strategic areas along the Chinese border including the Hukawng Valley, Kamaing town, and areas of Northern Shan State (Smith 1993: 220, 251, 257).

According to the interviews, a considerable number of influential Kachin people gave their support to the KIO/KIA more often than not, depending on the fluidity of the context. They provided physical protection, basic services to the community, and, for some, economic opportunities. At times, they gained or lost legitimacy depending on the changes they brought in other people's lives, accumulation of wealth, and levels of violence experienced by the population. Following internal criticism over the KIO's lack of inclusiveness in the early 2000s, the KIO attempted to rectify this by launching public consultations on political decisions. This more participative model managed to secure a degree of legitimacy for the organization, without totally annihilating internal opposition to the leadership.

[5] Interview with the Technical Advisory Team Leader in Myitkyina, September 2013.
[6] Ibid.

The role of the Church in Kachin areas

Christianity progressively emerged as the main religion among the Kachin.[7] The Baptist religion was first brought to the animist Kachin by proselytizing foreign missionaries in the late eighteenth century, and became, during the second half of the twentieth century, the cornerstone of the modern Kachin identity. According to Mandy Sadan, the prolonged conflict in Kachin territories induced a modern nationalist ideological model of the Kachin people as mainly Christian. "This social ideology, often expressed by ethno-nationalists through the question that to be a Kachin nationalist one had to be a Christian started to become entrenched. This social ideology […] connected notions of threat to the security of the self to the narrative of Christian conversion. Opposition by the State to this belief became a symbol of the State assumed deep-seated antagonism to the Kachin peoples as a distinct community within the nation" (Sadan 2013: 346).

Today, it is estimated that more than 90 percent of the Kachin population are Christian and about two thirds of them are Baptists. The Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) is the most influential church and its influence goes well beyond merely religious activities. In most remote areas where the state hardly reaches, KBC became an essential service provider for the local populations, shaping an intricate church-society relationship, that is best described as a "patron-client" relationship (Médard 1976).[8] Nowadays, the KBC plays the pivotal role of a patron, and has developed strong relations with influential "clients" among local political and business leaders, but also ordinary members of the community who benefit from the church's influence and protection (Jaquet, forthcoming in 2015).

After the Independence of the country, Bamar leaders tended to view Christianity as a result of British colonial influence. Indeed, the bulk of the Christian population is composed of minority ethnic groups that were converted during the colonial era, including the Karen, Karenni, Chin, and Kachin. Many of these minorities supported the British administration and army. After Myanmar gained independence in 1948, such signs of foreign influence were seen negatively and often attracted discrimination.[9] Even today, religious minorities reportedly encounter a "glass ceiling" in civil services, Buddhist values are taught in public schools, and so on. Alongside demands for autonomy, these elements, seen as unwelcome foreign influence and colonial legacy, have most

[7] This not systematically the case of the Kachin populations found in Yunnan Province of China, many of whom are Buddhists.

[8] According to the definition proposed by the French political scientist Médard, the patron-client relationship is "a personal dependency relation unrelated to parenthood based on reciprocal exchange of favors between two persons, the patron and the client, who control uneven resources."

[9] For example, according to an interviewee who was living in Kachin areas during this period, the Tatmadaw, in the early 1960s, under General Ne Win, released and disseminated a propaganda leaflet titled "The burning question." This anti-Christian document was largely in reaction to the formation of the KIO/KIA. It asserted differences between Buddhists and Christians and justified the use of violence against the Christians.

likely exacerbated negative perceptions of Kachin aspirations among the Burmese leadership. Compounding grievances over such matters, under Ne Win's socialist nationalization policies, churches lost their assets and their authority to run schools. Such policies eroded much remaining trust among Kachin leaders in the government. A crackdown on religious freedom was a key initial cause of the conflict in the 1960s according to an informant who witnessed the steady deterioration of relations between Kachin leaders and central government in the 1950s.[10] Kachin religious leaders developed significant political power as they were often consulted by Kachin political leaders, during formal and informal meetings held before key decisions were made.

The KBC supported attempts by government and Kachin representatives to hold a dialogue in the 1980s (Lintner, 1997: 157), and in 1993-4, with religious leaders acting as mediators.[11]As in some other ethnic areas, the predominance of Christianity among the Kachin was recognized by the central state in the form of specific measures applied during the initial ceasefire agreement. For example, in the mid-2000s the Myanmar Army North-Western Regional Commander, Major General Ohn Myint, reportedly exempted Christians from forced labor on Sundays out of respect for Kachin Christian beliefs (Callahan, 2007: 43).

Since the resumption of the conflict in 2011, Churches have taken the lead in providing humanitarian assistance to the civilian victims of the war. While international aid organizations encountered the greatest difficulties in reaching out the majority of the displaced populations located in the KIO controlled areas, Churches were able to access the areas and organize continuous support. This was possible because they had the trust of both government and KIO. Practically, it meant that they managed to cross military check points of both the Tatmadaw and KIA, and – in some cases, battle lines. The most influential churches – i.e. the Baptist and the Catholic ones – have been by far the main aid providers for Kachin civilians. Starting with the first civilian displacements, they provided food as well as basic items but also physical protection to the Internally Displaced Persons, a practice that has been continued until today.

[10] Interview of the descendant of a foreign missionary in Yangon, April 2013. Also see Smith (1993: 180 -183).

[11] Interviews conducted by the author in Myitkyina showed that a Catholic priest, Father Thomas, played a crucial role in creating negotiation space between the warring parties. Due to health issues, he was not able to finalize the process and handed over responsibility to the then chairman of the KBC, Reverend Saboi Jum, in the early 1990s.

3 - From post-Independence disillusionment to the first armed conflict (1961 – 1994)

In the post-Independence environment, Kachin claims for greater political autonomy soon emerged. The early years, under a fledgling national legislature in the early 1950s, were characterized by an overall feeling of insecurity as militia groups spread dramatically throughout the country, while elements within the army were attempting to reform its structure to secure the new country (Callahan 2003).

By the early 1960s, the Tatmadaw had managed to contain a number of anti-government insurgent movements but its officers assumed the role of sole "state-builders," leaving a legacy of mistrust among the population, both ethnic and Bamar (Callahan 2003). There was then a distinct hardening of positions on the question of autonomy among non-Bamar ethnic groups that was threatening the unionist project of the armed forces. Later, the central government attempted to implement cultural and religious "harmonization" programs in order to impose Bamar values on ethnic populations (Berlie 2005).In Kachin State, this generated a deep and lasting resentment against the central government. As mentioned above, the nationalization of schools was a key factor in fuelling conflict as it antagonized many Kachin, who blamed the central Bamar administration for seizing Church assets and objected when the language of teaching in the country's schools and universities was changed from English to Burmese all over the country in the early 1960s. According to an interview of the descendant of a foreign missionary in September 2013 in Yangon, these schools, initially created by missionaries, were highly valued by the Kachin people. When the land, buildings, and funds were taken back without prior consultation, this angered the local communities engendering ill-will towards the central state. They felt their culture was threatened, and some leaders promoted the armed conflict as a way to defend it.

A personal account of the first Kachin war,
Interview with an elder, by the author in Myitkyina, September 2013

According to an interviewee from Northern Shan State: "The current situation can last for a hundred years because it has already been like this for more than fifty years. It started in 1961 with the previous fighting. The KIA was quite weak at that time. It did not own modern weaponry but they were powerful because the members were very united. At that time, the KIA soldiers did not forcibly recruit young people to become combatants. Everybody joined the fights willingly and soldiers had a real commitment to their cause.

At that time, I was a high school student in Kutkai [Northern Shan State]. One day, after singing quarrels at the church, I was with my friends, walking back to our boarding house. We were all together about fifteen students. We meet a KIA officer on the road and had a discussion with him. He asked us whether we would be interested to join the KIA troops. He said we could fight to free Kachin State from the Burmese oppression. That was in 1961. […] It was the first time I had really encountered a KIA soldier. Soon after, during the conflict, the police captured all the Kachin students in our town and put them in jail in order to stop them from joining the KIA. I managed to escape then, and fled to another town, in order to continue my studies.

At that time, the Bamar police officers looked down on the Kachin people. They treated us as if we were just idiots. Then, progressively, the Tatmadaw soldiers came in greater number to Kachin areas; they had more ammunition to fight the KIA troops. They hoped to overrun KIA easily, but they have failed to defeat it. It took them time. Up until now, fifty years later, they [KIA and Tatmadaw] are still fighting."

The first phase of conflict between the Tatmadaw and KIA broke out in 1961 and lasted 33 years. According to an interview conducted in the late 1980s with Brang Seng, KIO chairman from 1976 to 1994, the only possible resolution of the armed conflict had to be a political negotiation. Once again, his account resonates with the current views of Kachin partisans:

> "All have seen that during the last 26 years Ne Win has spent half the nation's budget in this — in wars against the ethnic revolutionary fighters. But he cannot do that — he cannot win the war. Although we cannot capture Rangoon and Mandalay, he cannot defeat us. So the problem of ending the war is not on the battlefield, it should be on the table (Jagan and Smith 1994)."

During this conflict, short-lived truces were agreed in 1963, 1972, and1981. Later, in the 1990s, various Kachin armed groups signed ceasefire agreements with the then-military government, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). The government gave to these territories a new temporary status, as

"Special Regions" to which were initially promised specific support for development. Although this aid hardly materialized, the ethnic armed groups were given business opportunities with the Bamar leadership (Transnational Institute 2009). Peace agreements were signed with: the New Democratic Army – Kachin[12] in Special Region 1 on December 15, 1989; the Kachin Defense Army in Special Region 5[13], Shan State, on January 13, 1991; and the 4th Brigade in Special Region Number 2, Kachin State, on February 24, 1991. Finally, the largest faction, the KIO, signed a ceasefire on February 24, 1994, after several months of negotiations in which the government offered more concessions than in previous, failed, rounds (Taylor 2009). The final ceasefire document was kept secret for decades at the request of the government, presumably to avoid other armed groups demanding similar privileges, as other ceasefire agreements were never put in writing. Point 11 of the KIO Cease Fire Agreement created hopes for greater autonomy in the future and political involvement of KIO leaders as it says, "Following the successful implementation of this first phase, the second phase will be marked by continued negotiations on the question of the KIO's legal involvement in the new constitution of the Union of Myanmar and of the resettlement and rehabilitation of the KIO members." Both parties agreed on the principle of launching a political dialogue phase. After the junta was renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), in 1997, and its seven-step "Roadmap to Democracy" was unveiled, in 2003, it asked the KIO to wait for political dialogue until the last step of the "Roadmap" was achieved (the drafting of a new Constitution, holding elections, and setting up a parliament and a civilian government).

The peace agreement, though vaguely worded, mainly focused on military matters such as troop positions. There was no provision for an independent monitoring mechanism, and no agreed demarcation or separation of the troops from each side. Yet, it produced high expectations among the KIO who regarded it as an official recognition by the state that political power-sharing would follow. It can be inferred that, because of these expected concessions, the KIO was keen to collaborate while waiting for the future democratic government to grant it more autonomy. In the meantime, the KIO operated like a local government in some areas, described by some as a "State within the State"

[12] The New Democratic Army – Kachin (NDA-K) was a faction of the former Communist Party of Burma established in 1989 after the collapse of the CPB. It is considered to have close relations with the Myanmar military and Chinese governments.

[13] The Kachin Democratic Army (KDA) was a break-away faction from the KIA's 4th Brigade formed in 1990.

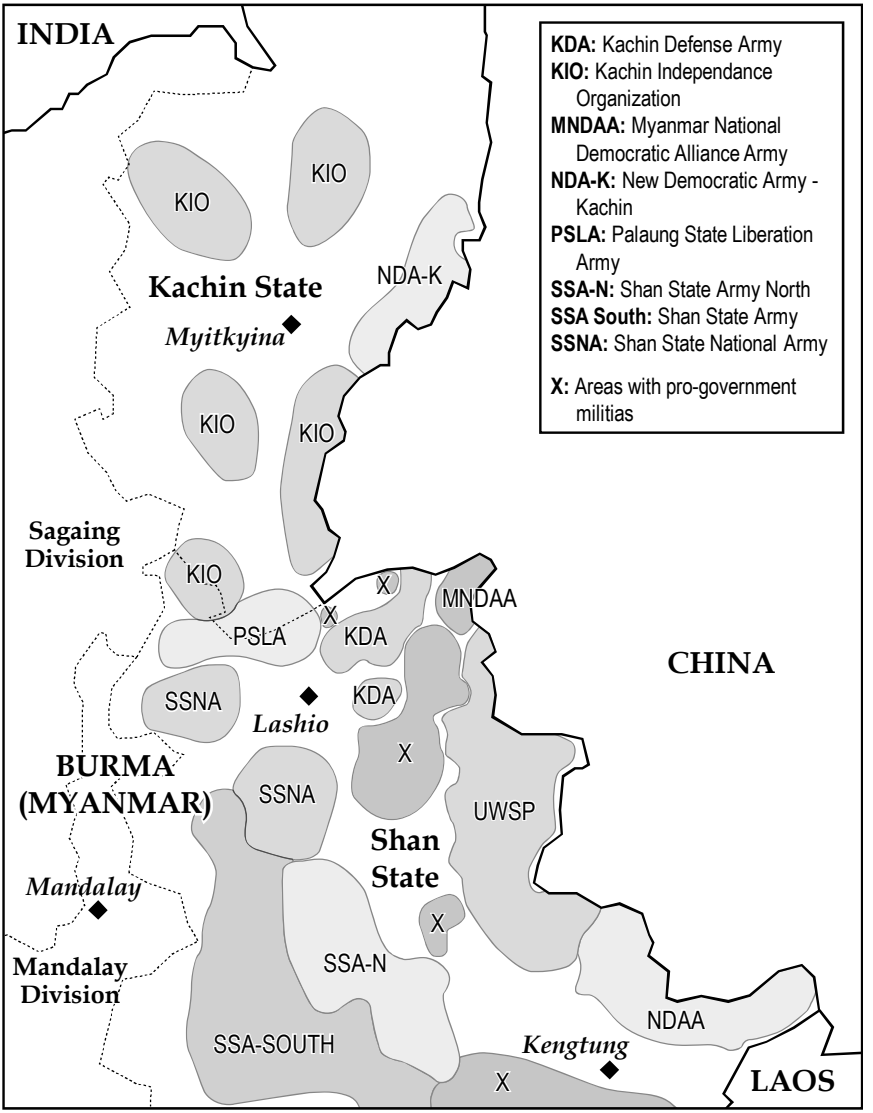
(Callahan 2007: 42). For example, the KIO managed its own education (including primary and secondary schools) and healthcare systems.

The KIO intermittently participated in the decade-long National Convention to draw up a new constitution, hoping to influence its content. In 2001, the KIO presented a 19-point proposal requesting self–determination, a state-based constitution, and resolution of issues around regional governance and authority. But the junta did not respond and its silence contributed to the antagonism of the KIO leadership. Yet, despite increasing frustration, the KIO continued to engage in the National Convention that resumed in 2007 chaired by the then Lt. General Thein Sein himself, currently president of Myanmar.[14] During these years although other political ethnic groups walked out of the Convention (such as the Shan delegates of main opposition party, the National League for Democracy, in February 2005, after the arrest of key party leaders), the Kachin continued their participation, lending legitimacy to the process. But the 2008 Constitution did not end up reflecting the KIO's inputs. And they isolated themselves from other ethnic armed groups that had opted for armed opposition over peace parleys.

Nonetheless, prior to the 2010 general election, the KIO continued to push its demands and maintained hopes that its claims for autonomy would be incorporated into future governance arrangements. Relations with the government deteriorated in the lead-up to the 2010 poll, when the KIO-backed Kachin State Progressive Party's (KSPP) attempt to register as a political party was rejected by the Union Election Commission. The official reason for this rejection was that the party was headed by KIO senior member Dr. Manam Tu Ja, although he in fact resigned from his position as vice chairman of the KIO, along with five KIO central committee members, in order to enable their participation to the elections. This move was allegedly intended to punish the KIO for its refusal to support the government's proposal to turn its armed wing, the KIA, into a Border Guard Force (BGF), under a plan revealed in April 2009 to bring all ethnic armed groups under the control of the Tatmadaw (Euro-Burma Office 2010). The elections were held without the KSPP or, indeed, any Kachin political party representing the KIO ideas contesting, and both sides started to prepare for renewed conflict. The Union Solidarity Development Party (USDP) ran Kachin candidates with military and business backgrounds with close relations with the regime.

[14] Euro-Burma Office (2010).

Figure 1: Armed Groups in Kachin and Northern Shan areas (indicative map)



This map shows the complexity of the armed groups' situation in 2009 in Kachin and Northern Shan States, where a multitude of armed groups control of territories and trade along the Chinese border (Source: TNI 2009)

This increasing radicalization of a number of Kachin individuals was rooted in disillusionment after a succession of political disappointments. It was also encouraged by generational changes within the KIO leadership in the KIO/KIA since the early 2000s. Following the chairmanship of Chairman Zaw Mai (between 1994 and 2001), critics within younger cadres emerged. New leaders realized that their organization's image had been severely damaged due to the behavior of some leaders who had accumulated significant wealth through "cronyism," including close ties with Barmar military commanders and businessmen, under the post-1994 ceasefire (Woods 2011). A new leadership style was adopted in the KIO/KIA, with the emergence of a "Young Turks" leadership under Chairman Gun Maw. Consultations with community representatives were launched on a number of matters, including participation in the 2010 elections. Today, such broad-based consultations are still held – a factor, according to some Bamar sources, that makes peace negotiations more difficult as the Kachin leadership wants to show more inclusiveness. In order to get the majority of constituents on board for key political decisions, it must take into account public opinion.

A number of sticking points have recurred in political negotiations with the successive governments since the inception of the KIO/KIA. The history of politics in Kachin territories shows a tradition of self-administration that was, until Independence, unchallenged by Burmese central authorities, even though the Kachin clans had links with regional powers and did not live in total isolation. Kachin political representations are still anchored in these past models, forged through clan-based alliances and local-level agreements. The emergence half a century ago of the Kachin nationalist independence movement is based on this version of the history and explains the more recent hardening of the Kachin position including efforts to bolster identity, entwining such notions with cultural, religious, and political projects. Understanding this position of the Kachin leadership is pivotal to building a long-term reconciliation process that would provide an alternative to more separatist projects.

An illustration of Kachin nationalist movements' frustrations

The frustrations among the Kachin leadership increased during the year that led up to the outbreak of the conflict as demonstrated by the transcript, presented below, of the KIO, Kachin National Organization, and Kachin National Council Statement issued on 48th Anniversary of Kachin Revolution Day, February 2, 2009. This statement illustrates that the frustrations are both generated by the SPDC, but also by some internal disagreements among the leadership.

"1. Today, after 48 years we are still confronted with a high-handed Military rule in the land of our forebears that denies the inherent rights of the people and freedom that was already achieved under Independence.
2. In the pursuit of peace and prosperity in the last 48 years, much has been sacrificed in human lives and treasure, in the honor and glory of our land.
3. Today, on the 48th year of revolution, we have not achieved the stated goal of regaining freedom, but have lost ground in the occupied regions.
4. A few leaders, who have become interested in their own welfare, decline to discuss or initiate talk about the purpose or mission, but instead placate the enemy for personal gain. Now a time has come for the people to realize that there is no consensus of unity of purpose in the leadership.
5. The ceasefire agreement with the SPDC had not produced peace and progress, but a regression that allowed the rampant spread of HIV/AIDS and other treatable diseases in the indigenous population which had lost the battle of social justice and to suffer the depletion of their natural resources.
6. We can no longer ignore or overlook what is happening all around us. The injustice inflicted upon our people calls for action and this is to be accomplished by uniting all the people in uprooting the enemy from our land."

(KIO Central Committee, Kachin National Council, and Kachin National Organization 2009).

Chapter 2
Contemporary experiences paving the path to war

> "The President Thein Sein, whenever he visits other countries, mentions the peace process. Sometimes he says that the armed struggle is due to extreme nationalists who have economic interests. He invites foreign investors to come to Myanmar. He thinks that if foreign direct investment increases, the armed groups will be satisfied and that they would be inclined to give peace a chance. His view does not reflect the reality. Armed struggle is not about money, it's not because we don't have any food to eat. It's about political struggle, to retain our rights and to get others their rights." Statement by a KIO representative from the Technical Assistance Team Office, supporting the peace process, Myitkyina, 2013.

As in many other conflicts, the protagonists do not share a common view of the root causes of the conflict. Overall, Kachin's narratives and accounts are more widely publicized, and easier to find, in comparison to the very scarce government sources that document their rationale – beyond the Border Guard Forces issue – for reengaging in armed conflict. A number of Kachin representatives have expressed frustration over the years, claiming that the actual causes of conflict have neither been properly identified, nor considered or analyzed by the government. Many feel they have made all possible efforts to engage with the government, hence their initial reluctance to re-start a process of negotiation in which a ceasefire is the first concrete step and modalities of political dialogue remain undefined. After discussing three main themes of the conflict (military, political, and ideological natures, respectively), the events leading to an escalation of the conflict will be examined in the following section. While most of the ethnic armed groups have laid down weapons, the KIO has returned to armed struggle and war. While this move seems to go against the

mainstream of the current political transformation of the country, it actually highlights a shortcoming of this process, and tests its limits.

1 - The causes of conflict

According to the field research, the contemporary conflict is the result of a mix of factors. Among the factors identified that triggered it, three pivotal elements – military, political, and ideological – precipitated the current armed conflict involving the KIO/KIA.

1. Militarily, pivotal to the re-ignition of the conflict was the failure to enforce the 1994 ceasefire, with both sides accusing each other of disrespecting the agreement. In addition, for the KIO, the ceasefire did not bring about the requested political dialogue. The build-up of Tatmadaw troops in areas surrounding KIA-controlled territory during the ceasefire period, and more importantly prior to June 2011, created additional security concerns for the KIO. The BGF ultimatum threatened the KIA leadership and caused an aggressive military response. Both parties thought that the conflict would bring victory.
2. Politically, both parties have been unable to reach pragmatic and lasting political compromises during the ceasefire period. Rivalry and mistrust exist between the two sides, over a number of issues, including the question of natural resource sharing. A number of Bamar cronies and political leaders have benefited from economic deals that arose from the war economy.
3. Ideologically, KIO thought it could gain more authority by refusing to bend to the government ultimatum. The government could not indefinitely let the ethnic armed groups take profit from control of the border and trade. It seems that there was a miscalculation of the duration and costs (political, financial, and in terms of human lives) of war by belligerents, each of who believed fighting was the best way to reach their political objectives. On the Kachin side, the conflict is linked to nationalist feelings that were at play when defending their turf and community.

The following section examines in greater detail and sheds light on current academic research on these military, political, and ideological factors that paved the way to the current conflict.

The military breach of the 1994 ceasefire

The overarching factor that led to the return of war in Kachin populated territories was the failure on both sides to enforce the 1994 ceasefire, demonstrating a failure to reach a mutually advantageous and enforceable agreement.[15] A number of contemporary issues related to security and politics in Kachin State have their roots in the limited and opaque 1994 agreement. This ceasefire was narrowly focused on military aspects of peace-making, such as troop positions and demarcations of areas of control. It also agreed to the establishment of KIO delegations in Myitkyina, Bhamo, and Kutkai (Northern Shan State) as well as twenty-two liaison offices throughout Kachin and Shan States and in Mandalay, to facilitate communications between both sides. From the perspectives of Kachin leaders, the ceasefire experience did not successfully bring peace. Yet, these leaders enjoyed largely unchallenged governance over large and often lucrative and strategic swathes of the territory. In contrast, for the Tatmadaw, this period enabled the deployment of more troops to secure the northern areas of the national territory and ensure better preparedness in case of future conflict.

For both parties (including those who economically benefited from the ceasefire), it enabled a temporary "limbo" situation between conflict and ceasefire – or a time of "no peace, no war."[16] This was a period characterized by what the peace theorist Johan Gatlung refers to as a "structural violence." (Galtung 1969). KIO leaders tend to re-examine this period in light of the rekindling of the conflict. Although the level of violence during the 1994-2011 period was low overall, sporadic violence was still perpetuated in some areas by Kachin armed factions and the Tatmadaw. Even though the majority of the Kachin people did not directly experience physical violence during these years, it is *a posteriori* referred to by many Kachin as a period of "violence and exploitation."[17] Documentation reveals that, in some areas, people had to continuously cope with post-conflict issues, for example, reports of landmines being laid by private companies exploiting natural resources,[18] militarization

[15] This is a cause of war in many other contexts according to political theorists, see Jackson and Morelli (2009).
[16] Regarding some comparable dynamics, but in the context of a more comprehensive peace agreement in Northern Ireland, see Mc Ginty, Muldoon, and Fergusson (2007).
[17] See above text box: "An illustration of Kachin nationalist movements' frustrations".
[18] This was reported by a resident of Sumprabun Township to the author in early 2011. Landmines were used by some Myanmar-owned companies in extractive industries to demarcate their land and discourage local populations from trespassing.

with increased presence of Tatmadaw battalions,[19]and taxation by various armed groups.[20]

The 1994 ceasefire: a KIO point of view

Among the narratives developed from earlier peace negotiations, some see the weaknesses of the former ceasefire agreement as the result of a flawed process. In this respect, a former KIO leader remembers the KIO's incentives to discuss peace, during an interview by the author in Myitkyina in May 2013:

"In the mid-1980s, Brang Seng, the then-KIO chairman, went to the Thai-Myanmar border to meet a number of people including foreign representatives and diplomats. He was then advised to look for a non-military solution […]. He was told KIO needed to step out, to change its strategy."

He also explains the conditions in which the KIO accepted to sign an imperfect deal:

"In the early 1990s, the KIO Central Committee was contacted by the government, mainly through [former prime minister] Khin Nyunt. The negotiation process was very difficult, and they couldn't reach a final result because the military wanted the KIA to surrender first but the KIA wouldn't accept this condition. Finally, the government accepted to proceed to peace talks without the prior surrender of the KIA. There was then no negotiation on disarmament or integration of the KIA. Only troop relocation was discussed. It was agreed that a political dialogue was needed but the KIO wanted a tripartite dialogue with the government, KIA, and the party that had won the general election, the National League for Democracy. The political dialogue was promised at a later stage, as Khin Nyunt said that he did not have the mandate to discuss political issues."

In June 2011, both sides accused each other of rekindling the conflict. The KIO/KIA contends that the government broke the ceasefire agreement. As a consequence, during unsuccessful negotiations before May 2013, they insisted the government recall soldiers to their former positions, away from KIA-controlled territory, in order to return to a pre-June 2011 troop position, complying with the former ceasefire. They claim that the initial clashes came after Tatmadaw soldiers trespassed into KIA areas, despite a prior agreement between both sides that access should formerly be granted by the KIA to enter the area. The government in turn contends that it was the KIO/KIA that broke the ceasefire, as they first used force against Tatmadaw soldiers.

[19] The number of battalions increased from twenty-six in 1994 to forty-one in 2006 according to Kachin Development Networking Group 2007. Also see Fink (2008).
[20] Reported by several interviewees in various locations of Kachin and Northern Shan State.

At the beginning, it seems that both warring parties were envisaging a quick resolution to the armed conflict and assumed they would be soon able to force political dialogue on their terms. The Tatmadaw was most likely encouraged by its victory in a week-long offensive over the Peung Kya Shin-led faction of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), an ethnic Kokang armed group based in Northern Shan State. The remaining faction of the Kokang MNDAA, supported by the Tatmadaw, turned into a Border Guard force. The KIA leadership took this as a warning that if their forces did not convert into a BGF, they could potentially suffer the same fate as the MNDAA. In this respect it can be assumed that asymmetric information in terms of the potential costs and benefits of the war precipitated the conflict, especially as the Tatmadaw leadership expected a quick military victory and under-estimated the tenacity of the KIA. Due to the disproportionate power balance, ranging from troop numbers and weaponry to access to technology, as well as sharply contrasting military strategies (i.e. guerrilla versus standing army), it was widely presumed that the KIA would not stand long against a Tatmadaw offensive.

In addition, to understand a given party's appetite for war, it is important to assess whether the leaders have made appraisals of the costs versus the benefits of war. Generally, optimistic assessments result in a belief that the war's outcome is likely to be victory, or an absence of defeat (Stoessinger 2000). That was certainly the case with the Kachin conflict, as both parties expected a quick armed offensive and rated their losses as less costly than inaction. According the strategist Jervis (1989: 104), even if leaders of opposing sides believe the chances of victory are slim, they make a rational decision to fight "if the gains of victory are large and the costs of losing are not much greater than those of making the concessions necessary to avoid war." The KIO leadership may not have been fully convinced it could achieve a military victory, but regarded the price of peace as too high in terms of honor, and also held assumptions about poor future political settlements for them and their people. Therefore, according to analysis from a think-tank focusing on ethnic conflict and political transition, "It was too late for the KIO to return to its pre-ceasefire condition without a very heavy cost" (Euro-Burma Office 2010). And more than a year and a half into the conflict, a KIO official speaking about the duration and intensity of the armed conflict in the post-airstrikes context, said, "We had never imagined facing this kind of crisis – ever! We had only seen this kind situation in the foreign movies - but this time it happened to us […]."[21]

[21] Interview with a KIO Public Relations Officer, May Ja Yang, September 2013.

Once conflict resumed, it became clear that none of the parties had planned strategically for its longer term consequences. They initially tested each other to demonstrate their determination but soon after the start of armed hostilities, the situation escalated. What was expected to be a brief show of power and resolve turned into a protracted and bitter conflict that destroyed any remaining shred of trust. More importantly, it left each party contemplating how to break out of the vicious cycle of conflict without compromising honor.

Political inability to reach compromises

The KIO contend that Kachin representatives have actively engaged in political dialogue forums since the inception of the Union of Myanmar, beginning with their support for the Panglong Agreement. The inability to reach a political compromise – before and since 1994 – has been a cornerstone of exacerbated tensions. The KIO leaders have certainly shared this feeling of frustration with their supporters. This enabled them to more effectively rally large support for the war. According to an interview with a representative of a Kachin civil society organization, "The KIO have enjoyed a strong relationship with their supporters and the Kachin public since the 1994 ceasefire."[22]

Fundamental to the breakdown of the agreement was also the fact that it did not address the issue of the "indivisibility of resources" (Jackson and Morelli 2009) such as control of border trade and of the natural resources-dependent economy. According to research conducted by economists Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2000), wealthy countries are usually largely dependent on the exportation of primary commodities – including agricultural products and natural resources – and are highly prone to civil violence. They argue that conflict may be explained either by grievance or greed. Nearly a third, or 31.2 percent, of Myanmar's GDP comprises exports of primary resources, including 8 percent from the mining/energy sector (according to official sources - much more is sold on the black market and unaccounted for). Among other resources, Kachin State has massive reserves of jade that by some measures accounts for the extraction of more than 90 percent of the world's stock (Mc Kinsey Global Institute 2013). Kachin State also has timber, gold, and rare earth metals as well as vast potential for development of hydroelectricity and agro-business. Most of these reserves were, during the ceasefire, in areas under the control of the KIO/KIA, and retaking those areas seems to have been a

[22] Interview in Myitkyina, September 2013.

central concern for the Tatmadaw. During the former ceasefire, uneven access to resources resulted in quick and massive economic benefits for elements of the KIO and some Bamar and Chinese businessmen. This "ceasefire capitalism" enabled wealth accumulation through centralization and land securitization by entities controlled by the Myanmar government and armed groups that have signed ceasefires (Woods 2011). There is strong economic incentive for the central state to control these resources. Yet few justifications by the KIA can be found in public sources when it comes to the appetite for war to secure natural resources in the area.

Ideological links between community, nationalism, and conflict

Even though it is difficult to have a sense of the opinion of the Kachin people as a whole due to divisions within Kachin society. Many Kachin disapprove of some of the positions adopted by the KIO/KIA. Even within the KIO/KIA there are differing views and factions. The sense of belonging experienced by the Kachin community seems to have been significantly influenced by the two episodes of armed conflict.

Research has found that conflict can be correlated to the sense of belonging to a community. In the Kachin case, conflict has certainly played an important role, since Independence, in contributing to a feeling of belonging to the pan-Kachin community. According to the conflict theorist Suganami (2002: 310):

> "The concept of war seems to contain the idea that those who engage in it have a clear understanding of what it is and that they are fighting on the behalf of and in the name of their society against another. War, therefore, conceptually presupposes understanding, on the part of individual persons that they are members of a particular community and are fighting within the community's authority structure."

Moreover, some scholars have demonstrated that war is not only caused by an appetite for fighting and fear, but also by what could be termed "spirit" (Lebow 2010). Nationalism, also, can be a mechanism of transmission linking individual interests with collective action. The Kachin, responding as a community, present a shared aspiration for the war as a mechanism to claim political rights denied to them through political dialogue. The KIO's narratives of war are defensive, relying on a sense of community – based on blood, linguistic features, religion, and political ideologies. This has been reiterated by

the Pan-Kachin movement and resulted in the "buy-in" of the broader Kachin community to the rationale for war. This is different from the majority of the Myanmar side, for whom this war is a distant reality, demonstrating the difficulty of making peace with the ethnic armed groups, and an inconvenience in asserting control over resources and frontier territories. Bamar nationalist sentiment is, however, stoked by government and the military to encourage support for war.

Community consultations, an attempt to boost KIO legitimacy
Interview in Myitkyina, September 2013

In the 1990s, the KIO put in place mechanisms of consultations within communities after encountering internal dissent with various members who felt that their opinions and public views should be more systematically and formally gathered to inform the decision-making process. In the wake of the new conflict, this strengthening of public opinion feedback mechanisms ensured broader public support by reinforcing nationalist sentiment. A KIO supporter interviewed explained to the author how the decision to return to war was discussed and validated by public support in Laiza in 2011, as the political way forward after two decades of frustration.

"Before the conflict, the KIO invited the Kachin community leaders from the Kachin and Northern Shan States to its headquarters. They listened to their opinions on current issues. The KIO representatives asked them how they should respond to the government's provocations. That was when the Myanmar government put pressure on the KIA to transform into a border guard force. […]

The outcome of that meeting was that the KIA should not accommodate the government proposal. The KIA should not surrender to them. And public opinion was not just to discuss about the breach of the ceasefire agreement. It was also keen to persistently demand dialogue to find a political solution. The conflict started after a second public meeting. Then, the KIO was still open to hear public opinion; the consultations were about whether or not to opt for a ceasefire. With these consultations, the KIO become more popular as it was seen as respectful of the views of civilians. […]

According to my experience, the Kachin civil society doesn't believe any of the political parties and only trusts the KIO to represent them, even during the former ceasefire time. Right now, we can see that KIO had become more and more transparent and accountable to their people. But we cannot see such a change in the Tatmadaw and government's attitude. The KIO became more transparent in its activities, policies, and in other aspects. They managed to draw more attention from the public in Kachin State as well as from the international community, in order to build trust in their leadership. […] The KIO/KIA changed their policies according to the speech of the then Vice-Chief of Staff, General Gun Maw, in Laiza, as they wanted to show that they are more accountable. He also mentioned that they [the KIO/KIA] couldn't be transparent in the past because whenever they met the Burmese government, they were told to keep the content of the discussions secret."

2 - Political transition vs. resurgence of the armed conflict

Since 2010, Myanmar has been through a radical political, legal, and economic reform process, which has been described as an unusual case of a top-down and managed transition. The decision of Senior General Than Shwe to step back, followed by the retirement of senior junta officers to enable them to take on civilian functions as government staff, was followed by a number of reforms towards the establishment of a more democratic system. Part of this reform process is to achieve peace between the Tatmadaw and numerous ethnic armed groups. Three years after President Thein Sein took the reins of power, thirteen major ethnic armed groups have managed to reach a ceasefire (or confirmed pre-existing agreements).[23] While this delicate top-down transition is complex and imperfect, many ethnic groups foresee room for constructive engagement with the government and an end to armed conflict.

In the meantime, according to a number of interviews, the KIA/KIO generally tend to view themselves as innocent victims of Bamar duplicity. Their relations with Burmese leadership have been increasingly tense throughout the 2000s, tension peaking in 2009 with the BGF ultimatum and in 2010 with the rejection of the Kachin political party's attempt to register to contest upcoming general elections. The KAI/KIO do not consider war as a retaliatory measure from their side, but as a response to external aggression, and a necessary attempt to stop confiscation of their land, identity, and resources. As with other ethnic armed groups in the past, the KIO/KIA perceives the Tatmadaw as an "invader" (Smith 1993: 258).Overall, among the Kachin, the war is justified as an act of self-defense, and as a reaction to external aggression. "We couldn't stay passive," is a sentence often stated by KIO leaders and supporters when asked about the KIA's decision to fight. In retrospect, the earlier period of ceasefire is now perceived as no more than a progressive escalation to war, in spite of the reluctance of KIA to return to war.

[23] See Annex D, "Main Armed groups present in Kachin 'territories'" and Annex E "Ceasefire agreements in Myanmar".

The Border Guard Forces ultimatum

Various accounts on both sides illustrate the difficulties of ceasefire implementation. Some key structural reasons explain these difficulties. Long delays in junta responses to KIO political demands fuelled doubt on the part of the KIO about the actual will and ability of the government to transform the ceasefire into a mid-term peace agreement and a longer-term political settlement. The end of the SPDC had not brought about the changes the KIO wished to see. Several episodes contributed to building up of political tensions between them and the former members of the junta, many of whom are still in control of the key institutions of the country.

A number of external observers note that relations between the junta and KIO/KIA deteriorated sharply well before the 2011 conflict broke out. These relations would have significantly deteriorated after the submissions of the KIO proposals to the National Convention in 2001, 2004, and 2007 requesting self-determination, a state-based constitution, and a number of demands regarding regional governance and autonomy. The Tatmadaw then adopted a harsher approach as relations with the KIO progressively deteriorated. Major-General Ohn Myint, commander of the Northern Region, reportedly stated in 2007 that, "KIO can be driven back to the mountains."[24] Then, according to the journalist Bertil Lintner, during a meeting with Myanmar Army's regional commanders in mid-2009, Senior General Than Shwe said that, "We, the Tatmadaw, have to fight the KIA because they have not accepted our terms."[25] The Tatmadaw position, as publicly stated, left few doubts about the potential resumption of the conflict and over a year before the first clashes, Lieutenant-General Ye Myint, the chief of the junta's Military Affairs Security, stated, "If the KIO does not abide by the latest instructions, then relations will revert to the period before the 1994 ceasefire agreement."[26] In response, the KIA headquarters mobilized troops and prepared for the eventuality of the resumption of the conflict.[27]

The junta's BGF ultimatum put pressure on the KIA in the lead-up to the recommencement of conflict. Major-General Lun Maung, formerly auditor general of the SPDC, threatened the KIO/KIA: "We will try to convince the KIO to accept the Border Guard Force through words. If they do not listen […] we

[24] *Kachin News Group*, July 23, 2007.
[25] Lintner Bertil, February 2, 2013.
[26] *Mizzima*, April 22, 2010 mentioned in EBO 2010.
[27] Interview of a person close to the KIO Central Committee, Laiza, December 2011.

have to kick them and eliminate them."[28] The KIA viewed this threat as a violation of the ceasefire agreement. The KIA chief of staff, General Gam Shawng of the KIA, argued that turning into the Border Guard Force was the same as surrendering. In a press interview, his position is summed up as follows:

> "The military government had promised the KIO that there would be no discussion of surrender or disarmament during the interim period [between the ceasefire and the start of political dialogue with future elected government], but had ultimately insisted that the KIA and other ceasefire groups subordinate themselves to Tatmadaw command as border guard forces, [which would be the] same as surrender."[29]

A KIO Public Relations officer explained to the author the organization's version of the final reply to the BGF ultimatum in August 2013:

> "We ended up in BGF negotiations with no solution in a meeting held on August 22nd [2010] in Myitkyina. Our KIO chairman was present in this negotiation, as proposed by the other party. But General Ye Myint only asked him twice to answer by 'Yes' or 'No' to the BGF ultimatum and our chairman up front replied 'No' to him. Then, General Ye Myint warned him that the situation would return back to the situation prior to the 1994 ceasefire, starting from September 1st. This was very short notice. We could determine that this was a declaration of war. […] Government set an ultimatum to the KIA to discharge all its offices, including liaison offices in government controlled areas on August 25th. This meant that KIA was not recognized anymore. And with the following intrusion by armed soldiers to other KIO territories, it was clear that the government was hell-bent on subjugation."[30]

After it came to power in March 2011, the government of President Thein Sein withdrew the BGF ultimatum in an effort to lessen tensions with the ethnic armed groups. The gesture was meant to demonstrate goodwill and was a late effort to curb risks of escalation of the conflict. But it came too late. For the KIA, this episode demonstrated that the Tatmadaw will, sooner or later, try to take their turf militarily. Because of the lack of respect for the BGF ultimatum, the former KIO vice-chairman could not run for the 2010 general election. This was

[28] *Kachin News Group*, July 12, 2011.
[29] Lambrecht Curtis (2013).
[30] Interview in Laiza, August 2013.

perceived by the Kachin as further evidence that the political transition the country was engaged in was not as deep as they expected and that long-promised political arrangements may be further delayed.

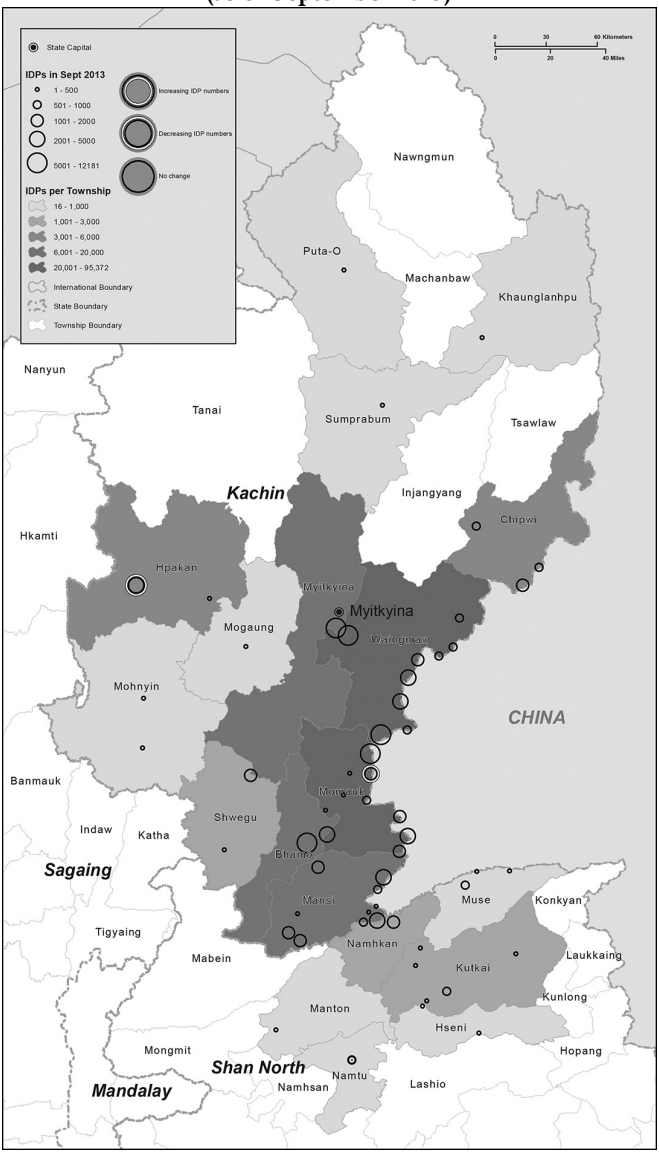
The human cost of war

> "We, IDPs, suffer the most from this conflict." Je Yang Kha IDP camp manager, Laiza, September 2013.
>
> "Third countries could suggest [ways that] the KIO and government leaders should find an exit to the conflict, and only then, a genuine peace would be achieved. The Tatmadaw soldiers are killing our people and even children are traumatized. They are afraid that Burmese Army would kill them and hurt their mothers and sisters as they have heard and witnessed such things happening. So, when they will grow up, these children will still fear the Burmese Army soldiers will treat them brutally [as they have done] in the past."A Kachin elder, Myitkyina, September 2013.

The conflict in Kachin State is not only the product of two opposing political blocks, or business interests trying to secure revenue sources. For most of the Kachin population and also some Shan and other ethnic nationalities, the conflict is the result of willful neglect of ethnic based groups' claims by central authorities since the inception of modern Myanmar. To fully understand the extent of grievances, it is important to note the suffering encountered by Kachin civilians, including the large numbers who fled their homes, and/or were victims or witnesses of violence by a range of armed groups, more often than not, the Tatmadaw. The following section explains the humanitarian situation, and the current politics of aid that tend to provide more legitimacy to the KIO, which is perceived as a protector by many members of the community that has been displaced.

As of early 2014, there were more than 92,000 IDPs in about 160 locations scattered throughout Kachin and Northern Shan States, with greater concentrations in and around main cities, such as Myitkyina, Bhamo, Laiza, Lweje, and May Ja Yang (some of these located in government-controlled areas and others in KIA-controlled locations). Most of the camps outside urban areas, particularly those in KIO areas, remain not easily accessible. In addition, a few thousand civilians who fled their homes remained unaccounted for by humanitarian agencies, as they were believed to be hiding in terrain near their villages for fear of further aggression by armed groups. Others initially took refuge in camps in China. A majority of the IDP camps are managed by religious

Figure 2: Map of IDP camps in Kachin and Northern Shan States (as of September 2013)



Source: OCHA, 2013

organizations, though some are managed directly by the KIO. Many of those who fled their villages found safe havens in religious compounds. Most of the displacement occurred between mid-September 2011 and mid-January 2012, although IDP numbers in border regions surged in December 2012 and January 2013 following air attacks by the Tatmadaw on KIA strongholds.[31]

Many IDPs noted that political affiliations or sympathies played a part in their decision as to where they turned for safe haven.[32] Many based their decision on which areas (government- or KIO-controlled), they saw as more secure. Nonetheless not all IDPs in KIO-controlled areas are pro-KIO, and vice versa. Fear of being interrogated or harassed by armed forces was often the reason IDPs chose to stay in the whatever place they first arrived. Unable to find sufficient income, many depended on food aid. For those staying in government-controlled areas in Christian churches or Buddhist monasteries, the religious communities initially provided for their needs but soon struggled financially.[33] A few months into the crisis, a few NGOs and UN agencies came to their aid.

Any international agency staff movement in Kachin State must still be cleared by the government. International organization employees are very rarely authorized to access the KIO-controlled areas. Occasionally, the government or army officers have organized rice distribution in some locations, with reported episodes of bullying of IDPs by local officials or army officers who exhorted them to return to their villages.[34] Overall, access to IDPs in KIO-controlled areas has been conditional on political and security considerations. When there was a political deadlock among the warring parties, international agencies could not access IDPs there. When discussions were gaining ground and belligerents were keener to establish a dialogue, humanitarian access was authorized on a case-by-case basis. All the while, the international community has had to rely on local civil society organizations to reach out to victims of conflict.

The bulk of international aid has been channeled to the most accessible IDPs, in the vicinity of Myitkyina and Bhamo towns. Domestic support groups, meanwhile, such as faith-based and civil society organizations, managed to

[31] Internal Displacement in Kachin and Northern Shan States (2012).
[32] Humanitarian Practice Network (2012). Like the displaced populations at the Thai-Myanmar border, there is a greater likelihood for those who have family members in the ethnic-army-controlled area to flee to this area.
[33] Only the Khat Cho IDP camp, in Waimaw Township is located on government-owned land.
[34] Interview of Kachin aid workers in Myitkyina in May 2013.

reach out to IDPs in remote areas. Overall, the political dividing lines between IDPs located in government- and KIO/KIA-controlled areas reinforced a form of segregation between victims of the war. Those who are associated to, or more supportive of, the KIO find themselves in camps where their survival depends on the aid delivery administrated by the organization.

The KIO as a safety provider

With the current conflict, KIO positions itself as a caretaker and protector of local communities, especially in providing services in three key sectors: physical safety, livelihoods, and culture. Much like in Karen State, armed groups are seen as "legitimate representatives and guardians of the Karen people."[35] Yet, many non-state armed groups in various ethnic states of Myanmar have also reportedly resorted to coercive practices, including taxation of local populations as well as conscription and utilization of forced labor.

The main security risk identified by Kachin IDPs is exposure to violence.[36] In interviews, many IDPs recounted experiences of harassment by armed groups, destruction of livelihoods, theft of belongings, and, in some cases, exploitation or recruitment by armed groups. Pervasive fear of landmines and unexploded ordnance were mentioned by some camp managers. Many IDPs have noted cases in which the army targeted civilians accused of supporting the KIA. Over time in Kachin State, as in other ethnic areas, the Tatmadaw was widely seen as the main perpetrator of abuses, even though the KIO is also (but perhaps more marginally in the absence of formal and systematic reporting mechanisms) reported as responsible of abuses, including forced recruitment. The vast majority of ordinary Kachin in conflict areas see the Myanmar military – and often, the broader government – as a potential threat. Interviewed IDPs in Laiza told to the author in September 2013, "We have never seen a good Myanmar soldier. We heard about many scenarios [and] we have seen many cases of abuses from them. Our children are afraid when they see them."

IDPs from the Laiza area reported to the author in August 2013, "We have the experience of being arrested and taken by the Tatmadaw as porters [to carry equipment and supplies in conflict areas]. So we are traumatized; we want to avoid it."

[35] Humanitarian Practice Network (2012: 5).

[36] Internal Displacement in Kachin and Northern Shan States, Myanmar: a Protection Assessment (2012).

While some progress has been made at the central levels of the Myanmar government to move towards a democratic system, the Kachin conflict appears to demonstrate that some in-depth issues and long term root causes of conflict are not yet open to discussion and resolution. A mix of military and ideological factors explains the resurgence of the conflict that has forced thousands to flee their homes. They now depend on humanitarian aid, that is itself part of the bigger political game, to survive. While the current peace process is more comprehensive than any other previous attempt, it remains weakened by the Kachin deadlock. The KIO demands to discuss long term political and military arrangements probably fall beyond the contemporary views and strategies of the Myanmar government and army. The following section will focus on the development of diverging narratives that have been both justifying the conflict and hindering the peace process.

Chapter 3
Diverging realities, conflicting war stories

The narratives and "blame games" among parties to the conflict have long embodied their currently irreconcilable viewpoints. Official statements from the military about this conflict have been overwhelmingly security-oriented, highlighting the Tatmadaw's focus on combating the insurgency threat, while later statements from the civilian government indicated commitment to reaching a mutually satisfying peace deal. On the other side, formal statements by the KIO/KIA show an "underdog" mentality, perpetuating the belief that the organizations are persecuted for political and economic reasons while their causes are overlooked. The grievances on both sides are summed up on one hand by the KIO view that the Kachin are oppressed by the much larger state and ethnic group in the country, the Bamar. This contrasts with the government/military view that their role is to unify and protect the Union. On both sides, such beliefs drove oppressive and heavy-handed campaigns that perpetuated conflict and complicated the political context. The divergence of narratives between the two sides – particularly on the causes of the conflict and the overall goal of peace talks – continues to affect relations.

The third part of this paper explores differences and continuity in the approaches and experiences of both sides, through local perceptions of key episodes during the two conflict periods (1961–1994 and 2011 until now) in Kachin territories. It also focuses on the construction of narratives about the continuity of the fighting for decades, despite a number of contextual changes. It then examines the new image that both sides have been promoting in the current political transition period, and concludes with an analysis of KIO leaders' feeling of isolation and perception of being attacked on a pivotal element of their identity: their Christian faith.

How did the war resume? The blame game

Illustrations of these diverging views are the narratives developed by each party to the conflict about the resumption of the conflict, in which they blame each other for the initial attacks.

The government version, according to the government-backed newspaper, the *New Light of Myanmar*, a few days after the first skirmishes:[37]

"Tatmadaw columns inevitably counterattack KIA troops with their threats and armed attacks; Government opens the door of peace to welcome those who are holding different views if they wish to cooperate with the government in cases of mutual concern in the people and in the national interest run for election in compliance with democratic practices to justify gaining power; the Tatmadaw then counter attacks the KIA and the nation's important hydropower project [stating that this is] just to protect its members, without even a single intention of aggression or oppression. […]

Concerning National reconciliation, there are still personalities and organizations at home and abroad and underground organizations that are unwilling to acknowledge the seven-step Road Map and the constitution. Nevertheless they should bear in mind that they are also Myanmar and should hold the concept that Myanmar is their motherland and the incumbent government is their own government constituted with national races at different levels."

The KIO/KIA version, according to the interview of a KIO public relations officer, Laiza, August 2013:

"Despite the fact that we have been waiting for if and when they would invite us to the political dialogue, the new government brought the war back to us – only two months after the government was established. And the whole world knows that this war did not break out due to our action, but because they overran our post first. The first fighting took place at the Bum Sen post in an area under the control of the third brigade of the KIA. This is located near the Tha Tang hydropower dam on the Ta Ping River.

The Tatmadaw established a military post in the nearby location of Sang Gang. Then, we set up a liaison office in Sang Gang while our posts were located in the surrounding villages. The Tha Tang hydropower dam was built three or four miles away from the army post. But it was right where the decades old KIA Bum Sen post is situated. The Tha Tang hydro project is managed by a Chinese company and the dam construction started in 2007. So, Chinese workers, escorted by Tatmadaw soldiers, started building the dam adjacent to the KIA post. Nonetheless, the KIA didn't create any disturbance to their operation. Instead it agreed to ensure the security of the transport of supplies. The dam construction was completed in March 2011 and President Thein Sein himself was present at the opening ceremony.

[37] *New Light of Myanmar*, June 18, (2011: 10).

Tatmadaw posts are mixed and intermingled in the region. So soldiers from both sides are not allowed to trespass onto other post areas without authorization. But one armed sergeant and one police officer encroached upon the territory of our post without any authorization. So, we captured them on June 8. The sergeant managed to run away. But we captured the police officer for investigation. After a short while, one captain and one lieutenant came to negotiate the release of the police officer. We arrested both of them as well. […]

As a consequence, it cannot be said that it was our mistake to arrest them. The troops on the ground were under pressure. So a total of three Tatmadaw staff were taken as prisoners in a KIA post. In fact we were supposed to release them upon receiving clearance from our headquarters. But during that night, Tatmadaw soldiers came to intimidate us. They requested the immediate release prisoners. Our soldiers told them that they would only release them when they got the order from the KIA HQ. So they [Tatmadaw] raided our post before dawn and arrested our officer, Chang Ying, who was then tortured to death."

1 - Amidst conflict, continuity, and changes

"It has already been fifty-three years since we got into this conflict." KIO Public Relations Official, Laiza, 2013.

When words matter: expressions of uncertainty

Each party to the conflict has starkly different ways to describe the conflict and its main stakeholders. The KIO/KIA blame the recent war on older and underlying issues, and uses specific terminology to describe this. As an example, after fighting rekindled in June 2011, the KIO/KIA initially referred to the renewed fighting as "ceasefire violations" by the Tatmadaw. As time progressed, it was referred to as a "war." As hopes for peace began to fade away in 2012, the vocabulary used by the KIO/KIA and a number of civil society organizations to refer to the conflict as evolved. Kachin activists and external observers began referring to the fighting as the "re-ignition of the conflict" (Farelly 2012). For example, an event in June 2013 organized by an advocacy group, the Kachin Peace Network, was reported in the social media and marked the second anniversary of what it called the "resumption of the war in the Kachin Region," whereas one year before, the same group held an event to mark the first anniversary of the recent

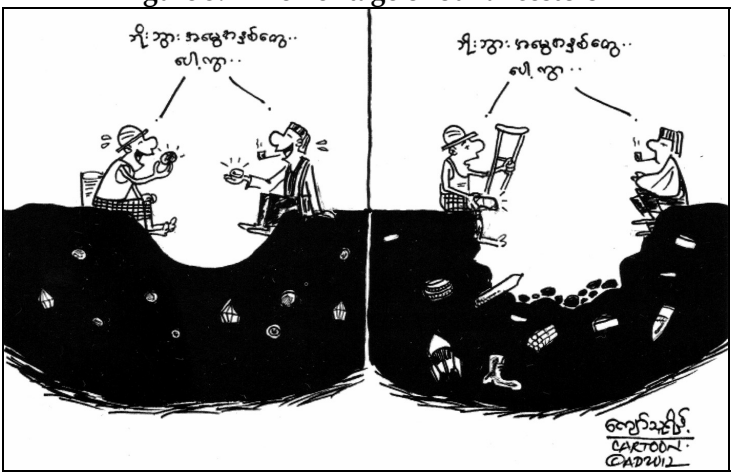
"Kachin conflict," as it was a standalone conflict.[38] This shift in usage of terminology reveals the change of Kachin perspectives over the present conflict. Most Kachin interviewed for this study stated they viewed the conflict as continuous, rather than a war interspersed with periods of peace or no war.

Field observations made by the author for this study showed a degree of conflation by the Kachin in their representations and perceptions of the government and Tatmadaw. For example, when a village was attacked, some informants mentioned a "government attack." In numerous interviews with KIO representatives, they interchangeably mention the government and the army when they spoke of military offensives and government decisions. Even in government-controlled areas of Kachin State, members of religious and political elites use these terms interchangeably, as if these were one monolithic bloc.[39] In addition, all state entities – the Tatmadaw and civilian government bodies – tended to be seen as predominantly predatory.

On the government side, there is a tendency to systematically conflate traditional Kachin leaders with the KIO. The KIO is perceived as an extremist organization. An analysis of the few official statements and Myanmar Government-backed press articles on the conflict reveals uncertainty over how to describe the KIO/KIA and escalation of hostilities. The KIO/KIA was called a "ceasefire group" until the government's Border Guard Force ultimatum in 2009. Then, it was referred to as an "insurgent group" just before the conflict resumed in 2011, for the first time since the early 1990s. In state-owned newspapers, the KIO/KIA were in 2011, the KIO/KIA were for the first time since the early 1990s described as "insurgents."[40] Then, in periods of intense fighting, the state media referred to the KIA/KIO as "terrorists."[41] In the public media, KIA is mainly blamed for injuring civilians and destroying infrastructure.

[38] http://kachin-news.blogspot.com/2012/06/kachin-peace-network-held-service-for.html (accessed March 14, 2015).
[39] Interviews in Myitkyina and Bhamo, August and September 2013.
[40] *New Light of Myanmar*, October 15, (2010: 8). Also, Human Rights Watch (2012: 26) reports, "for the first time since 1994, the Myanmar state-run media referred to the KIA as "insurgents" as opposed to a "ceasefire group."
[41] Republic of the Union of Myanmar Ministry of Defence Press Release, January 21, (2013). Moe Oo.

Figure 3: "The heritage of our ancestors"



On the right side of the cartoon, the underground contains gems while on the left side, the underground contains remains of war such as unexploded devices.
(Source: 730 Days of Kachin in Conflict, p. 129)

The official status of the KIO/KIA is unclear in government pronouncements. The KIO/KIA was on the official list of illegal organizations under legislation known as the Unlawful Associations Act 17/1. Under this law, passed in 1908 and amended in 1957, an association that "interferes with the administration of the law and with the maintenance of law and order, or that constitutes as a danger to the public peace," may be deemed illegal. This law is also used to prosecute people on the ground if they are members of, or if they have had contact with, illegal organizations. Until recently, this meant that people suspected to be associated to the KIO could be subject to harsh punishment and lengthy prison terms. The KIA/KIO was due to be removed from the list of illegal associations in 2012, but individuals kept on being arrested and charged under this act.[42] At the time of writing, the content, policy, and use of the list could not be clarified during interviews with lawyers and government officials.

[42] Interview with a lawyer in Myitkyina, July 2012.

From one conflict to another

The recent freedom of expression allowed in the Myanmar media has made a dramatic difference in the emergence of contemporary narratives on the conflict throughout the country, especially among most educated groups of the population. It has also demonstrated the media's ability to amplify the conflict, and its role in disseminating various versions of the history. A number of interviewees were asked to explain, according to their personal experience, the main differences between the current conflict and the pre-1994 situation. The most common replies tended to be about the intensification of military activities and greater civilian losses. According to a KIO public relations officer, the use of disproportionate forces is a main difference:

> "This war is very different to the situation before 1994. This time the army used airstrikes to fight. Now this is more like they were fighting against foreigners who were invading their country. They used airstrikes when ground forces couldn't overrun the KIA posts."[43]

For the chairman of the KIO's Internally Displaced Person and Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Committee (IRRC), the main differences are the military tactics employed and their impact on civilians:

> "Fighting before 1994 was just between combatants of the Tatmadaw and KIA. But this time, unarmed Kachin civilians were also targeted by the Tatmadaw, and their properties were destroyed. Most of the villages that have been destroyed by the Tatmadaw were under KIA protection during the [1994-2011] ceasefire period. Since last year those villages were no longer under KIA protection but were still destroyed by the Tatmadaw. Apparently, the Tatmadaw sees Kachin, even civilians, as KIA troops; as their enemy."[44]

> "In addition, economic drivers would also increasingly contribute to conflict dynamics. Trade and extraction of natural resources were mentioned by a number of interviewees as a central factor in the current conflict, in a more pronounced way than in the earlier period. This is partly due to the fact that many of these resources were discovered and exploited after 1994. Natural resource management was repeatedly mentioned as a local governance concern since Independence, and has been a source of

[43] Interview conducted in May Ja Yang, September 2013.
[44] Interview conducted in Laiza, August 2013.

> increasing frustration for local communities as well as KIO leaders. Large-scale jade extraction has been generating billions of dollars per year, that mainly benefit Kachin, Bamar, Wa, and Chinese businessmen. According to official figures, in 2011-12, Myanmar yielded 43,185 tons of jade, mainly from Kachin and Shan States, generating a profit of about 8.8 billion US dollars (Dapice and Thanh 2013: 5). However, official and written sources related to these profits are significantly scarce. One interviewee mentioned that the 1961-1994 conflict was more about power sharing (a revolt against subjugation for the KIA, and a war against insurgents for the Myanmar armed forces), whereas most refer to the more recent conflict as being primarily about access to, and share of, natural resources, while political power-sharing is considered secondary."[45]

During the conflict, natural resources are still being extracted from Kachin State, and large-scale business goes on. Conflict is particularly intense in resource rich areas, such as the Hpakant jade mines. According to the official government figures, in spite of the conflict and the suspension of major mining companies' operations, 15,061 tons of jade have been mined in 2013 – 2014 alone.[46] An interviewee highlighted the continuation of intensive logging in some areas:

> "In 1963, my school was closed. I remember every night the fighting was going on, all night. This time, people were more lenient. They don't feel like fighting. Many civilians were killed and nobody cared. […] At this present time, business interests matter most. As we speak, logging trucks continue to go 'silently' into the Kachin hills."[47]

Old conflict, new image?

Following internal power struggles in 2000s, the KIO/KIA's political and military leaders have carefully forged a new public image through their regular public consultations on political issues with prominent members of the Kachin population. In June 2011, a public forum gave the KIA the mandate to fight with the aim of pursuing a political solution, and to accept a ceasefire only as part of a more permanent political settlement.[48] A subsequent forum in March 2013 called

[45] Interview by the author, Yangon, September 2013.
[46] *Xinhua*, July 11, 2014.
[47] Interview with a religious leader in Bhamo, August 2013.
[48] Interview with an IDP camp manager, Je Yang Kha, Laiza, August 2013.

for the maintenance of the KIA's military strength. The results of these forums formalize communication channels between the KIO, civil society, and members of the community, ensuring a degree of political support for the KIO.

As a consequence of this new public relations approach, it is commonly acknowledged that the KIO has recently shown new signs of enthusiasm for listening to the opinions of the Kachin people. One interviewee, who participated to these forums, mentioned:

> "People in KIO areas suffer from the conflict but they support the KIO. If you compare to the former conflict, KIO is more transparent this time. We now know what is being discussed when the KIO and the government meet. Before we didn't know anything. These days, the KIO officials ask for views and opinions from representatives of the Kachin people, and they then repeat these during the talks with the government. They take into account public opinion; and this is new."[49]

A Kachin Baptist leader, speaking at a public briefing to foreign diplomats in Myitkyina in early 2013, also mentioned this new approach:

> "Before, there were hardliners within the KIO, now there are 'soft liners.' Nowadays, things have changed a lot. The KIO listen to the people. It is not the first time for them to negotiate a ceasefire. Nowadays, the people are really supportive of the ideas of KIO, especially because they [the KIO] are not the ones who broke the ceasefire. So trust in the government has been lost. This time, people are still willing to suffer, rather than getting a 'cheap peace.' The sentiment of the population is 'let's go and fight!' What they want is welfare, rights of indigenous people, and religious and cultural rights in peace. The ceasefire is not enough. It can break at any time. That is our experience."[50]

This visibly more inclusive approach aims at strengthening KIO legitimacy. Furthermore, KIO views are not only disseminated in their own media or media that was biased towards them. They are also discussed in the churches, and in IDP camps. For example, near the gate of Hpun Lum Yang camp, in Laiza vicinity, a public board shows the pictorial narratives of the conflict. On a wooden board, photographs illustrate symbolic episodes of the conflict, including the first KIA soldiers who died, the first Tatmadaw officers captured

[49] Civil society representative interviewed in Myitkyina, April 2013.
[50] Author's fieldwork notes.

as prisoners, the civilians fleeing Laiza under air attack, the first UN-led humanitarian convoys, several rounds of peace talks, and others. These wordless narratives show, and disseminate, the history of the war from the prevailing KIO perspective. They can thus reach out, convince, and rally the support of the several thousands of Kachin who are settled in the camps, including those who are illiterate.

Figure 4: Board made of pictures depicting the key episodes of the armed conflict.

Source: Picture by the author, Hpun Lun Yang IDP camp, Laiza area, 2013

Nevertheless, not everyone is convinced about transformation in the KIO/KIA. Some consider it as merely cosmetic and primarily a change of communication style, as a Catholic leader explained: "Before, it was very different. The leadership adopted a very military style. Now, they engage with the people, though they still try to control the situation. Actually, they don't really care about public opinion."[51] Aware of their past experiences and of the fact that they cannot represent all the Kachin, the KIO responds by inviting for more discussion. The organization's Technical Advisory Team (TAT) in

[51] Interview by the author, August 2013.

Myitkyina, which was created as a result of the May 2013 agreement to support the peace negotiations, invites anyone who has comments and positive or negative feedback to voice it to the team. Access to this offer is certainly limited to members of an elite as only they would have the confidence to respond, but it shows a drastic change of tone.

Finally, through the political reform process, and some visits of its leaders, the government has also tried to change its image in the eyes of Kachin and is keen to convince ethnic peoples that it has gone through an irreversible change for the better. But many Kachin still see government gestures, even positive ones, as aimed at the international community, in order to gain support for national reforms. Overall, the Kachin are convinced that the degree of change is insufficient to tackle the most sensitive issues, such as the devolution of political power and the reform of the armed forces (including the integration of combatants from ethnic armed groups).

2 - The KIO's perception of the war

Isolation and marginalisation

> "Nobody supports our struggle from outside. We are on our own. We are here until today thanks to the support of our people. That's why we keep on struggling." Technical Assistance Team leader, Myitkyina, 2013.
>
> "We are angry, we are sad, and we feel alone." Kachin school teacher in KIO-controlled area, interview by the author, August 2013).

Interviewees often mentioned a feeling of isolation, both from Bamar people and also, especially in 2011 and 2012, from other ethnic armed groups, some of which were criticized for being the first in signing a ceasefire agreement in the 1990s, and then making their own peace agreements as the KIO resumed armed conflict with the Thein Sein government.[52] Geographic and administrative isolation may have been an asset for the KIO to set its own direction during the ceasefire period, but it has now emerged as a hindrance. The Kachin feel

[52] The KIO was blamed for trying in vain to convince other armed ethnic groups to enter peace talks with the government, after the 1994 ceasefire, and was subsequently expelled from the largest alliance of ethnic armed groups formed in 1976, the National Democratic Front.

forgotten and misunderstood. Even on a practical level, the lack of communications, transport, and basic infrastructure, including roads and bridges, in Kachin State hinders exchanges both within the region and beyond, thereby reinforcing the sense of isolation.[53]

The feeling of isolation among the Kachin has been reinforced by the belief that even opposition leaders and civil society representatives operating on a national level do not understand them and, worse, do not care. For example, when the Tatmadaw escalated its offensive against the KIA/KIO and launched air attacks on KIA bases in late 2012, some Kachin had hoped for a strong statement from opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, at least urging the government to protect civilians, especially after air attacks in December 2012. A Kachin religious leader said, "She is not talkative now, before [when she was not a member of parliament], she surely was, but now, she remains silent. She is seen as superficial. She has no more interest in ethnic people."[54]

A Kachin humanitarian worker said, "Aung San Suu Kyi does not know much about the context. Not only about the Kachin, but about all ethnic groups. She does not know about the country very much. She has a theoretical knowledge only, but she tries to be pragmatic. She tries to be a successful politician. People should not say that NLD is an opposition party – the UNFC [an alliance of armed groups] is!"[55] Other interviewees suggested Aung san Suu Kyi was not fully informed of the extent of the military offensive in Kachin State, hence her silence.

[53] The author attended a public meeting in June 2012 with Kachin members of state-level Parliament, where the audience asked about infrastructure construction and renovation such as schools, roads, and telecommunication. These were stated as pivotal issues for the development of the region.
[54] Interview in Bhamo, August 2013.
[55] Interview in Laiza, August 2013.

Ethnic groups and coalitions

In this respect, gaining support from other ethnic nationalities is important to the Kachin. Many defended the United Nationalities Federal Council as a main coalition of ethnic armed organizations. In late 2013, the KIO participated in the establishment of the National Ceasefire Coordination Team.

The United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC)

The UNFC was created in November 2010 to advocate for talks with the government as a united ethnic front. In early 2014, it comprised six main groups, including the KIO and the Karen National Union, and five smaller groups such as the Wa National Organization and Arakan National Council.

The KIO/KIA has been championing this initiative, and the UNFC Chairman is KIA Lieutenant General N'Ban La. Its main objectives, as stated, are "Establish a federal union, form a federal union army and protect ethnic areas."[56] KIO leaders would like the UNFC to serve as a common platform for all ethnic groups and enable a common approach to peace and political talks with the government. Their demands include holding ethnic nationality conferences to discuss the peace process. Once perceived as an increasingly isolated alliance in early 2013, UNFC managed to rally other ethnic leaders to engage as well as question the peace process. They obtained common agreement to put political dialogue on the top of the agenda, instead of following the initial government plans to agree a ceasefire first and then discuss longer term political arrangements.

The National Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT)

The NCCT was established by sixteen ethnic armed organizations that held a conference in Laiza, the headquarters of KIO/KIA, starting on October 30, 2013. The NCCT aims at negotiating the terms of the national ceasefire agreement with government peace negotiation team, the Union Peace Working Committee (UPWC). As of July 2014, the NCCT and UPWC have exchanged several drafts of the agreement, without yet finalizing it. Among the points on which a common agreement could not yet be reached are the monitoring of the ceasefire, as well as any concrete provision related to the future of the armed groups.

The Peace Creation Group (PCG)

The PCG was formed by Kachin businessmen in 2012 to assist ceasefire negotiations between the government and the KIO at a time where the KIO leaders had lost trust in Minister U Aung Min and the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) and the negotiations were experiencing a deadlock. In spite of the PCG's limited mandate and lack of formal recognition from the central government, they have been facilitating the organization of several rounds of talks in different locations of Kachin State.

[56] *Burma News International,* (2013a: 33).

The Kachin leaders also feel abandoned by the international community as they expected greater support from Western governments to international organizations after the recent conflict broke out. Many Western governments and international organization have, however, shifted focus in their humanitarian-focused aid agenda to provide support to the central government and its reform process.[57] The KIO hoped for some forms of international condemnation of the use of violence by the Tatmadaw, especially for violence against civilians. They wanted their status of victims to be acknowledged by Western powers. In their view, this would have provided them with greater political leverage to negotiate peace. General Gun Maw emphasized during his visit to Washington in April 2014, his keenness to see the US become an observer of the talks, along with China and the United Nations.[58] The view that international observers would help the Kachin to reach peace appears to be commonly shared. A Kachin community elder told the author during an interview in September 2013, "Nowadays, we can only find a real and genuine peace with the support of international community. With the presence of representatives of the international community, nobody can obstruct our movement."

Overall, many Kachin doubt that the current government has undergone significant political transition as far as ethnic minority rights are concerned. They have adopted a very critical perspective about the role of some Western countries that provide funding and assistance to the new government, including engagement with the Tatmadaw, despite having formerly reproved Myanmar due to repeated violations of human rights and armed conflict in ethnic areas. According to a senior Kachin humanitarian worker:

> "Until now, I don't see any improvement in Kachin State, but many social services have improved in cities like Yangon, Mandalay, and Nay Pyi Taw. The European Union should have lifted sanctions in some sectors to support economic development [EU sanctions were dropped in 2012]. But they should seriously consider the situation of the country. When the United Kingdom and United States announced their collaboration with the

[57] President U Thein Sein's efforts towards peace were recognized by the international community, with, for example, support from individuals and organizations for his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize in March 2013, which was perceived by many Kachin as a denial of their difficult circumstances.

[58] Democratic Voice of Burma, April 22, 2014.

government in the military sector, we became deeply concerned about their support to the Myanmar military."[59]

The feeling of isolation, both physical and political, has been echoed in concerns related to the preservation of Kachin identity markers. Some nationalists even considered that the conflict directly targets them as a group: "After a seventeen-year ceasefire failed to result in a political solution, the Myanmar government led by ex-general U Thein Sein began a military offensive against the KIO/KIA on June 9, aimed at the elimination of the Kachin people."

The Church under attack

Political marginalization, economic predation, and physical threats due to military offensives reinforced the ethnic dimension of the conflict and were perceived by many Kachin as direct attacks on their ethnic identity.[60] This became apparent when symbols of the Kachin culture and identity were damaged during the Tatmadaw offensives. Churches were used in military operations or damaged as a result of the conflict. In several reported incidents, Tatmadaw used local churches to lock up villagers in order to interrogate them, and to prevent them from escaping and alerting the KIA to their presence.[61] For example, in a case well-known in Kachin State, a church was used as a detention center to interrogate civilians in the village of Hpaikawn.[62] Churches were also used for temporary physical protection, because local residents believe that, "The Tatmadaw knows that KIA would not attack a church."[63] As results of skirmishes, the Nam Lin Pa Catholic Church was damaged, a catechist house destroyed by artillery fire, and five civilians killed in mid-2013. In this event, the Tatmadaw surrounded the village, captured villagers, and locked them in the church until nightfall.[64] In Sine Lone, the Catholic Church was also used by soldiers for accommodation.[65] In Hpakant, the Mawwan Baptist Church was

[59] Interview by the author, Myitkyina, September 2013.
[60] Statement posted on the Kachin National Organization website, http://www.kachinland.org/index.php/statement (accessed April 13, 2013). See also *Mizzima*, February 15, 2013.
[61] Several reports were collected by the author in 2012 and 2013.
[62] December 2012, Northern Shan State, according to NGOs providing humanitarian relief, interviewed by the author.
[63] Interview in Kachin State, August 2013.
[64] Interview with a witness by the author, Kachin State, August 2013.
[65] Interview by the author, Kachin State, August 2013.

damaged by mortar fire on January 16, 2013.[66] These events, along with similar incidents, antagonized the local population, including even the most moderate elements.

In addition, armed offensives scaled up in December 2011 and 2012 during the Christmas period, the most important spiritual festival for the predominately Christian Kachin, were seen as attempts to destroy their culture and faith.[67] This also laid the foundations for increased radicalization of Kachin people, some of whom may not have previously supported the KIO.[68] A few months into the conflict, for many, neutrality was no longer an option and speaking about peace was viewed as traitorous. The head of the influential Kachin Baptist Church, Reverend Samson Hkalam, was quoted in a press interview, speaking about the resurgence of KIA support due to these threats: "People are committed to this fight. Young men who were previously skeptical of the Kachin Independence Army are volunteering to join. It's a miracle — the people's spirit and motivation."[69]

Besides, some religious leaders have used religious discourse to justify and encourage the war. The KIO leadership is ostensibly Baptist and the KIA chief of staff, General Gam Shawng, reportedly prays three times a day, invokes the Bible in his public speeches, and casts the war in religious terms. In one of his speeches quoted in the media, he intoned, "God above is judging the Myanmar Army and humiliating them. If they keep coming at us they will lose. Our struggle is an investment in something God condones. We are standing on the righteous path."[70] A number of pastors also encouraged the Kachin combatants, mentioning war in their sermons, holding commemoration masses, and declaring their support for the KIA.[71] For example, soon after the conflict broke out, special prayer services were held on the first Saturday of every month in Laiza, the KIA headquarters, "for the triumph of the Kachin revolution."[72]

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[66] Kachin Women's Association Thailand, February 2013.

[67] Yet, according to Scott 1900: 61, the Myanmar military campaigns were traditionally conducted from November to February, during the cold season as it was too hot to fight in March and April, and too rainy from May to October.

[68] Fuller (2013).

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Roughneen Simon, December 24, 2012, quotes a pastor at a regular Sunday church service for KIA soldiers: "Right now we are in a serious situation, secularly speaking, as we are surrounded by government forces. But spiritually we are strong, as God is with us."

[72] *Kachin News Group*, July 12, 2011.

Prayers are still reportedly held regularly for those who died in conflict, and combatants who died fighting are hailed as martyrs. Furthermore, the church plays a central role in supporting victims of the conflict and displaced families, and healing their trauma.

Finally, several interviews revealed a shared perception among many Kachin that their participation in the war was the right choice or a "just war." One interviewee explained he believed in fighting and defended the call for war from religious leaders, quoting St. Augustine (who, in the fifth century, elaborated the theory of the "just war" (*jus bellum iustum*) called by a legitimate authority, for a just cause and the right intention) saying that longer-term peace may require initial fighting.[73] Persistent poverty, lack of government services, and other hardships have also given many Kachin justifications for armed conflict as a means to achieve lasting peace.

These Kachin perceptions of the conflict are widespread, especially in KIO-controlled areas, and, overall, have contributed to support the KIO's new-found legitimacy in a protracted conflict. But they also impact on the environment of the peace negotiations, making it more challenging, with the absence of common views and willingness to compromise on political issues.

[73] The Catholic Church's the "just war doctrine" can be found in the 1992 Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2309, published in 1992, and lists four criteria for "legitimate defense by military force": 1. the damage inflicted by the aggressor must be lasting, grave, and certain; 2. all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective; 3. there must be serious prospects of success; 4. the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated.

Chapter 4
The peace process deadlock

"Everyone is delighted by hearing [the word] 'peace.'"KIO public relations officer, Laiza, interview by the author, June 2013.

"What do you mean by peace? What is peace? Of course, people want to stay peacefully. But they can't give up their dreams and their expectations. They want to see a political solution that is acceptable and brings Kachin [representatives] into the Parliament in Nay Pyi Taw." Resident of Laiza, interview by the author, June 2013.

While both sides have publicly stated that they want to achieve a peaceful settlement, paving the way to a lasting peace has proven particularly difficult. Firstly, KIO/KIA leaders desperately want to avoid the kind of "deception," as they call it, by government representatives that they experienced after the 1994 ceasefire. Kachin leaders today single out the flaws and inequitable aspects of the former agreement as one of the causes of conflict, and seem determined to extract solid government guarantees. They have also indicated that they prefer to remain in a state of conflict rather than going for a quicker settlement that would not address their political grievances in a sustainable manner. On the government side, this is a new political era and recent success stories of several ceasefire agreements with other ethnic armed groups seem to have increased their confidence.[74] The agreement reached in May and October 2013 with the KIO created optimism, but the situation remained fragile with ongoing fighting reported in a number of locations, especially in Northern Shan State, while, as of July 2014, the peace talks stalled.

[74] See Annex C, "The Peace Talks – Chronology."

A number of factors may explain the duration of the conflict and the failure so far to achieve constructive dialogue between the two parties, including two central impediments to comprehensive agreements. The first, and main, issue for the KIO/KIA is that the government may not be able to guarantee that they will adhere to the agreement after the deal is reached, especially when it comes to military arrangements. The second issue is the nature and extent of actual incentives for protagonists to lay down their arms. To understand the challenging environment of Kachin peace talks and the reasons for their repeated failures, the following section examines four sets of obstacles to peace, which are identified as main impediments. These include: the divergent notions of peace; suitable timing for a peace agreement; the military's pre-conditions in the negotiation process; and finally, initial mistrust on both sides in the peace process. The latter part focuses on a set of political and stakes economic held by parties to the conflict, including the role played by China.

1 - Impediments to Peace

Different shades of peace

Parties to the conflict do not share a common conception of the notion of a peace process. On one hand, the KIO have requested a "genuine" political dialogue to achieve peace.[75] This term demonstrates the need to rebuild trust and it implies that peace in itself is insufficient; it also implies that further political dialogue and settlement is required. On the other hand, the government side reportedly finds this request groundless and considers that the Kachin are creating unnecessary difficulties.[76] An interviewee who had spent several years in Kachin State and is currently involved in peace support within the Kachin community told the author:

[75] See, among others, Kachin Women's Association in Thailand 2013: 5. The term "genuine" peace was also mentioned by a number of interviewees, including representatives of the KIO and the PCG.

[76] Burgmann Tamsyn, September 7, 2013, states that an advisor to President Thein Sein blamed the KIA for the lack of progress in the peace process. It also quotes Nyo Ohn Myint, of the Myanmar Peace Center, saying his organization's members were "confused" by the KIA people's view that the government is insincere. "That's their view, because there is illiteracy in those areas."

> "Some observers think that the KIO wants a war, and is creating difficulties to avoid sitting at the negotiating table. But this is a wrong perception. What the Kachin want is a real peace, based on a political solution, whereas all proposals from the Bamar so far are about a ceasefire only."[77]

Some details in the interaction modalities during the peace negotiation have led to serious defiance, or mutual misunderstanding. Some cases of inadequate behaviors contributed to the continuation of the conflict, and, overall, seem to have supported the perception that the KIO was keen to continue fighting. For example, during peace talks held on October 30, 2012, the Myanmar military sent senior commanders to participate, but the KIA sent only lower-level KIA representatives, so that according to protocol, military discussions could not be held. This event is related as follows in an international think–tank report: "It was interpreted as a snub by the military and left government negotiator U Aung Min undermined as he had worked hard to convince the army to send a very senior army commander to attend the talks in China, only for him to be stood up [in effect, by the KIA]."[78]

In contrast, a peace advisor to the KIO explained to the author his understanding of the situation: that the government negotiation team did not reveal its composition prior to the meeting and outnumbered the KIO representatives. He also argued that, as the Tatmadaw was launching an armed offensive at the time, the KIA's chief of staff could not travel.[79]

Later, in April 2013, the peace talks were delayed because the KIO refused to participate without international witnesses, arguing their presence would be a guarantee for favorable dialogue and a compelling factor for the government to keep its promises. At first, both Myanmar and China were not keen on inviting foreign witnesses. China, the only foreign power that has been directly involved in peace brokering, for several months refused further international participation, as it perceived the presence of foreign witnesses as an intrusion in its sphere of influence. It finally accepted these conditions but when the negotiation teams met in May 2013, the KIO/KIA leaders demanded that the international observers (Chinese, United Nations representatives, and seven other ethnic armed groups) be physically present in the main negotiating room,

[77] Interview in Yangon, April 2013.
[78] International Crisis Group (2013:10).
[79] Interview in Laiza, August 2013.

as agreed, not just in an adjoining room where they had previously been seated by the government. Such behavior was perceived by Bamar leadership as the KIA creating unnecessary obstacles.[80]

Finally, vastly differing notions of peace exist on both sides. The journalist Bertil Lintner has suggested that "peace" has different meanings according to the side pronouncing it: "Clearly, peace means different things to the government and the ethnic rebels. The former want the latter to accept the 2008 non-federal constitution and convert their armed forces into so-called "Border Guard Forces" under the command of the Myanmar Army. Peace for the Kachin, on the other hand, means a new, or at least fundamentally amended, Constitution that gives ethnic states a large degree of autonomy."[81] Although the government has since dropped its demand for the KIA to merge into the BGF, deeper disagreements over the mere definition of peace have certainly made talks more complicated.

A right time for peace?

The KIO/KIA and the government also differ sharply in their perceptions of the definition of the right time for peace. For seventeen years, the KIO built up expectations, waiting for a democratic government to be elected, in order to discuss political matters and, in the longer term, achieve greater autonomy.[82] Because the KIO feels it has been consistent in its demands over the last decades, it often cites its own version of history to justify its demands for political dialogue before any ceasefire. But this kind of multiphase and linear approach stands in contrast to the new government's desire to turn the page and move on with its overall reform process. In this context, it is not surprising that the government's nationwide ceasefire agreement plan initially scheduled for 2013 was considered premature by the KIO. The Kachin leadership did not believe that they would have sufficient guarantees from the government, in terms of future political settlement (and mainly about the Kachin's status and degree of autonomy, the future of KIA troops, and other issues). They later softened their

[80] Interview by the author with a member of the MPC, August 2013.
[81] Lintner Bertil, December 18, 2012.
[82] Lambrecht 2013. KIA General Gam Shawng noted that throughout the previous ceasefire the military government "deferred political discussions again and again, stating it was only a caretaker government and that only when a legitimate government came to power could political issues be discussed."

position and agreed to meet the government peace negotiators, which at least paved the way for further negotiations and crucial new signs of cooperation on both sides.

On the government side, it seems that the perception that the Kachin create delays and show unwillingness to compromise prevails. To make public its willingness to meet the KIO/KIA and discuss peace, the government highlighted its views in the state media. As reported in the *New Light of Myanmar* on August 13, 2011, "Government Already Acceded to Peace Proposals of KIO to Most Possible Degree."[83] Following this, the state media stated twice that President U Thein Sein announced a halt to military offensives that did not materialize as military attacks continued, creating a situation in which both parties blamed the other. These episodes not only contributed to further mistrust, but, more worryingly, hinted that the civilian government and the Tatmadaw may have divergent views on how to achieve peace. Some Kachin openly questioned the actual role of the government, especially in the peace talks, considering that, as they hold the Tatmadaw responsible for military decisions, negotiations should be primarily held with the military, and not the civilian leaders who do not appear to have the authority to maintain a ceasefire.

The government's and Tatmadaw's "peace" strategy

The government claimed in late 2013 that it was willing to sign a ceasefire agreement with KIO representatives as soon as possible. But various indicators demonstrated that the Tatmadaw remained reluctant to give up its hold in Kachin areas and attacks were reported during and after peace talks, hinting at a division between the Tatmadaw and the civilian government. Continuing into 2014, the Tatmadaw continued with lesser but persistent military operations against the KIA in Kachin and Shan States. Without adequate willingness to compromise on either side, however, the signing of any peace agreement would appear less acceptable than victory of the military conflict. Hence, hardline elements on both sides seem determined to achieve a clear-cut military victory. As mentioned by a KIA representative, before the conflict resumed:

> "General Gam Shawng [of the KIA] said that he had little hope of a political settlement while the Tatmadaw held the upper hand in the field. The military's mentality is to arouse fear in others and then demand what

[83] New Light of Myanmar, August 13, 2011.

> they want without any compromise… Unless fear is in their minds, they cannot be pressured to do anything… [According to this line of thought] the KIA has been unable to put fear in the minds of the Myanmar military so they have refused to compromise."[84]

Another interviewee, reporting a discussion with a person close to the government leadership in early 2013, said that the Myanmar military would not negotiate peace from a position of weakness. He argued that only if military campaigns to capture the hills near the KIA headquarters of Laiza were successful would negotiations be fruitful. As for the Tatmadaw's position in 2010, in a particularly rare statement, U Hla Swe, a former army commander and Upper House representative of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party, said in an interview with the *Democratic Voice of Burma*, "It is said that if the [KIO] can't be extended an olive branch, then we should send them bullets instead… So I said: how did the Second World War end? Because two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, forcing them to come and sign a peace treaty."[85] This mindset has serious implications as the Tatmadaw was still trying to gain ground in KIA-controlled areas in early 2014 even though the government and KIO recognized there had been a de-escalation of violence and were keen to pursue peace talks.

In order to ensure a clear military victory, the Myanmar Army used disproportionate military power that climaxed with artillery bombardments and air strikes of KIA strategic positions in late 2012.[86] The Tatmadaw was hoping to lead a "flash war" inflicting considerable losses, with limited resources. Consequently, it opted for the deployment of asymmetrical power – in strategic studies, an asymmetric conflict opposes a formal military and a non-state, less equipped, but often resilient opponent. Indeed, the size of the KIA and Tatmadaw forces, arsenal, and equipment capabilities are disproportionate. The KIA has fewer troops (approximately 10,000 according to the highest estimates among local sources with a few additional thousands designated as reservists) in comparison with the Myanmar military (estimated at over 450,000). The Tatmadaw also boasts a superior arsenal of weaponry including an air force against a KIA with limited arms and no air capability nor sophisticated anti-

[84] Euro-Burma Office (2010).
[85] *Kachin News Group*, October 23, 2013.
[86] Colonel Zau Tawng, the head of the KIA's Strategic Studies Department, claimed that by December 2012 three of the Tatmadaw's regional commands were engaged in major operations on five fronts involving 132 infantry battalions and an artillery brigade.

aircraft equipment. Nonetheless, the KIA has maintained its control over a number of territories as its combatants understand and know their environment better, and their strongholds are strategically located near the China-Myanmar border, making it difficult for the Tatmadaw to attack without posing a security threat for China.[87] Furthermore, the Tatmadaw's lack of technical competence to operate newly-acquired military assets and low morale have also been cited by analysts as contributing factors to the Tatmadaw's unexpected lack of military progress for several months in 2012.[88]

In order to build a more conducive environment for peace, both sides must agree on a number of prerequisite points. Yet, not only do they differ in their understanding of the concepts of "peace" and what an agreement should entail, they also have contrasting views on how a prolonged delay in reaching an agreement could affect the peace process.

Peace talks and mistrust

Among hindrances to the peace talk process, the first appears to be the extremely low level of trust among the parties. This is common in most early stages of peace processes in any war. According to KIO sources, the government's appointment of different successive negotiators through 2011 and 2012 was confusing as a team led by U Aung Thaung was replaced by U Aung Min in 2012, which undermined its credibility with the KIA/KIO as trust had started to be built and the KIA had different perceptions of the political clout of the negotiators. The ensuing talks were further undermined by the fact that key negotiators for the government side clearly lacked decision-making powers. Even though they were mandated by the president, these negotiators did not seem to have any authority over the military and could not commit to any decision interfering with military chains of command. As a consequence, such attempts damaged, more than supported, the building of trust among the parties. As a KIO official noted about the 2011 and 2012 talks, "The negotiations were a game in which nothing significant was ever discussed." According to a press interview in 2013, General Gam Shawng claimed the government only wanted to discuss a ceasefire:

[87] *Kachin News Group* (2011): "Reverend Laphai Shing Rib, Pastor of Laiza Baptist Church: It is impossible for us to defeat the Burmese Army, which has much stronger manpower and weapons than we Kachin, without the help from Almighty God."
[88] Davis Anthony, January 30, 2013.

> "We asked them many times verbally and in writing if they would engage in a political dialogue. […] When we finally came close to a political dialogue with their delegate, Aung Thaung, the government replaced him with Aung Min and limited his authority to that of a mediator. Talks then became "informal discussions." Although Aung Min confessed a desire to discuss politics, he claimed the government had instructed that all political discussions must occur in parliament within the framework of the 2008 Constitution."[89]

The replacement of the U Aung Thaung from the first high-level government negotiating team by U Aung Min, a President's Office Minister at the time of writing, supported by the Myanmar Peace Center, in May 2012. This was initially considered a welcome move for the KIO due to his good reputation and successes in other peace negotiations. A shrewd but diplomatic negotiator, he appears to have won trust from the KIA and other Kachin leaders, who have commended his initial efforts. At the same time, the real issue, as many observers note, is that while U Aung Min can speak for the central government, he has seemed to lack authority to speak for the Tatmadaw and is considered to have less influence over them than his predecessor, U Aung Thaung. Several incidents marred the efforts of the peace negotiators. Both parties blamed each other for the skirmishes and armed attacks that occurred after the talks.[90] By late 2013, the civilian government's authority and credibility had suffered more than that of the KIO/KIA in the eyes of Kachin people. While U Aung Min was seen generally as "sincere," many interviewees mentioned their doubts about the president's authority over the most fundamental point—military strategy—as they remained convinced that the Tatmadaw was still in control of the country or at least did not have to act in accordance with presidential dictates.[91]

After several unsuccessful attempts to jumpstart peace talks in 2012 and into 2013, the seven-point agreement signed by KIA and government representatives on May 29, 2013 created hope on both sides.[92] Though symbolic, this initial agreement showed that all parties to the Kachin conflict were keen to achieve peace. This was the first time that KIO/KIA senior officials were able to travel to Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State, since the conflict resumed in

[89] Lambrecht (2013).
[90] Republic of the Union of Myanmar Ministry of Defence Press Release (2013).
[91] *Kachin News Group*, "Thein Sein's orders for Burma army to halt Kachin offensive are worthless", January 19, 2012.
[92] See the transcripts of May and October 2013 Agreements, in Annex B.

mid-2011. The government also agreed to the KIO's long-term demand for international observers, with representatives of the United Nations and China present at these talks. Representatives of seven other ethnic armed groups were also allowed to attend as observers at the request of the KIA.

Dichotomy between hopes created during the peace talks and the reality of the continued attacks led to a degree of skepticism among the KIA leadership. Thus, the need for further confidence-building measures remained clear. One frequently raised issue has been the continuation of armed attacks, allegedly decided by the Tatmadaw's highest leadership, and in some cases by private militias that operate according to the Tatmadaw's interests (mainly small sized ethnic armed groups that made ceasefire with the then-junta in the 1990s and retained their arms) stationed in Northern Shan State. A KIO public relations officer explained the KIA's position as of September 2013:

> "Since the last negotiations in Myitkyina, the KIA had fully adhered to the seven-point agreement. But the army violated those agreed points and is currently attacking our posts in Putao [in northern Kachin State]. They also attacked positions in Chipwi region on August 17, 2013[…]. The Tatmadaw constantly puts military pressure upon the KIA troops. That's why it is very difficult to trust them."[93]

The agreement signed in May 2013 generated different opinions. According to a Kachin religious leader from the government-controlled area in Kachin State, "The seven-point agreement is good for the government to show off and to get attention from the international community." Another religious leader, also living in this area, expressed more hope: "This time it is different;, whatever we said they didn't believe and whatever they said we didn't believe. There is no trust in each other. This is why the seven-point agreement is there; we are trying a new approach. Our people are really optimistic."[94] Not long after, however, skirmishes were reported in Northern Shan State (on August 19, 2013) and by September, fighting was reported in several areas in Kachin State, including Putao, Chipwi, and Mansi areas.

The most important achievement of the agreement signed on October 10, 2013 was the consent by the KIO leadership to participate in nationwide ceasefire discussions, after consultations were held with other ethnic armed groups in an unprecedented meeting held in Laiza. During the Laiza conference

[93] Interview in Laiza, August 2013.
[94] Interview in Bhamo, August 2013.

held in November 2013, nearly all ethnic armed group leaders reviewed the proposed Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement draft and commented on it. They then established the NCCT, the negotiating platform of the armed ethnic groups. A few days later they met with the UPWC (in charge of reaching peace agreements with ethnic armed groups and chaired by Vice-President U Sai Mauk Kham) in Myitkyina to provide their feedback. Several meetings were held between the NCCT and the UPWC, and progress was made in the wording of the ceasefire draft. However, as of July 2014, the KIO considered that only time and further discussion will enable the two groups to come to a common agreement.[95]

2 - Economic, political, and military incentives for conflict

> "A few people do not really want peace, such as some KIO officers and business people. They do not pro-actively try to spoil the peace process; they just ignore discussions related to peace without attempting to stop the peace talks. So, they are only indirectly spoilers." Religious leader interviewed in Myitkyina, August 2013.

While field research showed that, overall, the KIO/KIA's conflict narratives were widely assimilated and apparently accepted by the local population, the government's positions were less frequently exposed, and hence were more difficult to grasp. One tangible consequence of this lopsided understanding of the motivations for war is lack of clarity on all sides about what the government really wants, leaving room for various interpretations. Several interviewees felt that, as much as President Thein Sein should be supported in his economic and political reform efforts, the decision by many Western governments to ease sanctions in 2013 was premature and may have overly encouraged and given confidence to the Tatmadaw as well as the government, resulting in lower incentives for peace. Many Kachin felt it demonstrated that business interests prevailed over their safety and minorities' political claims.[96]

[95] Interview with an observer, Yangon, July 2014.
[96] Interviews by the author in Myitkyina in May 2013 and in Bhamo in August 2013.

Securing access to natural resources

As previously mentioned, accumulation of wealth was one of the key criticisms concerning some leaders of the KIO/KIA during the 1994-2010 ceasefire period. Some leaders, who engaged in lucrative business relations with parties closer to the then-military government, were accused of "cronyism" by others. The ceasefire allowed them to obtain large swathes of lands and extract and trade jade, teak, and other natural resources (Woods 2011).The current conflict also enabled them to protect their business interests.

Some KIO/KIA leaders own businesses, provide services mainly to Chinese and Myanmar businesses such as security, protection, and the issuance of licenses and concessions to exploit timber, mining, and other resources. These business enterprises also raise taxes from companies as well as from individuals, some of which is reinvested in the fighting effort. Funding for the conflict has both military and humanitarian implications. The political scientist Macartan Humphreys (2002) identified several channels that fund and prolong conflict worldwide; three of these can be seen in KIA methods of fundraising. The KIO/KIA is often associated with logging, jade mining, and other natural resource extraction and trade. They also get benefits from agro-business that include large banana and rubber plantations that are visible in the vicinity of Laiza (Woods 2011). Finally, according to interviews, the KIO raises funds from (more-or-less) "voluntary taxes."

Several interviewees reported that the conflict had not halted natural resource-related businesses by key military actors and that some areas of the state were being even more intensively exploited as a result of the conflict. A Kachin humanitarian worker based in May Ja Yang, in the KIO-controlled areas, and interviewed by the author in September 2013, explained:

> "Illegal logging in areas between Bhamo and Lweje has never been as intensive as for these last two-and-a-half years. There are currently more than fifty trucks blocked at various check points as they couldn't pay the bribes. Before the war, smugglers had to give a lot of under-the-table money to the Tatmadaw in order to get through check points. Yet, it was still a limited taxation. […] Now, they are freer to move around as long as they pay informal taxes to the soldiers. The road is still under the government control. The soldiers are discreet as they are afraid to be seen taking economic profit of the situation. On the other hand, the KIO does not ask for money, they do not need it as they had already set up a systematic tax system."

Other testimonies also suggest that logging of teak and other expensive trees is on the rise throughout the state, and that the KIO has a monopoly in some areas. According to an interviewee in Bhamo area, August 2013:

> "Two years into the conflict, KIA soldiers earned a lot of money because of logging, thanks to the conflict. There were no more Tatmadaw check-points in some areas, as they have been destroyed. So, no more government tax is collected there and the KIO gets loads of money. Both parties are selling trees, security, and cross-border services. They levy tax in return for permission to log. Then they get their supporters hired, so both KIO as an organization, and its members as individuals, can make money out of the conflict."

As a consequence, some large companies are still reportedly able to operate with the protection of warring parties. As a Kachin member of a civil society organization told to the author in May Ja Yang in September 2013:

> "Before the fighting there were many small-scale traders but after the fighting had broken out, there were only big companies left. Actually most of the check-points along the way to the Chinese border were established during the war and their number increased quickly. This increases the costs for business people as they have to pay much more bribes and taxes than before. So only those who have deep pockets can access this area greasing palms at each check-point. Small dealers started losing their livelihoods as small businesses cannot pay at all of the newly established check-points. When I spoke with loggers and truck drivers, they mentioned that there were at least 300 fully loaded trucks per day waiting to cross the Chinese border."

Jade and underground resources are considered differently as the jade mines of the Hpakant were recently evacuated due to the nearby fighting. During this period, big companies withdrew while the mines were left for months to smaller-scale miners. As of mid-2014, the Tatmadaw has regained control of the mines and companies are expected to resume their work soon. On the political side, the Kachin continue to harbor suspicions about government motivations and some believe the real incentive to fight is to secure access to Kachin State's natural resources. This economic issue has serious ramification for local governance and even non-KIO supporters worry about wealth-sharing. During a public meeting at Myitkyina City Hall between members of the Kachin State Government and members of the local civil society, in June 2012, the first

question raised was about increased Bamar – and central government – involvement in local natural resource extraction and trade in the area.[97]

Chinese interests

Regional trade and China's interest in natural resources have also influenced Kachin politics for at least three centuries. In the 1950s, the academic Leach observed that the jade mines, operating since the eighteenth century, had a "major impact on the Kachin politics" in the words of Leach (1954: 241). Chinese border demarcation claims on both Chinese and Kachin sides were among the causes of the first Kachin conflict. Chinese authorities remained publicly silent about border politics following the first ceasefire. But their attitude shifted as concerns grew over instability along the border during tensions between the Tatmadaw and Kokang ethnic militia (the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army located in Northern Shan State) in 2009 (Egreteau and Jagan 2013: 282-285). During this episode, as well as the current conflict in Kachin State, a dichotomy could be observed between the silent but supportive approach of local authorities at regional level and a firmer stand at the national level. As people belonging to the Jinghpaw ethnic group and other Kachin sub-groups were present on both sides of the Chinese border, China's local authorities initially closed their eyes to legal and illegal border crossings by people fleeing the conflict. Some Yunnan-based Chinese helped provide those who fled to China with assistance, protection, and/or accommodation (Human Rights Watch 2012). Meanwhile, Beijing closely monitored the situation with the Myanmar government. Asian politics researcher Nicholas Farelly noted that "The overarching priority is the stability and the relative freedom of commerce and trade that benefited them [the Chinese] so much during the ceasefire period" (Farelly 2012: 65). According to various local sources, Chinese investments in raw materials and commodities extraction directly affect the war economy in Kachin State. As noted by a civil society organization member interviewed in May Ja Yang in September 2013, "The KIO sold rare earth metals concession permits to Chinese companies because they have to raise funds to feed their soldiers and supply weaponry."

In an increasingly risky business environment in Myanmar, particularly in Kachin State, Chinese companies have striven even harder to secure local and

[97] Author's field visit notes.

government guarantees for deals and projects, as described by a civil society organization member in May Ja Yang in September 2013:

> "These big companies are mainly from China. Even though they have enormous capital, they still can't operate and do their business directly. That's why they have selected many local brokers as their handymen. Most of these local people are just daily workers. In this border area, although many businesses titles belong to local businessmen, they are mostly backed by Chinese companies. Chinese businessmen provide capital to local businessmen who back smugglers to bribe both the KIA and Tatmadaw in order to carry jade or teak to China. [This occurs] as law enforcement is very weak, especially during times of conflict."

In September 2011, President Thein Sein surprised the world with a decree suspending construction of the massive, Chinese-backed Myitsone Dam hydropower project, located at the confluence of the Meika and Malikha Rivers, and the larger Ayarwaddy (also known as Irrawaddy) River. The move was particularly striking as the government had not previously informed the Chinese company in charge of the project, China Power Investment. The suspension was widely seen as the result of intense advocacy work from civil society organizations, Burman nationalist sentiment concerning the river seen as the lifeblood of the nation, and also as an expression of Thein Sein's willingness to try to address some local Kachin grievances. Yet, this sign of goodwill came too late and was considered too marginal to address the root causes of the conflict. The Chinese company and government were left with little choice but to try to persuade the president to change his mind while accepting this decision. However, the Chinese government would soon perceive direct security threats to China from fighting close to and spilling over its border with Myanmar, and adopted a firmer approach to the conflict.

In August 2012, Chinese authorities, after several notifications to the KIO, dismantled Kachin refugee camps in Yunnan and sent thousands of mainly Kachin and Shan refugees back to Myanmar.[98] Later, Chinese authorities enforced stricter border controls amid the perceived increase of threats to China's national security resulting from escalating conflict in Kachin State. Chinese territory was within mortar and airstrike range of Myanmar's military forces, and at least two mortar shells fell inside China's Yunnan Province in December 2012 and January 2013.[99] From then, Beijing actively pressured both

[98] Wong Edward, August 23, 2012.
[99] Robinson Gwen, January 2018.

the Myanmar Government and KIO/KIA leaders to stop fighting and hosted the first major – albeit unsuccessful – peace talks between them in the Chinese border town of Ruili, in late 2012. Since then, China assigned an envoy to attend all peace talks between the KIA and the government.

Post-war uncertainties

> "The solution [to the conflict] is to include ethnic groups, and religious leaders including the non-Kachin. 1994 was a kind of success, but during the ceasefire, both the KIO and government became corrupt. It was a lull period and there was no active fighting during these years. Yet no problem was resolved. I did not see any positive outcome from this period." Religious leader interviewed in Bhamo in August 2013.

Today, many Kachin elders are skeptical about the new political system that could bring about more equality for all ethnic groups in the shorter term. Although the KIO has supported the idea of federalism for decades, many are unclear about the modalities of such a system. According to an interview with a Kachin politician in September 2013, "We don't have any experience of federalism here in our country. What would it be? Maybe this is only possible after all natural resources are gone from the ethnic areas." Setting up a federal model – a long-coveted goal for many ethnic armed group participants involved in talks over a possible nationwide ceasefire – presents various challenges. The KIO is requesting establishment of a federal system as a solution to its political grievances. Yet, it has articulated relatively little about the type and form of federalism it desires, reinforcing the impression that very little has been discussed about the nature of federal arrangements. Central to a future federal system in Myanmar is the issue of the restructuring of the armed forces and the future of the KIA. Regardless of its past, the Tatmadaw, as the only legitimate national armed force according to the 2008 Constitution, intends to monopolize control of the security sector. This does not allow for ethnic armed groups to control large swaths of territory. The only long-term settlement the state envisages is one in which its military controls the whole country.

The question of reforming the ethnic armed groups was first publicly stated at the national level when the government's BGF plan was released in 2009, which triggered the recent conflict in Kachin State. A KIO public relations officer in May Ja Yang explained to the author in September his perspective on the central government's BGF proposal. Under the plan "BGF have to locate themselves only at the border posts but not in other regions within the country.

And all the [Kachin] battalions would be strictly limited to the border points with China and India." Such curbs on the mobility of troops proved a major stumbling block to KIO/KIA acceptance of the ultimatum, for two reasons. For one, KIA battalions are stationed in a number of areas within Kachin State, away from the border (for example in the strategic resource-rich areas of Hpakant and Tanai). On top of this, the notion of handing control of border administration to the central government had obviously negative financial implications for the KIO/KIA, which would also be giving up its taxation of border trade activities.

Furthermore, under the plan, there is no future provision made for the senior officers of the ethnic armed groups in the BGF structures. As outlined by the Brussels-based think-tank, Euro-Burma Office, in a report released in 2010.

Lieut-General Ye Myint told the KIA to transform into seven battalions of the BGF, under the command of the Tatmadaw, the Burma Army. Each battalion would be composed of 18 officers and 326 soldiers: the highest rank in the BGF would be a mere major and each battalion would have 3 majors, 5 captains and 10 lieutenants. The age limit for the BGF is between 18 and 50, which means that all the officers whose current ranks are higher than major and senior officers older than 50 years of age will be forced to resign. Moreover, each battalion would include at least 3% of officers from the Tatmadaw. These Burmese officers would then control key positions of the BGF, such as logistics and others.[100]

Another pivotal issue was the proposed chain of command that would ultimately see KIA troops reporting to the Myanmar military. According to a KIO representative interviewed in May Ja Yang in September 2013 – who provided different information on battalion composition from the above quoted report:

> "There would be 100 combatants in each BGF battalion, each comprising seventy KIA soldiers and thirty Tatmadaw soldiers. […]The battalion commander would be a KIO officer while the second battalion commander would be a Tatmadaw officer within the BGF. But in fact those Tatmadaw officers will occupy all the critical ranks of the battalion, for example commanding the rations, supplies, and logistic sectors. That's why KIO had stated that they would accept the BGF proposal only when decent transformation planning would be proposed but that it couldn't accept the BGF proposal at this stage. Since then, tensions between KIA and Tatmadaw have increased. […] Even though the chiefs of battalions are our

[100] Euro-Burma Office (2010: 3).

> KIA members, they [the Bamar] would take all the critical positions from second commander to ration collector. So we would be like the living dead. We would have very little space to move, and we would be totally under their control. That's why the KIO Central Committee has determined that the proposal would bring no benefit for [the KIA] and thus decided to resist it firmly."

Since the its inception, there has been no opportunity for soldiers of ethnic minority origins to occupy senior positions within the Tatmadaw, hence the BGF criteria was perceived as the continuation of the current monopoly held by Bamar personnel within the army. As a solution, some Kachin civilians have suggested that "Integration and reinsertion of the troops can take place but it needs to be within a federal system, with the creation of Kachin regiments within a federal army. Chief of staff should be of an ethnic nationality background."[101] The army has, so far, remained silent about this issue, and appears rather unlikely to accept such a proposal. General Aung San and the British agreed on something similar in the Kandy Agreement of 1947 in which the Burma armed forces were to incorporate ethnic battalions that had previously fought the nationalists on the side of the British including the Karen, Chin, and Kachin Rifles. But soon after Independence, elements of these battalions split off in the 1950s and '60s and took up arms against the Burmese government. The Tatmadaw still has this painful experience in mind and such an arrangement seems certainly unsustainable to the current leadership.

Furthermore, the question of the age limit and social security (such as retirement schemes and reintegration of combatants) of BGF also became an issue. As a member of the Peace Creation Group stated during an interview in Myitkyina in September 2013, "The age for service is limited between eighteen and fifty. But nothing had been mentioned about the pension after retirement." Some interviewees mentioned that suggestions were made to the effect that those above fifty years old should focus either on business or politics. The current most-senior KIA officers are all directly concerned. A more comprehensive approach with incentives for the leadership would be required for them to support and trust a future potential integration process.

Although the government has now dropped the demand to fold the KIA into a proposed BGF, the question of reform, and potential integration of KIA combatants into an armed force sanctioned by the state will be an unavoidable

[101] Interview with a NGO worker by the author, Laiza, August 2013.

issue that will need to be negotiated. There is a widespread feeling in the KIA that the Tatmadaw will not back away from its insistence on either dismantling ethnic armed groups or turning them into regular army personnel. But this reform process, and any broader reform of the entire security sector itself, cannot take place in such a mistrustful context. The ethnic armed groups are afraid that this is another strategy to divide them. As mentioned in a report by the national media outlet *Burma News International* in 2013:

> "Many believe that the BGF scheme is a strategy by the government to control ethnic armed groups by using compliant armed groups already transformed into BGFs or PMF [People Militia Forces] to fight against them. For example: using the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army transformed BGF to fight against non-ceasefire Karen groups like the DKBA brigade-5 and Karen National Union. In addition, the New Democratic Army Kachin transformed into a BGF and was used against the KIA. Pitting ethnic armed groups from the same area, or ethnicity, and against each other has made many groups and civilians even more distrustful of the government's intentions."[102]

Effective security sector reform will have to ensure that information channels are clear to bring these groups – with their potentially conflicting agendas – into the same fold. Local security needs must be carefully identified and adequate solutions formulated by the central government, in accordance with ceasefire signatories. Given the widespread conviction among local populations in Kachin State that the KIA is more reliable and protective than government troops, the Tatmadaw's image and relationship with them will also need to drastically improve.

Finally, KIO/KIA and other ethno-nationalist movements find unity and support from within, the public, and other armed ethnic groups, during periods of conflict (Robinne 2007).A lasting peace will have to provide mechanisms for sustaining and institutionalizing some of the KIO's local political power. Integration of its leaders will be required so that they, as individuals, also perceive incentives for change. As an interviewee noted when discussing the future of the KIO/KIA, in September 2013, the KIO may be negotiating more than its own legitimacy in this conflict: "The main question is: 'Will KIO survive?'If the government was to win, if it wants to stop all the illegal trade, KIO will suffer a lot. The KIO will have to go back to war."

[102] *Burma News International,* (2013a: 33).

Conclusion

The main Kachin armed group, the KIA, is the largest ethnic armed group still in conflict with the Tatmadaw. In resuming their conflict in mid-2011, KIO leaders questioned the intentions of the government concerning its vague commitments of future devolution of power and greater inclusion of ethnic minorities in government and political institutions at regional and national levels. The main KIO demand for many years has been greater political autonomy, which they believe was far from being achieved even during the seventeen-year ceasefire between 1994 and 2011. By unwillingly re-engaging in an armed conflict with Thein Sein's government, they demonstrated some shortcomings of the current political reforms and peace process. The government's push to achieve a nationwide ceasefire agreement with all armed groups in the country and the KIO's engagement with NCCT in continued peace talks, however, gave hope that the process would ultimately lead to political dialogue.

The broader Kachin identity has been shaped since colonial times by the need to distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups while strengthening ties between the Kachin sub-groups and clans. Kachin identity is built on common (Christian) faith and the main language (Jinghpaw) as well as various traditions that differentiate them from other ethnic groups. Through modern history, the Kachin have cultivated these differences and leaders have striven to maintain their political influence over local populations. But Myanmar's post-Independence state-building project thwarted some of their ambitions. Alongside the push to rebuild relations with the central government emerged a radicalized ethnic identity and, along with it, more strident demands for autonomy. The KIO were soon frustrated at being deprived of political power over their ancestral territories and resources. The new border demarcation with China and the constitutional recognition of a state religion – Buddhism – that was not theirs was the final blow, and led to the first war with the Tatmadaw, which lasted thirty-three years (from 1961 to 1994) despite some attempts at peace negotiations.

The former ceasefire brokered by Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt in 1994 was not viewed as a sustainable solution for the KIO leadership as it was predominantly a military agreement acknowledging troop positions along with assorted provisions of a military nature. It was not planned as a long-lasting arrangement but as a temporary deal, awaiting a civilian government to take over and solve pending political issues. Hence, seventeen years into this agreement, Kachin leaders saw little political progress. In the meantime, however, the KIO oversaw administration of a large swathe of territory, running a limited public administration structure that delivers justice, education, health, and other public services in areas it controls. Consequently, when the former junta issued the BGF ultimatum just before handing over power to the Thein Sein government, KIO leaders felt increasingly threatened. For the last few decades, interaction with the central government became gradually more difficult as mutual trust eroded amid repeated failures to achieve mutually agreeable compromises. Kachin narratives justifying the war tend to revolve around an unfair political process while the Myanmar Government's and Tatmadaw's narratives are inclined to focus on sovereignty and national security. Hence, as of July 2014, a number of ethnic armed groups, including the KIO, demonstrate cautious optimism for the government-led nationwide ceasefire, hoping it will be the first big step to longer-term political dialogue. KIO leaders may have different views on the process but they all want more guarantees and to ensure that political dialogue will logically and simultaneously go hand in hand with a ceasefire agreement.

Several failed rounds of peace talks between 2012 and 2014 were interspersed with outbreaks of intense conflict between Kachin and government forces. Even after their tentative agreement of mid-2013 and continuing bilateral and NCCT talks, mutual suspicion lingers, despite public statements from both sides supporting the goal of forging a lasting peace. Various attempts to revitalize the peace process have had two main effects on "peace politics" at the national level. First, the KIO, after supporting, then challenging, and ultimately eroding cohesion among other ethnic armed groups, has managed in late 2013 and early 2014 to build momentum to get the multi-ethnic armed group UNFC alliance and its messages heard by a wider audience. Through its leadership in this platform in particular it has also rallied other ethnic armed groups around KIO demands, gaining leverage and legitimacy in the overall negotiation process. Second, it questioned and tested the government's approach to peace, seeking commitments that the government-led UPWC will go beyond seeking peace solely from a military perspective. It questioned the limits of Myanmar's democratic transition by demanding that priority be placed on enacting earlier government commitments on long-term political arrangements with armed

ethnic groups, particularly the decentralization of power within a federal system. This was primarily to challenge the government's initially short-term strategy of achieving a ceasefire agreement without commitment to devolution of power in ethnic areas.

At the time of concluding this research, in July 2014, the recent process, with two initial rounds of promising peace talks in Myitkyina (in May and October 2013) and increased coordination among the ethnic armed groups since November 2013, seems to indicate that peace is closer than ever since the resumption of the conflict. Yet there are many factors at play influencing the process. One of the most significant of these issues is to agree on the sharing of revenues from natural resources and border trade, in order to avoid clashes over contested economic dividends and support longer-term stabilization of the area. In early 2014, fighting was still reported in Southern Kachin and North-Western Shan States, suggesting that the Tatmadaw was attempting to undermine peace efforts, despite expressed goodwill and promises by the civilian government to reach out and build trust in its peace initiatives. Some among the KIO leadership currently appear to be keener to engage in efforts for peace than in the past. Yet the organization must still deal with the aspirations of supporters, who widely accepted the rationale for war and will need to be convinced that peace is preferable. Above all, the KIO/KIA, in order to trust the government peace delegation, will need strong evidence that the government is in control of the armed forces and not vice versa. Earlier military attacks in Kachin State, during and immediately after former peace talks, have greatly undermined government efforts to rebuild trust with the KIO leaders, and a large portion of the Kachin population.

Finally, this conflict is particularly delicate for the government to manage as it raises questions about the country's security sector and the future of the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups. It ultimately highlights the need for reforming the country's security and military structures. The wider role of the Tatmadaw in governance and its views on ethnic armed groups seem to remain fairly close to those of previous decades. The Tatmadaw has a considerable number of soldiers, financial resources, and power; its role was to deal with both internal and external enemies who were deemed to be undermining national unity and threatening sovereignty. In the context of a national level peaceful settlement, the future role of the Tatmadaw and the problematic integration of ethnic armed groups must be decided, and security sector reform remains key to the achievement of the overall political transformation. This is why KIO/KIA leaders, and those of a number of other ethnic armed groups, have decided to test the space and push the limits of this increasingly vibrant and more democratic – yet still fragile – reform process.

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Annexes

A - Acronym List

BIA: Burma Independence Army
BGF: Border Guard Forces
DKBA: Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (formely the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army)
IRRC: IDPs and Refugee Relief and Resettlement Committee
KBC: Kachin Baptist Convention
KDA: Kachin Defense Army
KIA: Kachin Independence Army
KIC: Kachin Independence Council
KIO: Kachin Independence Organization
KNO: Kachin National Organization
KNU: Karen National Union
KSPP: Kachin State Progressive Party
IDP: Internally Displaced Persons
PCG: Peace Creation Group
PMFs: People Militia Forces
MNDAA: Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
NCCT: National Ceasefire Coordination Team
NDAK or **NDA-K**: New Democratic Army – Kachin
NLD: National League for Democracy
NGO: Non-Government Organization
NSAG: Non-State Armed Group
PSLA: Palaung State Liberation Army
SLORC: State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC: State Peace and Development Council
SSA N: Shan State Army North
SSA South: Shan State Army
SSNA: Shan State National Army
TAT: Technical Advisory Team
UNFC: United Nationalities Federal Council
UPWC: Union Peace-making Work Committee
UN: United Nations
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA: United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

B - The Union Peace-Making Work Committee and KIO Agreements

The "Seven Point-Agreement" (unofficial translation) – 30 May 2013

Agreement between Union Level Peacemaking Committee and KIO Representatives

1. Representatives from Union Level Peace Making Committee led by Vice Chairman and Union Minister U Aung Min and representatives from KIO led by U Sumlut Gun held meetings/discussions at Ma Jwe Hall, Myitkyina, Kachin State on 28-30 May 2013. United Nations Resident Coordinator for Myanmar - Mr. Vijay Nambiar, Second Secretary/Consular from Embassy of China in Myanmar - Mr. Lu Zhi, representatives from 8 ethnic armed groups, and other invited elders from the area attended as observers.

2. To come up with a political agreement that guarantees lasting peace, both sides agreed on the following points and signed in front of attending witnesses.

a) We agree that union government and KIO will continue political dialogue/discussions

b) We agree for both sides' troops to reduce the fighting and to prevent further fights from happening

c) We agree to form a Joint Monitoring Committee that is made up of both sides' representatives

d) We agree to discuss and continue to work on *development / resettlement / return* of Internationally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (NB: not sure what is the *term* exactly)

e) We agree to continue discussion on troop placements

f) We agree to form a Technical Team in Myitkyina which will include KIO representatives to discuss things that need to be done

g) We agree to have the same representatives of the organizations present here today for the next talk. If there are any other organizations to be invited, it is to be done with both sides' agreement.

Signed by:
- Ministry of Defence - Lt. Gen. Myint Soe
- KIO representative - Colonel La Phaing Khun Naung
- Kachin State Minister - U La John Ngan Sine
- KIO representative - Colonel Ma Yan Zaw Taung
- Pyith Hluttaw MP - Daw Dwe Bu
- Amyotha Hluttaw MP - U Ket Htein Nan

Signed by the following witnesses:
- UNRC - Mr. Vijay Nambiar
- Embassy of China - Mr. Ku Zhi
- KNPP - U Khu Yea
- KNU - Phado Mann Mann
- CNF - U Ro Khaw Mar
- NMSP - Naing Aung Min
- RCSS/SSA - General Sai Luu
- SSPP/SSA - U Sai Khun Sai
- UWSA - U Sam Khun
- NDAA - U Kham Maung
- Myitkyina elder - Duwagyi U Haw Wa Zaw Gam

***

Follow-on Agreement
(Official Translation - President's Office) - 10 October 2013

The agreement between Union Peace-making Work Committee and KIO delegation October 10 2013

1. The government peace negotiation team led by Vice-Chairman of Union Peace-making Work Committee Union Minister U Aung Min and KIO peace delegation headed by U Sumlut Gam held peace talks at Majwe Hall in Manaw Ground in Myitkyina, Kachin State from 8 to 10 October. Present at the peace talks as observers were Special Adviser to UNSG on Myanmar Mr Vijay Nambiar, Chinese Special Envoy on Asia Mr Wang Ying Fan, reps from 10 ethnic armed groups, four Kachin Hluttaw representatives, representatives from official political parties in Kachin State such as Union Solidarity and Development Party, National League for Democracy, Unity and Democracy Party, National Democratic Force, Tailai (Shanni) National Development Party and Shan Nationalities Democratic Party, Kachin National Traditional Culture Central Committee and Kachin State Shan Ethnic Literature and Culture Committee, members of Peace-talk Creation Group and ten invited community elders.

2. The two sides agreed the following points in front of the observers with a view to laying down sound foundation for political dialogue for lasting peace. The seven-point agreement is as follows:

(a) The two sides agreed to continue according to the following preliminary procedure as the government has invited KIO to join nationwide ceasefire signing to enter into political dialogue.

(1) The Union government shall send and discuss the plans

(2) The government agreed to hold Ethnic Armed Groups Conference as demanded by KIO delegation

(b) The two sides acknowledged the de-escalation of the conflict since May 28-30 talks and attributed it to regular interaction between the technical teams and enhanced communication between troops from both sides and agreed to continue coordinating to avoid recurrence of clashes;

(c) The two sides agreed that the technical teams of two sides and departments concerned shall continue coordinating on adopting of basic principles and a plan for return and resettlement of IDPs; the two sides also agreed to undertake in coordination with each other the pilot project in four villages;

(d) The two sides agreed to form Joint Monitoring Committee based on an organizational structure that can cover all conflict regions to de-escalate the military tensions and avoid recurrence of clashes; the technical teams of two sides shall take further actions to adopt operational plan based on Joint Monitoring Committee Structure (Attached-1) and terms of reference — five basic principles and 18 rules (Attachment-2);

(e) The two sides agreed to reopen through coordination as quickly as possible the public and arterial roads in Kachin State closed because of conflict;

(f) KIO agreed to organize public consultation through prior coordination with authorities concerned;

(g) The two sides agree that the technical teams shall coordinate on future work programmes and coordinate on soonest holding of next peace talks.

C - The peace talks Chronology (as of July 2014)

#	Date	Location	KIO Representatives	Government Representatives
1	17/06/11	Laiza, Kachin State	KIO Central Committee	4 leaders of the Kachin National Consultative Assembly
	The government offered a verbal ceasefire with the KIO. The KIO told them they must first agree to recognise their political rights before any discussion regarding a ceasefire could commence. A document was sent to Myanmar high ranking state officials and military leaders. The KIO requested a political dialogue in a third country under the aegis of foreign mediators. The KIO's request was refused.			
2	30/06/11	Laja Yang Village, Kachin State	Maj. Gen. Gun Maw + (4)	Col. Than Aung
3	01-02/08/11	Laja Yang village, Kachin state	Maj. Gen. Gun Maw + (4)	Col. Than Aung
	The KIO demanded that the government negotiate a nationwide ceasefire with all ethnic armed groups. No agreement was reached but both sides agreed to continue meeting for further discussions.			
4	19/11/11	Mae Sai, Thailand	Lt. Gen. N'Ban La	Aung Min
	Informal meeting Individual participants included: Nay Win Maung; Myanmar Egress, DrKyaw Yin Hlaing and Tin Maung Than; Burmese academics, HarnYawngwe; executive director of the Brussels-based Euro-Burma Office.			

5	29/11/11	Ruili, China	Lanyaw Zawng Hra	Aung Thaung
	Full scale delegation level talks. No agreement was reached. Other KIO reps: Col. LahpaiZau Raw, Lt-Col. Lazing JiNawng, Lt-Col. MaranZauTawng, Sumlut Gam and Lama Gum Hpan.			
6	18-19/01/12	Ruili, China	Sumlut Gam + (11)	Aung Thaung
	The government continued to try to convince the KIO to sign a ceasefire but no agreement was reached. KIO complained that the Myanmar military was attacking their frontline position while talks were going on.			
7	8,9,10/03/12	Ruili, China	Sumlut Gam + (7)	Aung Thaung
	3 days meeting. No agreement reached but a joint statement was signed that tentatively agreed on five points. Some of which included: continue political dialogue, building trust, a drawdown in troop levels, coordination of military activities in the conflict zone.			
8	21/05/12	Chiang Rai, Thailand	Maj. Gen. Gun Maw, Brig. Dr. La Ja	Aung Min
	Informal Meeting			
9	1/06/12	Maija Yang	Sumlut Gam +(4)	Aung Min
	Informal Meeting			
10	20/06/12	Maija Yang	Sumlut Gam +(4)	Aung Min
	Informal Meeting. Agreed to aim toward more meaningful talks in the next round, including the presence of army Commander – in-Chief Soe Win. Aung Min laid out a map detailing the government's proposal for the relocation of military bases to sites where both armies would be farther apart.			
11	30/10/12	Ruili, China	Sumlut Gam	Aung Min
	Agreement was reached to continue talks and proceed with further political dialogue.			

12	4/02/13	Ruili, China	Sumlut Gam, Maj. Gen. Gun Maw	Aung Min
13	11-12/03/13	Ruili, China	Sumlut Gam, Maj. Gen. Gun Maw	Aung Min
	2 days meeting, 5 points statement. Observers: 4 from UNFC, other NSAGs, 4 from PCG and Minister-Counselor Mr Wang Zongying of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs			
14	28-30/05/13	Myitkyina, Kachin State	Sumlut Gam, Maj. Gen. Gun Maw and other leaders (48 delegates)	U Aung Min, Lt. Gen. MyintSoe and ministers (44 delegates)
	7 points agreement.			
15	08-10/10/13	Myitkyina	Sumlut Gam, Maj.Gen. Gun Maw, Col. Laphai Zau Raw, Col. Zau Tawng, Naw Htoi, 8 representatives from KIO	Aung Min, Lt. Gen MyintSoe (30 from govt/ 53 from KIO/ 24 from ethnic armed groups/ and CSOs/ total 115)
	Preliminary agreement in Myitkyina on 10 Oct 2013.			
16	16/09/13	Myitkyina	KIO Advisory technical team	MPC technical team
	Informal meeting.			
17	02/10/13	Myitkyina	KIO Advisory technical team	UPWC - MPC
	Informal meeting about 5 main issues: 1 - both side firing situation 2 - IDPs 3 - Military code of conduct(joint monitoring committee) 4 - political talks 5 - Others.			

18	13/05/14	Myitkyina, Kachin state	KIO	UPWC
	Released a joint statement after the meeting and agreed to reduce the clashes.			
19	28/05/14	Myitkyina, Kachin state	KIO advisory technical team	UPWC
	Informal meeting. After the meeting, KIO and UPWC formed a joint committee to mediate the conflicts between KIO and government forces and reduce the clashes in Kachin state. In the joint committee, Col. Than Aung leads the government team and Col. Zau Tawng leads KIO team. The joint committee has equal number of representative. There are 5 representatives from each side included in the joint committee.			
20	05/07/14	Myitkyina, Kachin state	KIO technical team	Col. Than Aung (minister of Kachin state border affairs)
	Informal Meeting. Attempt to end skirmishes.			

Source: Myanmar Peace Monitor
(http://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/background/constitution/155-kio)

Main Armed groups present in Kachin "territories" (incl. Kachin State and areas of Northern Shan States)

Name	Shan State Army / Shan Progress Party	Shan State Army / Restoration Council of Shan State	Ta'ang National Liberation Army	New Democratic Army – Kachin	Kachin Defense Army
Area of Operations (within Kachin territories and Northern Shan)	Muse, Lashio	Muse	Namtu area of Northern Shan	Special Region 1 - operating from Pang wan and Kan Paiti on the Chinese border	Special Region 5
Combatants (estimate)	2,000	6,000	1,000	900	200 - plus about 1,000 men from local militias
Previous Ceasefires with the government	1989 and 28th January 2012	1996 and 16th January 2012		1989 and turned into BGF 1001, 1002 and 1003.	PMF Unit 3 to 7 aka Kaungkha 1 to 5
Alleged allegiances			KIO	Tatmadaw	Tatmadaw
Remark		Under the command of General Yawd Serk. Former CBP, Shan United Revolution Army and Mong Tai Army - merged in 2005	Palaung ethnic armed group	Former CPB's Brigade 101	

Source : Burma News International (a) (2013).

E - Ceasefire Agreements in Myanmar

	Ethnic Armed Group	Cease-fire Agreement at State Level	Cease-fire Agreement at Union Level
1	United Wa State Party/Army	September 6 2011	December 26 2011
2	National Democratic Alliance Army – Eastern Shan State	September 7 2011	December 27 2011
3	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (5)	November 3 2011	December 11 2011
4	Restoration Shan State/ Shan State Army	December 2 2011	January 16 2012
5	Chin National Front	January 6 2012	May 7 2012
6	Karen National Union	January 12 2012	April 7 2012
7	Shan State Progressive Party/Shan State Army	January 28 2012	January 28 2012
8	New Mon State Party	February 1 2012	February 23 2012
9	Karenni National Progressive Party, Arakan	March 7 2012	June 9 2012
10	Pao National Liberation Organisation	August 25 2012	March 23 2013
11	Karen National Union/ Karen National Liberation Army- Peace Council	February 7 2012	-
12	Liberation Party/Army (Rakhine State Liberation Party)	April 5 2012	-
13	National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Khaplang	April 9 2012	-

Source: Burma News International (2014).

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