A Return to War: Militarized Conflicts in Northern Shan State

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Northern Shan State

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Preface

Drawing on both primary research and a range of secondary sources, this paper aims to provide a clearer, historically informed understanding of the complex situation in northern Shan State in Myanmar, by analyzing its conflict dynamics grounded in a subnational perspective. Involving since 2009 escalating armed conflict featuring several Ethnic Armed Organizations, the Tatmadaw, plus an array of other actors, ongoing conflict in the sub-region holds significant implications for the prospects of ending Myanmar's decades-long civil wars.

It should be noted that developments in Myanmar are invariably fast moving which means that information can quickly become outdated. This report considers developments up until March 2018. Commissioned by ISDP, the report reflects the inputs of several authors who would prefer to remain anonymous.

ISDP, June 2018

Acronyms

21CPC	21st Century Panglong Conference
AA	Arakan Army
ABSDF	All Burma Students' Democratic Front
AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
AIO	Arakan Independence Organization
ALP	Arakan Liberation Party
ANC	Arakan National Council
ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
CEFU	Committee for the Emergence of the Federal Union
CNF	Chin National Front
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CPCS	Center for Peace and Conflict Studies
DKBA	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organization
FPNCC	Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee
IDP	Internally Displaced Person/s
KDA	Kachin Defense Army
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
KIO	Kachin Independence Organization
KKY	Ka Kwe Ye
KMT	Kuomintang
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU	Karen National Union
KNU/KNLA PC	Karen Nation Union/ Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council
KRF	Kokang Revolutionary Force
LDU	Lahu Democratic Union
MIMU	Myanmar Information Management Unit
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
MNTJP	Myanmar National Truth and Justice Party
MoIP	Ministry of Immigration and Population
MTA	Mong Tai Army
MDS	Myanmar Defense Services
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NCCT	Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team
NDF	National Democratic Front
NAA	National Alliance Army
NA (B)	Northern Alliance (Brotherhood)

NMSP	New Mon State Party
PNF	Palaung National Front
PNLO	Pa-O National Liberation Organization
PSC	Peace and Solidarity Committee
PSLA	Palaung State Liberation Army
PSLF	Palaung State Liberation Front
PLSO	Palaung State Liberation Organization
PNDF	Pawngyawng National Defense Force
RCSS	Restoration Council of Shan State
SAZ	Self-Administered Zone
SNUF	Shan National Unity Front
SSA	Shan State Army
SSA/RCSS	Shan State Army/ Restoration Council of the Shan State
SSA/SSPP	Shan State Army/ Shan State Progress Party
SSIA	Stan State Independence Army
SSNA	Shan State National Army
SSPP	Shan State Progress Party
SUA	Shan United Army
SURA	Shan United Revolutionary Army
TRA	Tailand Revolutionary Army
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
ULA	United League of Arakan
UPC	Union Peace Conference
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
UWSA/P	United Wa State Army/Party
WNO	Wa National Organization

Introduction

Myanmar's internal armed conflict erupted in 1948 just after it gained independence from Britain. The principle armed actors in Myanmar's civil wars have involved the Myanmar Defense Services, or *Tatmadaw*,[1] and dozens of armed resistance groups.[2] In 2008, after decades of militarized violence under civilian and then military regimes, the Tatmadaw initiated political reforms which allowed for the transition to a quasi-democratic or hybrid regime.[3] In 2011, the newly elected Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) government commenced engagement with ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) in an effort to resolve the long-running civil war. These efforts have been continued by the National League for Democracy (NLD)-led government since March 2016.

Since 2011, the patterns of engagement between the Tatmadaw and EAOs feature several significant changes. The first is the promulgation of a multilateral ceasefire agreement involving the civilian government, the

[1] The Tatmadaw is the name of Myanmar's armed forces, or Defense Services as they are officially known. Martyred nationalist leader General Aung San is widely considered the father of the modern Tatmadaw for his role in leading Burma's nationalist forces to independence from the Japanese and the British. For more information on the history of the Tatmadaw, see Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003); Defense Services Historical Museum and Archives [Burmese]; *Tatmadaw Thamain [History of the Armed Forces]* (Yangon: News and Periodicals Enterprise, 1997-1998); Maung Aung Myoe, *Building the Tatmadaw: Myanmar Armed Forces since 1948* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009); Andrew Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces: Power without Glory* (Norwalk, CT: East Bridge, 2002); Defense Services Historical Museum and Archives [Burmese]; *Tatmadaw Thamain [History of the Armed Forces]* (Yangon: News and Periodicals Enterprise, 1997-1998).

[2] For a comprehensive list of armed resistance organizations, see Appendix III in Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 1999).

[3] A hybrid regime features elements of both a democratic system, but also those of its authoritarian past.

Tatmadaw, and ten EAOs.[4] The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) of October 2015 aims to provide a mechanism for dialogue to address the political issues that have fueled the conflicts. The second is that the Tatmadaw now allows discussion of the once taboo issue of federalism, and agrees in principle to its inclusion in the future political reform of Myanmar. Previously, this issue was contentious for the Tatmadaw and was viewed as a threat to the security of the country.

At the same time, however, an escalation of warfare has also taken place during this period of reform. Some areas, including but not limited to northern Shan State, have experienced a return to chronic militarized conflict and instability. [5] The escalation of violence and military operations by the Tatmadaw in these areas have further eroded trust by local EAOs and communities in the NCA process, and thus, have effectively stalled the overall peace negotiation process and ending decades of fighting.

This paper focuses specifically on northern Shan State where conflict has steadily escalated since 2009, and experienced further intensity after the initial signing of the NCA in 2015.

Northern Shan State: Overview[6]

Shan State is the largest of Myanmar's 14 states and regions with an area of over 60,000 km^2 and an estimated population of 5.8 million people.[7]

[4] In October 2015, 8 EAOs signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. In February 2018, two more EAOs signed the NCA: the New Mon State Party/NMSP and the Lahu Democratic Union/LDU. See p. 26 for table.

[5] In Kachin State, located to the north of Shan State, the military offensives by the Tatmadaw also represent an escalation that began in mid-2011, marking the end of a 17-year ceasefire arrangement between the government and Kachin Independence Organization (KIO).

[6] Note: a lack of standardized English transliteration of place names from Shan, Burmese and other locally used languages sometimes leads to confusion when writing about northern Shan State. This paper employs place names that are locally used and those used by the Myanmar Information and Map Unit.

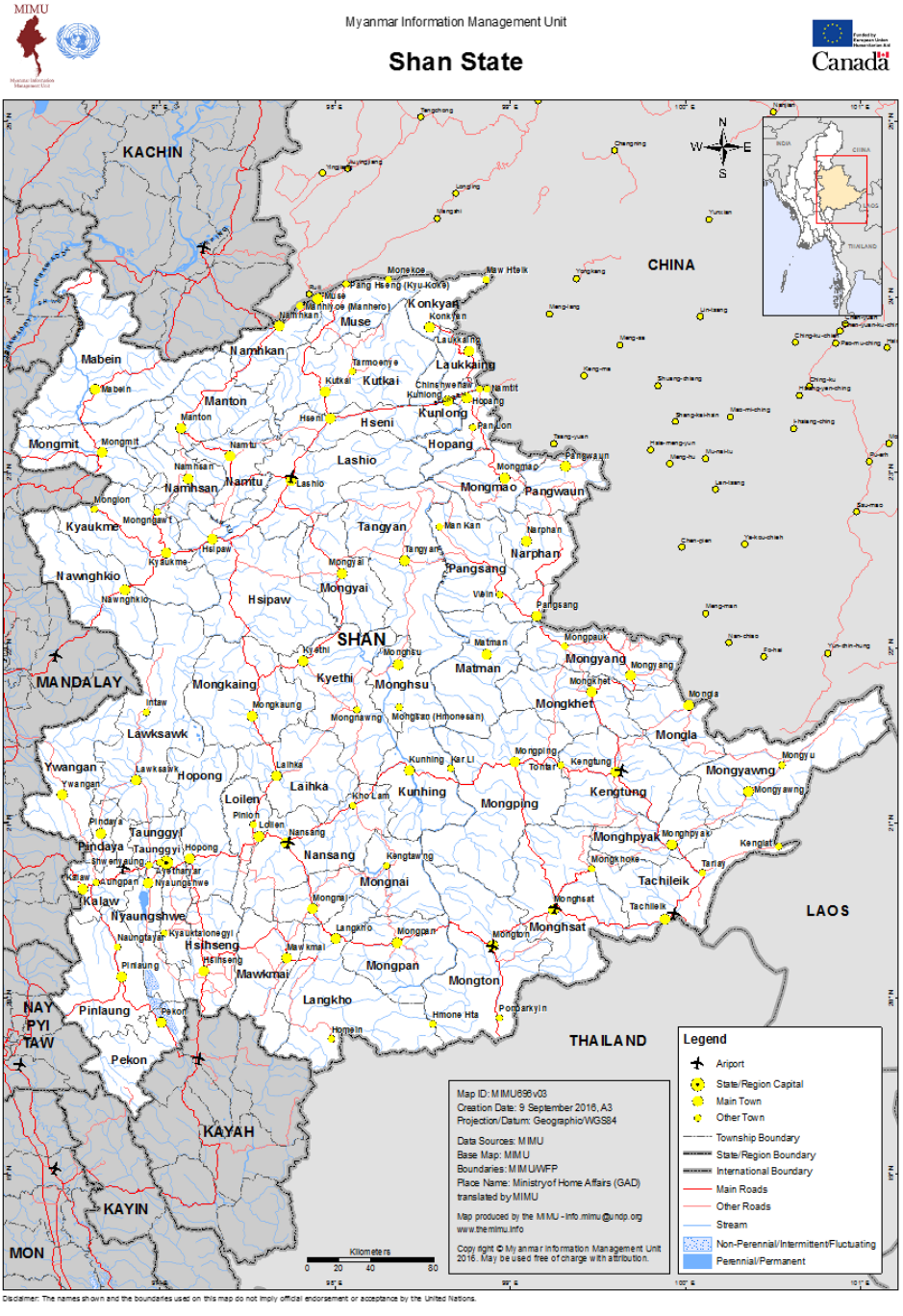
[7] Myanmar has 14 constituent administrative units known as states and regions. The seven states are home to populations with large non-Burman minorities. The seven regions have majority ethnic Burma

Northern Shan State is a commonly employed geographic sub-region within Shan State, along with eastern and southern Shan State.[8] A salient feature of northern Shan State is its ethnic diversity, which includes the Burman, Chinese, Kachin, Lahu, Lisu, Palaung/Ta'ang, Shan, and Wa ethnic groups. The population is predominately rural, residing in mountains and upland valleys. Many ethnic Shan live in these valleys and practice wetland rice cultivation, whereas Akha, Kachin, Lahu, Lisu, Palaung/Ta'ang, and Wa predominantly live in the mountains and tend to practice upland cultivation. Although the area possesses significant natural resource endowments, decades of fighting have stifled economic development and many areas lack basic services. Northern Shan State borders China's Yunnan Province, Kachin State, the Sagaing and Mandalay regions, and the southern and eastern regions of Shan State.

populations. The regions were previously known as divisions, but the term was changed under the 2008 Constitution. The 2014 National Census does not provide a breakdown of population estimates specifically for northern Shan State. See Ministry of Immigration and Population (MoIP), Department of Population, "The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census. Shan State Volume 3 – M," May 2015.

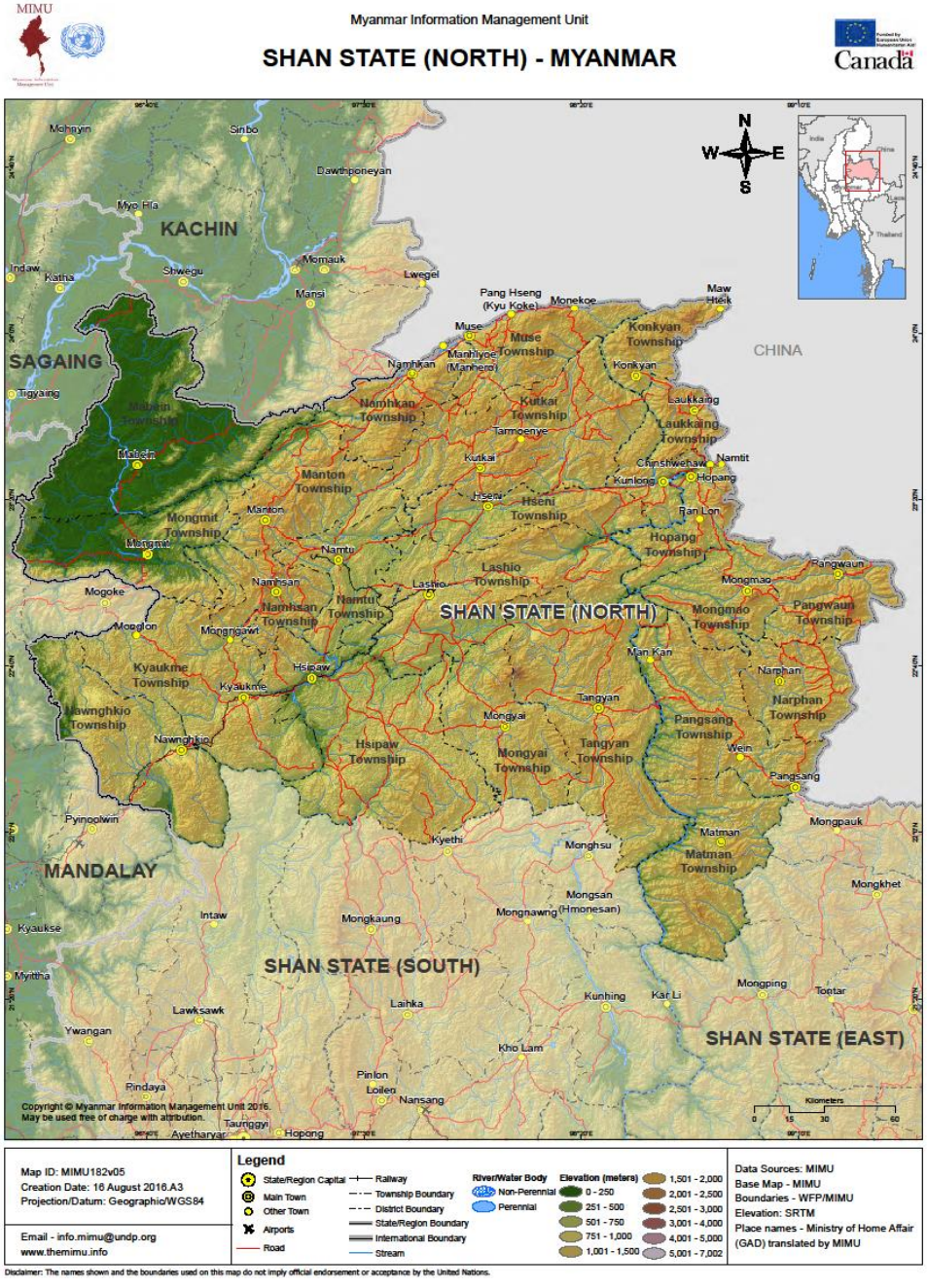
[8] See Myanmar Information Management Unit, "Township Map-Shan State (North)," February 23, 2015.

Map 1: Shan State



(Source: Myanmar Information and Map Unit)

Map 2: Township Map – Shan State (North)



(Source: Myanmar Information and Map Unit)

Armed conflicts in northern Shan State first erupted following Myanmar's independence and have involved dozens of armed groups. Among the Tatmadaw's first battles were those against the incursions by Chinese troops from Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) in 1949. At the same time, militarized violence between the Tatmadaw[9] and several ethno-nationalist and ideologically motivated organizations began in the late 1940s throughout Myanmar, and for the next several decades the Tatmadaw and these armed groups engaged in ongoing civil wars. In addition to the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), among the larger and most influential of the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) operating in northern Shan State were the Shan State Army (SSA), the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), and the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA). There also existed an unknown number of largely Tatmadaw-allied militias. While the main axis of fighting was between the Tatmadaw and EAOs, instances of conflict amongst EAOs occurred, and alliances between EAOs were formed that waxed and waned in terms of strength and influence over the post-independence period.

After several decades of fighting, a series of ceasefire arrangements between EAOs and the military government were concluded between 1989 and 1996, which led to a reduction in militarized conflicts in northern Shan State. Whilst armed violence subsided in the ceasefire period after 1996, core political issues revolving around demands by EAOs for greater autonomy and federalism remained unresolved.[10] Furthermore, armed actors did not

[9] Estimates of the ethnic breakdown of the Tatmadaw are not publicly available; however, the Tatmadaw is largely believed to be comprised mostly of citizens of Burman ethnicity and there are very few personnel from other ethnicities found in high-ranking positions. See: David Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p.37.

[10] For discussion on the framing of political goals held by EAOs, see Yaw Bawm Mangshang, "Is media biased against the ethnic armed organizations in Myanmar?" *Tea Circles*, July 31, 2017.

fully demobilize. This created a situation described by academics as "neither war, nor peace."[11]

At present, armed conflicts in northern Shan State have come full circle with their current patterns resembling those of earlier ones in the pre-ceasefire period (prior to 1989). While the causes for the re-escalation of conflicts are complex and varied, as this paper will examine, they were preceded by a breakdown in existing ceasefire arrangements. Since 2009, many parts of northern Shan State have become zones of armed violence in which multiple armed actors operate. Namely, these are the Tatmadaw, seven EAOs, and several Tatmadaw-allied militias[12] (See Table 1). The presence of so many ethnic armed groups distinguishes it from other areas of the country and in part reflects the high degree of ethnic heterogeneity in northern Shan State. This diversity of ethnic populations provides conditions useful for armed groups to mobilize ethnic identity as a basis for generating support.

The largest, oldest, and most politically influential of these EAOs in northern Shan State include the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Shan State Army/Shan State Progress Party (SSA/SSPP, also referred to as the SSA-North), and the Shan State Army/Restoration Council of the Shan State (SSA/RCSS – also known as SSA-South). While not currently engaged in armed conflict with the Tatmadaw, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), founded in 1989, is the strongest militarily of the EAOs. Three other EAOs operate in northern Shan State: the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the

[11] For discussion of this concept in the Myanmar context, see Tom Kramer and David Aronson, *Neither war nor peace: The future of the cease-fire agreements in Burma* (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 2009), and Mary P. Callahan, *Political authority in Burma's ethnic minority states: devolution, occupation and coexistence*. Vol. 31 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007). For further discussion of the concept of "negative peace" see Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilisation* (Oslo: PRIO, 1996).

[12] A large number of Tatmadaw-allied armed groups, often referred to as people's militias, are an enduring feature of Myanmar's security landscape. Despite their long-term presence, however, much basic information about militias is unavailable. For discussion of Tatmadaw-allied militias, see John Buchanan, *Militias in Myanmar*, The Asia Foundation, 2016.

Arakan Army (AA). The latter two organizations were founded relatively recently, in 2009. In addition, the Shan State Army/Restoration Council of the Shan State (SSA/RCSS – also known as SSA-South) has expanded its operations in northern Shan State as of late 2015.

Of the seven EAOs present in northern Shan State, only the SSA/RCSS is a signatory to the NCA signed in October 2015 under the previous USDP government (see Table 2 for list of current signatories). Critically, three EAOs – the MNDAA, TNLA, and AA – are prevented from participating in the NCA, with the Tatmadaw insisting that they first sign bilateral ceasefires and disarm, terms they will not currently accept.

Moreover, in a significant development, in April 2017 the Federal Political Negotiation Consultative Committee (FPNCC) was formed, which is a UWSA-led political alliance of northern EAOs in opposition to the NCA. The alliance includes the UWSA, KIA, SSA/SSPP, MNDAA, TNLA, and AA, as well as the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), which is primarily based in eastern Shan State. The alliance is mainly political in nature, but together commands the most significant combined troop-strength in Myanmar outside of the Tatmadaw, and has increasingly drawn China into the peace process. Arguably, the participation of this northern bloc in a national peace process is "the key to resolve the conflict."[13]

These developments pose serious challenges to the reformist agenda of the current NLD-led government and its stated goals of resolving Myanmar's decades-long civil wars through a multilateral peace process.[14]

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[13] "Aung San Suu Kyi Scores First Win in Myanmar's Crumbling Peace Process," *Voice of Asia*, February 16, 2018, https://www.voanews.com/a/aung-san-suu-kyi-scores-first-win-myanmars-crumbling-peace-process/4257632.html

[14] Hnin Yadana Zaw, "Myanmar's Suu Kyi says peace process will be government's priority," *Reuters*, January 4, 2016.

Table 1: Armed Actors in northern Shan State, 2018.

Actor	Date Founded	Main Areas of Operation within northern Shan State
Government Forces		
Defense Services (Tatmadaw)	1948	Most Areas
Tatmadaw-allied Militias	Varied	Most Areas
Ethnic Armed Organizations		
Arakan Army (AA)[15]	2009	Muse
Kachin Independence Army (KIA), 4th, 6th, and 10th Brigades	1961	Kutkai, Muse, Lashio, Hsenwi, Namkham, Mongmit, Namtu
Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) (Kokang)	1989	Muse, Kutkai, Laukkai, Konkyan
Shan State Army/ Restoration Council of the Shan State (SSA/RCSS) (SSA-South)*	1997	Namkham, Kyaukme, Hsipaw, Manton, Namtu, Namsan, Mongmit
Shan State Army/ Shan State Progress Party (SSA/SSPP) (SSA-North)	1964	Hsenwi, Hsipaw, Kyaukme, Tangyan, Mongyai, Lashio
Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA)	2009	Nawngkhio, Lashio, Kyaukme, Hsipaw, Kutkai, Namtu, Manton, Namhsan, Mongmit
United Wa State Army (UWSA)	1989	Pangsang, Mongmao, Pangwaun, Narphan, Hopang

**** Note: the SSA/RCSS signed the NCA in October 2015***

The outbreak and continued escalation of militarized violence in northern Shan State has left many civilians and soldiers dead, and displaced tens of thousands of people in these areas. Often overlooked, moreover, is the impact of violence on the lives of the local population, such as access to

[15] The Arakan Army has a political wing known as the United League of Arakan (ULA).

education, freedom of movement, and basic healthcare.[16] The Tatmadaw's engagement in military operations against EAOs and the trauma and suffering caused by violent conflicts has generated mistrust among many communities about the peace process and raised questions about the government's ability to effectively resolve armed conflict. Indeed, many communities in this region have not experienced the benefits of a "peace dividend" since the Thein Sein-led government came to power in 2011.

Nevertheless, a commonly found sentiment among the people of northern Shan State is a desire for the war to stop.[17] It is important to take this local perspective into account when assessing conflict dynamics and efforts at conflict resolution in northern Shan State. The de-escalation of armed conflict and a cessation of fighting are a critical step towards creating conditions conducive to further negotiations.

Methodology, Structure, Challenges

Clear understandings of Myanmar's conflicts are often limited by gaps in knowledge and biases in analysis. The conflict in northern Shan State is no different. In many cases, the reasons for how and why instances of armed violence break out are not often well understood with explanations all too often resorting to generalizations. A focus on a subnational zone helps better

[16] On this topic see: *Peace is Living with Dignity: Voices of Communities from Myanmar's Ceasefire Areas in 2016* (Phnom Penh: Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, 2016); David Scott Mathieson, *Burma's Northern Shan State and Prospects for Peace* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, Peace Brief No. 234, September 2017); and "Myanmar children in conflict-hit areas risk getting left behind: U.N.," *Reuters*, May 23, 2017.

[17] This point of view reflects regular visits to northern Shan State over the last ten years. A study of concerns by people in northern Shan State conducted by the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies notes that, "The most prevalent theme expressed across communities was the desire for real and sustainable peace." See: *We Want Genuine Peace: Voices of communities from Myanmar's ceasefire areas 2015* (Phnom Penh: Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, 2016), p. 84. See also: *Peace is Living with Dignity 2016* (Phnom Penh: Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, 2017).

identify dynamics and trends in militarized violence not readily discerned by broader studies focused on analyzing violence across Myanmar.[18]

Notwithstanding, analysis of the armed conflicts in northern Shan State is challenging for several reasons. The conflicts are exceedingly complex with more than a dozen armed organizations operating in the area since 1949, not including a multiplicity of militias. The history of these armed organizations often involves multiple splits, mergers and alliances, with new names being adopted in the process. Further adding to this complexity, patterns of engagement and conflict between EAOs and the Tatmadaw have shifted frequently over decades.

Like many areas of conflict in Myanmar, northern Shan State has weak systems for collecting information about militarized violence, independently verifying reports, and disseminating such information. This reflects several impediments. The area is remote and contains rugged mountainous features. This difficult terrain combined with the violence involving multiple armed groups makes many parts of northern Shan State hard to access. In addition, there are restrictions on gaining access and a lack of resources for gathering information about patterns of conflict.[19] These factors contribute to a lack of awareness of incidents of violence and limits understanding of why violence occurs in these areas.

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[18] The term "subnational analysis" is used in this report in reference to analysis that focuses on an area that is at below the country level. In this case, northern Shan State is the unit of analysis. The term is not fixed and other instances of subnational analysis could also cover eastern Shan State, Magwe Region, or northern Thailand. See, for example, *The Contested Areas of Myanmar. Subnational Conflict, Aid, and Development*, Asia Foundation, October 2017, pp.17-25.

[19] Conflict areas in Myanmar are often in remote mountainous areas. Access can be difficult due to ongoing conflict in these areas and usually requires one of the armed groups' permission to enter the area deemed under their control. The Tatmadaw rarely take journalists to conflict areas and EAOs provide limited access. The law is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of reporting on the conflict, as aside from strict legislation to prevent criticism of individuals and institutions, perhaps the most threatening legislation that impacts on reporting in conflict areas in Myanmar is Article 17/1 of the Unlawful Associations Act of 1908. This effectively prevents people from meeting others who belong to outlawed organizations, which often means EAOs.

Efforts to examine militarized violence are often oriented towards monitoring violence, rather than analyzing the patterns of armed conflict.[20] The news media in Myanmar provides coverage on clashes, human rights abuses, troop movements, peace negotiations, and other conflict-related events.[21] Additionally, several human rights organizations provide in-depth analyses of human rights abuses related to the conflicts.[22] Organizations focused on humanitarian-related activities are also involved in the reporting, collection, and dissemination of information about the impact of the conflict on the population.[23] The data collected by these groups, and other conflict resolution and monitoring organizations, are one of the few ways to assess the conflict.[24]

Accordingly, two key metrics have emerged as common indicators for conflict trends in the sub-region: 1) the number of armed clashes, and 2) the numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The data for these metrics are updated regularly by groups such as government departments, humanitarian and development organizations, and provide measures useful for researchers, conflict monitors, and relief organizations to assess changes in conflicts over time. While useful, these metrics are not without fault and bias, however, and do not account for many important aspects, which range from the intensity of clashes, their shifting patterns, inter-EAO

[20] For a detailed account of current conflicts in northern Shan State, see Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the Ethnic Armed Organizations* [Burmese] (Yangon: Yan Aung Sa Pei, 2016).

[21] For English language media reports on the armed conflicts in northern Shan State, see *Shan Herald Agency for News, Kachin News Groups, Irrawaddy, Myanmar Times, Eleven News, Frontier,* and *Global New Light of Myanmar.*

[22] For in-depth reporting on human rights issues, see reports produced by the Kachin Women's Association Thailand, the Shan Human Rights Foundation, the Ta'ang Women's Organization, the Free Burma Rangers, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch.

[23] Several organizations collect and publicly disseminate information on internal displacement. These include the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), the Myanmar Shelter Cluster, and the Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster.

[24] See reports published by Burma News International and the Euro Burma Office. The information reported by Burma News International is one of the most extensive on the conflict. See *Deciphering Myanmar's Peace Process: A Reference Guide* (Chiang Mai: Burma News International, editions from 2013, 2014, 2015).

interactions, as well the impacts on the local population beyond displacement. There is consequently a dearth of in-depth analysis and a more comprehensive understanding of the conflicts in northern Shan State.

Another shortcoming of the analyses of fighting in Myanmar is that it is often ahistorical or lacking in historical context. The main emphasis of such lies on events taking place since 2011, and sometimes as early as 2009, with the result that the historical dimensions of the conflicts are often given short shrift. Thus, a focus only on the period since 2011, when the Thein Sein-led government made conflict resolution a priority and initiated new negotiations with EAOs, does not take into account several important elements. These include the earlier ceasefire arrangements and the proposals issued by the Tatmadaw for ceasefire EAOs to transform into Tatmadaw-allied militias; nor does it provide the historical background useful for understanding the significance of current developments.

This study aims to address some of these limitations and to fill in gaps with a focus on the local conflict dynamics currently at play in northern Shan State, the historical roots of the conflicts, patterns of change that have occurred over time, and the impacts of the conflicts on society. It is hoped that this will provide a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of the conflicts.

This paper is accordingly divided into six sub-sections. Following the introduction, a brief background is provided to Myanmar's political transition and concomitant peace process which witnessed the breakdown of existing ceasefire arrangements with EAOs in northern Shan State. The next section provides an overview of the main actors and alliances involved in the current militarized conflicts in the sub-region. This is followed by an examination of recent trends and features of violence, including forms of escalation, identifying conflict hotspots, the resource-conflict nexus, and the adverse impacts on the local population. The next section provides

necessary historical depth to the subject by providing an overview of the origins of armed conflict in northern Shan State up until the concluding of ceasefire arrangements in the 1990s. This allows the reader to gain a more historically informed understanding of the complex evolution of conflict dynamics in the sub-region, which are crucial for better understanding the trends and patterns of the current fighting. The conclusion discusses the implications of the findings for understanding and addressing the conflicts.

The data for this report draws on a fusion of field research and archival sources. The primary information comes from over 30 interviews conducted with diverse groups of actors in northern Shan State, Yangon and Chiang Mai from August 2016 through November 2017. These include members of civil society organizations, journalists, former and current members of EAOs, IDPs, Members of Parliament, Myanmar and international researchers, community leaders, and conflict analysts. The report also draws on a broad range of archival and secondary sources in both English and Burmese. These include books, media reports, statements and reports produced by various local and international organizations. A strategy of triangulating sources addressed potential bias in data. This process involved cross-checking various accounts through the use of other sources produced by individuals and groups with different political orientations and bias.

Myanmar's Political Transition

This section provides a background to the political context at the national level at a time when armed conflicts returned to northern Shan State. This has involved a transition from a political system of direct military rule to a new quasi-democratic, hybrid arrangement, as well as changes in the patterns of engagement between EAOs and the Tatmadaw, which led to a breakdown of existing ceasefire arrangements dating back to the late 1980s and 1990s. Significant in this regard were attempts by the Tatmadaw in 2009 and 2010 to push EAOs to transform into Tatmadaw-allied militias. Efforts by successive USDP and NLD-led governments to resolve armed conflicts through a national peace process, of which the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) is integral, are then discussed.

Changing Ceasefire Arrangements

In August 2003, the then ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) announced its adoption of a 7-Step Roadmap to Disciplined Flourishing Democracy,[25] which set out steps for a transition to a new

[25] The "Road Map" was announced in 2003 by former Lt. General Khin Nyunt, who served as prime minister from August 2003 to October 2004, when he was placed under house arrest on charges of corruption. He is widely considered one of the primary architects of the initial ceasefire arrangements and as a result had worked closely with EAO leaders in his position as head of military intelligence, or the Directorate of Defense Services Intelligence (DDSI). The seven steps of the roadmap included: 1) Reconvening of the National Convention that has been adjourned since 1996, (2) After the successful holding of the National Convention, step by step implementation of the process necessary for the emergence of a genuine and disciplined democratic system, (3) Drafting of a new constitution in accordance with basic principles and detailed basic principles laid down by the National Convention, (4) Adoption of the constitution through national referendum, (5) Holding of free and fair elections for *Pyithu Hluttaws* (Legislative bodies) according to the new constitution, (6) Convening of *Hluttaws* attended by *Hluttaw* members in accordance with the new constitution, and (7) Building a modern, developed and democratic nation by the state leaders elected by the *Hluttaw*; and the government and

political system. A key element of such was the referendum on a new Constitution in 2008.[26] But while a key provision of the Constitution allowed for multi-party elections, which subsequently took place in 2010, other important provisions safeguarded the Tatmadaw's political influence, particularly over security-related affairs. These included its authority to appoint 25 percent of the representatives in both the national and local parliaments, as well as the ministers of the Ministries for Defense, Home Affairs, and Border Affairs. Another significant element was the promulgation of Article 338 of the Constitution, which states that, "All the armed forces in the Union shall be under the command of the Defense Services."[27]

Thus, concomitant with constitutional reform and the lead up to the political transition, the last days of direct Tatmadaw rule under the SPDC, involved changes in its ceasefire arrangements with EAOs as part of the 7-Step Roadmap. Beginning in 2009, and as part of the political transition, the Tatmadaw pressed such groups to transform their forces and become militias allied to them. Though the full details of the negotiations were never made public, the proposal resulted in two types of militia arrangements. For EAOs located in areas proximate to international borders, the groups would become part of a new militia program known as the Border Guard Force (BGF) that involved their integration into the Tatmadaw. Another

other central organs formed by the *Hluttaw*. See David Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everybody Needs to Know,* and "The National Convention," *Irrawaddy Online*, March 30, 2004. http://www2.irrawaddy.com/research_show.php?art_id=3564

[26] The constitutional referendum was reported as having received an endorsement of 92.4% of those that voted on May 10, 2008. However, it is important to note that large areas of Myanmar (such as Yangon) were not able to take part in the voting due to a cyclone and security issues regarding access to conflict areas. The figure therefore remains contentious.

[27] Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008), available at: http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar_Constitution-2008-en.pdf

arrangement for EAOs located further away from the border involved their transformation into a people's militia force.[28]

The Tatmadaw engaged in negotiations with EAOs and its deadline for transformation was extended several times until 2010. EAOs in northern Shan State had mixed responses to this proposal. For instance, the Kachin Defense Army (KDA)[29] and the 3rd and 7th Brigades of the SSA/SSPP accepted the proposal and became Tatmadaw-allied militias.[30] Conversely, the UWSA, KIA, and the 1st Brigade of the SSA/SSPP did not accept the proposal. The MNDAA ceasefire group split into two groups. One became a BGF in 2010 and was led by Bai Suoqian. After the 2009 fighting, the other faction led by Pheung Kya Shin fled to China, but returned in early 2015 to fight government forces.[31]

One of the concerns with the proposed transformation of the EAOs with ceasefire agreements into Tatmadaw-allied militias is that it entailed changes in their status *before* discussions of other concerns including long-promised political issues.[32] After extending the deadline several times, the military government reportedly informed EAOs that ceasefire agreements with groups that had not acceded to their demands would be considered "null and void" after September 2010.[33] Subsequently, state media reports

[28] For more information on this process, see "Government Already Acceded to Peace Proposals of KIO to Most Possible Degree," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 18, 2011, 6; *Deciphering Myanmar's Peace Process* (Burma News International, 2013), pp. 49-55.
[29] The KDA was formerly the 4th brigade of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). In late 1990, it broke away to form the KDA, and engaged in a ceasefire arrangement with the military government in early 1991. The KDA transformed into a Tatmadaw-allied militia in 2010.
[30] For further details, see *Deciphering Myanmar's Peace Process*, pp. 49-55; Buchanan, *Militias in Myanmar*.
[31] *Military Confrontation or Political Dialogue* (Transnational Institute (TNI), July 2015, Policy Briefing), p.21; Bertil Lintner, "Kokang: The Backstory," *Irrawaddy*, March 10, 2015; Tom Kramer, *Burma's Cease-fires at Risk*.
[32] For discussion of the KIA's position, see *Burma's Ceasefires at Risk* (TNI, September 6, 2009, Report).
[33] Burma News International, "BGF and resumption of conflict," Myanmar Peace Monitor.

began to refer to these groups as "insurgents" again.[34] This contributed in northern Shan State to a breakdown in the patterns of coexistence that had provided the basis for a halt to large-scale militarized conflicts in the ceasefire period.

USDP and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement

In November 2010, general elections took place, which resulted in a win for the USDP (the NLD did not contest this election). In March 2011, President U Thein Sein, who had previously been a general in the Tatmadaw and a prime minister in the SPDC, formed a new government. The resolution of decades of civil conflict became a priority for the new government, as signaled by the president in his inaugural speech.[35] The transition of regime thus led to the initiation of new ceasefire arrangements with EAOs as part of a formal peace negotiation process.

To accomplish this goal, President Thein Sein appointed three retired generals, Aung Thaung, Thein Zaw and Aung Min, as emissaries to negotiate on behalf of the government. Aung Min subsequently took a lead position in this process and oversaw the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC), a government operated and largely internationally funded secretariat designed to support the government's peace negotiations.

The Thein Sein government issued an announcement of peace talks on April 18, 2011.[36] The first step involved efforts to negotiate new bilateral ceasefire arrangements with EAOs, including those who had previously engaged in ceasefires with the military government and those who had not. The Thein

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[34] *Burma's New Government: Prospects for Governance and Peace in Ethnic States* (TNI, Burma Policy Briefing No. 6, May 2011). See articles in the *New Light of Myanmar*. For examples, see editions on May 1, 2011 and November 23, 2011.

[35] "President U Thein Sein delivers inaugural address to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw," *New Light of Myanmar*, March 31, 2011, http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs11/NLM2011-03-31.pdf

[36] See Burma News International, "Border Guard Force," (website); "Government offers olive branch to national race armed groups," *New Light of Myanmar,* August 19, 2011.

Sein-led government also changed tack and dropped its insistence that EAOs transform into militias. In northern Shan State, the government succeeded in achieving new bilateral ceasefire arrangements with the SSA/SSPP and the UWSA. In addition, the SSA/RCSS engaged in its first bilateral ceasefire.

Following the initial success of achieving bilateral ceasefire arrangements, the government agreed in February 2013 to national-level negotiations for a multilateral ceasefire. This was the first time a government in Myanmar had agreed to participate in a multilateral ceasefire agreement. These negotiations produced the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in October 2015, which was initially signed by eight EAOs.[37] A further significant feature of these negotiations when compared with earlier false starts is that the Tatmadaw permitted discussions about the once-taboo topic of federalism and agreed in principle in the NCA to federalism as a system of governance.

The NCA consists of seven chapters and 33 paragraphs outlining the basic principles, aims and objectives, ceasefire premises, guidelines and regulations governing the ceasefire, guarantees for political dialogue, future tasks and responsibilities, administrative obligations and guidelines for dispute settlement. Despite 21 EAOs being involved to varying extents in the negotiation of the NCA text, only 15 EAOs were initially invited by the government's Union Peace Working Group to sign the NCA. This was because the government ruled that only groups with bilateral ceasefires were allowed to sign the NCA, and the TNLA, AA, MNDAA did not have bilateral ceasefires and thus could not sign. Militarized conflict with these groups had also been ongoing since February 2015.

[37] While not an NCA signatory, the KIA signed a cessation of hostilities agreement in 2013. The KIA, SSA/SSPP, PSLF/TNLA, AA, and MNDAA participated in negotiations for the NCA as members of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) and its Senior Delegation (SD).

EAOs invited by the then government to sign the NCA, including the KIA, NDAA, UWSA, SSA/SSPP, KNPP, NMSP, did not sign the agreement, citing a lack of confidence in it. Only eight EAOs of the 15 proposed EAOs signaled their formal support of the NCA by signing the agreement in October 2015 (See Table 2).[38] Thus, aside from the SSA/RCSS, none of the six other EAOs that currently operate in northern Shan State acceded to the NCA. Issues of inclusion of EAOs in the NCA have still not been resolved and are one of the reasons that the FPNCC has now rejected the NCA process and fighting continues.

Table 2: EAO Signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement

Name	**Acronym**
Initial Signatories (October 2015)	
All Burma Students' Democratic Front	ABSDF
Arakan Liberation Party	ALP
Chin National Front	CNF
Democratic Karen Benevolent Army	DKBA
Karen National Union	KNU
Karen Nation Union/ Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council	KNU/KNLAPC
Pa-O National Liberation Organization	PNLO
Shan State Army/Restoration Council of Shan State	SSA/RCSS
Later Signatories (February 2018)	
Lahu Democratic Union	LDU
New Mon State Party	NMSP

NLD's Peace Efforts

After taking power in late March 2016, following its landslide election victory in November 2015, the NLD-led government continued to state the resolution of conflict as a key goal. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, an elected Member of Parliament and leader of the NLD, assumed the newly created

[38] Two more EAOs, the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Lahu Democratic Union (LDU), later signed in February 2018.

position of State Counsellor, becoming the de facto leader of Myanmar.[39] Although initially unclear how the government would proceed with the peace process, through the course of 2016, the NLD government indicated it would continue the peace process based on the NCA.

Under the guidelines of the NCA, it was stipulated that a session of the Union Peace Conference (UPC) would be held every six months. The first was formally held in mid-January 2016 by the USDP-led government. Aung San Suu Kyi subsequently rebranded the UPC sessions as the 21st Century Panglong Conference (21CPC) in reference to an earlier meeting among leaders of different ethnicities in 1947, which paved the way for the establishment of the Union of Burma.[40] Meetings of what became known as the UPC/21CP were held in Naypyidaw in late August/early September 2016 and May 2017. The UPC/21CP meetings bring together representatives from some of the EAOs, the Tatmadaw, the government, political parties and civil society organizations together to share views on a wide range of peace-related topics.

Nevertheless, the speeches broadcast on national television at the UPC/21CP held in August-September 2016 coincided with the continuation of attacks by the Tatmadaw against EAOs, including the Kachin Independence Army

[39] While the President is the highest authority in Myanmar, a provision of the 2008 Constitution – Article 59 (f) - disqualifies Aung San Suu Kyi from holding the position of President on the grounds that her children are citizens of a foreign country. The position of State Counsellor was created and permitted Aung San Suu Kyi to exercise increased authority. See Htoo Thant, "'State Counsellor Bill' Approved Despite military boycott," *Myanmar Times*, April 5, 2016. See the Union Parliament (or the *Pyidaungsu Hluttaw)* website for *The State Counsellor Law*, Union Parliament Law, Act 26, April 6, 2016, https://pyidaungsu.hluttaw.mm/uploads/pdf/R0gh9q_26._union_state_advisor_law_.pdf. See also the President's Office website: http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/?q=briefing-room/news/2016/04/07/id-6237

[40] State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi's inclusion of a reference to Panglong draws on the symbolism of an earlier instance of interethnic cooperation that laid a foundation for the establishment of the Union of Burma. In 1947, leaders of several ethnic communities, including national independence hero Aung San, met in the town of Panglong in Shan State to produce the agreement bearing its name. See Matthew P. Walton, "Ethnicity, Conflict and History in Burma: The Myths of Panglong," *Asia Survey*, vol.48, no.6, November/December 2008: 889-910.

(KIA), Shan State Army/Shan State Progress Party (SSA/SSPP) and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in northern Shan and Kachin states.[41] Similarly, while the recent UPC/21CP held in May 2017 involved the last minute attendance of EAOs operating in northern Shan State, brokered by Chinese government officials, the fighting continued.

Thus, in spite of the continued emphasis placed on resolving armed conflicts by the USDP and subsequently the NLD-led government, militarized violence continues in not only northern Shan and Kachin states, but has also recently intensified in Rakhine State.[42]

The lack of inclusion of EAOs in northern Shan State in NCA negotiations has stalled efforts to resolve conflicts in the area and has led to their further escalation and perhaps expansion of violent conflicts to other areas. However, it would be wrong to overemphasize the role of the NCA in the return and escalation of militarized violence in northern Shan State, which in fact preceded the signing of the NCA. As such, analysis tends to highlight the political dimensions of the peace process that include its procedures, the requirements for participation by EAOs, and its implementation as *reasons* for ongoing conflicts. This comes at the expense of understanding the more localized dynamics at play, to which this paper turns next.

[41] "Myanmar army attacks SSPP/SSA ahead of Panglong Conference," *Shan Herald Agency for News,* August 30, 2016; Lun Min Mang and Yee Mon Tun, "Fighting intensifies in Kachin as peace conference approaches," *Myanmar Times*, August 25, 2016.

[42] In late August of 2017, attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) in Rakhine State provoked a heavy-handed response by the Tatmadaw and Myanmar Police Force, which triggered the exodus of over half a million people from Rakhine State to Bangladesh. ARSA is nascent militant resistance group that the government and Tatmadaw have labeled as "extremist Bengali terrorists" and have for the first time used the 2014 Counter-Terrorism Law to label the group terrorists.

Actors and Alliances[43]

The most recent phase of the armed conflicts in northern Shan State, since 2009, has involved successive instances of armed clashes involving five different EAOs and the Tatmadaw. The first fighting erupted in the Kokang area[44] – a predominately ethnic Han Chinese inhabited area adjacent to Myanmar's border with China – between a faction of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and state security forces. By 2011, the Shan State Army/Shan State Progress Party (SSA/SSPP) (sometimes referred to as SSA-North) became embroiled in militarized conflicts with the Tatmadaw.[45] Both EAOs had earlier bilateral ceasefire arrangements with the Tatmadaw and both had refused the Border Guard Force (BGF) deal offered to them. In mid-2011, there was an outbreak of fighting in Kachin State between the Tatmadaw and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), with the fighting spreading to Kutkai Township in northern Shan State where the KIA's 4th Brigade operated.[46] In 2012, the conflict spread westward and embroiled two recently established EAOs – the Ta'ang National

[43] See the section "Origins of Armed Conflict: A Historical Perspective" for a fuller description on the historical emergence of these groups. Note that the names of EAO political wings are also provided here.

[44] After the collapse of the Communist Party of Burma in 1989, and when the first ceasefire of 1989 was concluded, Kokang was designated as a Special Region of northern Shan State by the government. As stipulated by the 2008 Constitution, the two townships of Kokang area Konkyan and Laukkai formed the Kokang Self-Administered Zone (SAZ), with its capital named as Laukkai. This was announced by official decree on August 20, 2010.

[45] Reports indicate limited an earlier outbreak of limited instances of conflict between the SSA/SSPP and Tatmadaw as early as November 2010, near Wanhsaw village, which is located between Monghsu and Wan Hai, the headquarters of the SSA/SSPP. See Paul Keenan, *The Burma Army's Offensive Against the Shan State Army – North*, EBO Analysis Paper No. 3/2011, 2011, p. 1.

[46] An attack by the Tatmadaw on the KIA's Sang Gang outpost in Kachin State on June 9, 2011, led to the unraveling of the 17-year ceasefire. See *Deciphering Myanmar's Peace Process: A Reference Guide* (Chiang Mai: Burma News International, 2013), p. 105.

Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Arakan Army (AA). Accordingly, by 2012 militarized violence had spread to many parts of northern Shan State and has continued to escalate with the displacement of tens of thousands of people.[47]

The section below provides a short account of the outbreak of conflict with the main EAOs in northern Shan State, their key developments, as well as patterns of military and political alliances among them.

Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army/Myanmar National Truth and Justice Party

In early August 2009, a standoff emerged between state security forces and those of the MNDAA ceasefire group over an alleged weapons factory and drug trafficking-related activities. This precipitated a clash that became known as "the Kokang Crisis" and which marks the resumption of conflict in northern Shan State. One faction of the MNDAA leadership had refused to transform into a BGF and the Tatmadaw subsequently launched military operations against them. In late August 2009, a split occurred in the MNDAA. One faction led by Pheung Kya Shin retreated into China. Another pro-government faction of the MNDAA, led by Bai Xuoqian, remained in Kokang and his troops were reorganized as a new BGF (No. 1006) and were placed under his command. He was elected as an MP of the Upper House (or the *Amyotha Hluttaw)* representing Laukkai and became the first head of the Kokang SAZ.[48]

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[47] As of June 2018 there are approximately 241,000 displaced people in camps or camp-like situations in Kachin, Kayin, Shan and Rakhine states. See UNOCHA figures: http://www.unocha.org/myanmar.
[48] Transnational Institute, *Military Confrontation or Political Dialogue,* 21; Bertil Lintner, "Kokang: The Backstory," *Irrawaddy*, March 10, 2015; Tom Kramer, *Burma's Cease-fires at Risk,* Transnational Institute, Peace and Security Briefing No.1, September 2009*;* John Buchanan, *Militias in Myanmar*, The Asia Foundation, 2016, pp. V, 19.

The fighting in the Kokang area quickly dissipated until February 2015, when troops from Pheung's group returned to Kokang from China. According to a media interview with Pheung Kya Shin in 2014, his forces received training from the KIA at their headquarters in Laiza, Kachin State.[49] The initial fighting period from February to May 2015 was reportedly extensive and involved cooperation with other EAOs (both the TNLA and AA), while large reinforcements of Tatmadaw troops were deployed as well as the use of air strikes by the Air Force. The fighting tapered off by May 2015 as a standoff emerged. Reports indicate that MNDAA troops operate in the remote mountain ranges adjacent to the China border and those on the east bank of the Salween River. Tatmadaw forces operate in the valleys.[50] The 2015 fighting between the Tatmadaw and Pheung Kya Shin's MNDAA coincided with the preliminary finalization of the NCA text, with the MNDAA not being one of the 14 groups that the government had been negotiating with multilaterally. Pheung's MNDAA has since joined both the Northern Alliance (also known as the Northern Alliance-Brotherhood or NA-B), and later the FPNCC (*see section on Military and Political Alliances Among EAOs*).

Reports indicated a resumption of fighting in January 2017 between the MNDAA and Tatmadaw in the Maw Teik area of Konkyan Township located in the northeastern-most tip of the Kokang area.[51] On March 6, 2017, furthermore, the MNDAA launched an attack on Laukkai, the capital of Kokang, in which over 30 people were reportedly killed. The attack resulted in thousands of refugees fleeing to China as Tatmadaw troops fought an offensive against the combined troops of the MNDAA, TNLA, and

[49] "Myanmar's 'King of Kokang' Returns after 5 Years – His Version of the Situation in Northern Myanmar–Pheung Kya-shin," *Global Times* (Unofficial Translation), December 29, 2014.
[50] Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*, pp. 268-9.
[51] Interviews with northern Shan State based conflict researcher and journalist, January 24, 2017.

purportedly troops from the Kachin Independence Army and the Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP), both of which denied their involvement.

Shan State Army/Shan State Progress Party

The SSA/SSPP areas located east of the Salween River were the next area to become drawn back into conflict.[52] Reports indicate that the Tatmadaw initiated attacks on SSA/SSPP positions as early as October and November 2010.[53] By March 2011, sporadic fighting had resumed between the two armed groups.[54] In early 2012, negotiations between the SSA/SSPP and representatives of the new Thein Sein-led government produced new bilateral ceasefire agreements.[55] Despite the agreements in place, fighting between the two groups continues. Assessing the exact patterns of conflict is made difficult by a lack of systems for reporting. Nonetheless, in the periods February-April 2013, October-November 2015, late August 2016, January 2017 and August 2017, reports indicate that an increase in fighting took place.[56] Some of this fighting appears to reflect operations by the

[52] It is important to recognize that the SSA/SSPP operates in areas outside of northern Shan State. Its areas of operation include Kehsi (Kyethi), Monghsu, Mong Khoung (Maing Kaung) and Mong Nai (Mong Nawng) townships have also experienced fighting between Tatmadaw and the SSA/SSPP, and the population has also experienced displacement and abuses by armed groups. See Shan Human Rights Foundation, "Burma Army shelling and aerial bombing of 6,000 civilians in Mong Nawng town are war crimes," November 20, 2015.

[53] See Paul Keenan, *The Burma Army's Offensive Against the Shan State Army – North*, EBO Analysis Paper No. 3/2011, 2011, p. 1.

[54] Anthony Davis, "Democracy or not, war with ethnic groups continues," *Bangkok Post*, November 15, 2015; *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, "Shan State Army - North," May 15, 2013. *Mizzima*, "Burmese troops overrun SSA-N base in Nam Lao," March 17, 2011; *The Burma Army's Offensive Against the Shan State Army-North,* Euro Burma Office (EBO), Analysis Paper No.3, 2011; Zin Linn, "Is Burma's Shan State close to a new warfare?" *Burma Correspondent*, December 20, 2010.

[55] The SSA/SSPP's initial ceasefire agreement with the military government (1991), became considered null and void in September 2010, when its Wan Hai-based 1st Brigade did not transform into a Tatmadaw- allied militia. The organization engaged in both State and Union level ceasefire agreements with the government on January 28, 2012. For an unofficial translation of the agreement, see *SSPP/SSA-N Government Preliminary Peace and 5-point Peace Agreement 28 January 2012*. Retrieved from http://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/~mmpeac5/images/pdf/SSPP-SSA-N-Government.pdf. Also see BNI, *Deciphering Myanmar's Peace Process*, 2013.

[56] Lun Min Mang And Htoo Thant, "Fighting resumes as MPs call for aid," *Myanmar Times*, November 24, 2015; "Number of clashes decrease in December: Think Tank," Burma News International, January

Tatmadaw in SSA/SSPP base areas, particularly those located in operational areas near its headquarters at Wan Hai in northern part of Kehsi (Kyethi) Township.[57] These are strategically important locations both for economic and security reasons. At the same time, the SSA/SSPP and the Tatmadaw have on several occasions engaged in cooperation that involves joint inspections and negotiations regarding troop movements.[58] The SSA/SSPP is also a member of the FPNCC.

Kachin Independence Army/Kachin Independence Organization

In mid-2011, a seventeen-year ceasefire between the KIA and the Tatmadaw came to an end. Fighting first broke out in Kachin State in July 2011 and by August had spread to the KIA 4th Brigade areas in northern Shan State. The fighting followed political tensions over the KIA's refusal to accept the Tatmadaw's BGF proposal and the government's subsequent rejection of KIO attempts to form a political party for the 2010 election.[59] In 2016, the KIA expanded its operation in northern Shan State by establishing a new Brigade – known as the KIA 6th Brigade – which reportedly operated in areas between the Muse and Kutkai Townships to the west and the Salween River to the east. In 2018, the KIA formed another unit – the 10th Brigade – in northern Shan State.[60] The KIA is a member of the FPNCC and two of its brigades have fought alongside the Northern Alliance Brotherhood.

11, 2018; Lun Min Mang, "Old conflict flares again in northern Shan," *Myanmar Times*, May 18, 2016; and Sai Wansai, "2018 The Year Ahead: Achieving peace and resolving armed conflict would remain far-fetched in Myanmar," *Shan Herald News Agency*, December 15, 2017.

[57] "Burma army attacks SSPP/SSA ahead of Panglong Conference," *Shan Herald Agency for News,* August 29, 2016. Interviews with members of humanitarian organizations in northern Shan State.

[58] "SSPP/SSA and Burma Army Working on Joint Inspection Agreement, *Shan Herald Agency for News*, May 16, 2016.

[59] For discussions of the resumption of conflict between the KIA and the Tatmadaw, see Mandy Sadan, *War and peace in the borderlands of Myanmar: The Kachin ceasefire, 1994-2011* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2016); EBO, "The Kachins' Dilemma – Become a Border Guard Force or return to warfare," Euro-Burma Office (EBO) Analysis Paper No.2, 2010.

[60] Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint, "KIA Forms 2 New Brigades," *The Irrawaddy*, February 14, 2018.

Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front

The TNLA is one of Myanmar's most recently established EAOs. The organization was founded in October 2009 and received training in KIA-controlled areas of Kachin State. Despite this, the newly formed organization has ties to earlier Ta'ang (also known as Palaung) armed movements that include the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA), which entered into a ceasefire arrangement in 1991 and disarmed in 2005 and the Palaung State Liberation Front, formed by ethnic Palaung/Ta'ang that did not accept the 1991 ceasefire. [61]

The TNLA began operations in northern Shan State in early 2012, when a band of 42 members crossed from Kachin State into Namkham Township.[62] When the group returned to Palaung areas in northern Shan State, conflict erupted with the Tatmadaw and Tatmadaw-allied militias. In official statements, the TNLA have repeatedly emphasized that their emergence reflects political goals focused on national equality and autonomy, but also their concern about the increase in drug production and addiction in Palaung/Ta'ang communities.[63] The TNLA has rapidly grown in strength that by 2015 one account cautiously estimated its strength at 5,000.[64] It is a member of both the Northern Alliance and the FPNCC.

[61] For discussion of the origins of the TNLA and PSLF, see Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*, pp. 257-260; Patrick Meehan, "The Continuation of War by Other Means," in *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar: The Kachin Ceasefire, 1994-2011*, ed. Mandy Sadan (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2016), p. 387; PSLF, "Ta'ang people and the current conflict situation in 2012," October 15, 2012; Interview, "Ta'ang (Palaung) Leader Tar Aik Bong: 'Without Proper Political Solutions, There Will Be No Lasting Peace'," *Burma Link*, November 11, 2014.

[62] Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*, p.259.

[63] For information about the TNLA and their counter-narcotics policies, see Phyu Phyu Ko; translated by Mai Aik Phone; "The War of PSLF/TNLA on the drug trade and their National Liberation Duty," May 17, 2013.

[64] Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*.

Arakan Army/United League of Arakan

The Arakan Army, another of Myanmar's recently formed EAOs, was established in KIA-controlled areas of Kachin State in 2009. The leadership of the AA represents a younger generation of ethnic Rakhine, some of whom participated in the anti-government protests of 2007 in Yangon against rising energy prices and government repression of peaceful activism, and others disillusioned with the moribund leadership of the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) based in Mae Sot on the Thailand-Myanmar border.

The establishment of the AA, and later its political wing, the United League of Arakan (ULA), was facilitated not just by training and material support from the KIA, but a sizeable pool of recruits of young Rakhine toiling in the jade mines of Hpakant in Kachin State. These recruits harbored deep grievances against the Myanmar military state for years of discrimination and underdevelopment in Rakhine State that compelled many to seek work around Myanmar and in neighboring Thailand.[65] These recruits gravitated towards the new army to engage in armed struggle against the Tatmadaw, with the long-term aim of opening a new front in Rakhine State.

AA units initially operated in Kachin State in support of the KIA, gaining combat experience against the Tatmadaw and gradually training new units. By 2012, AA units began operations in northern Shan State in support of the KIA, MNDAA, and TNLA. By 2015, furthermore, the AA had deployed units to operate in both Rakhine and Chin States.[66] The AA is a member of both the Northern Alliance and the FPNCC.

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[65] See David Scott Mathieson, "Shadowy rebels extend Myanmar's wars," *Asia Times*, June 11, 2017.
[66] For reports of fighting between the AA and Tatmadaw in Chin and Rakhine states, see Thu Thu Aung, "Chin State civilians flee Arakan Army, Tatmadaw fighting," *Myanmar Times*, December 15, 2016; Ye Mon and Thu Thu Aung, "Tatmadaw pledges to 'eliminate' Arakan Army in Rakhine fighting," *Myanmar Times*, January 8, 2016; Htet Khaung Linn, "'The army insists we give up our weapons, it's a major obstacle'," *Myanmar Now*, June 27, 2016; Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint, "'I Want to Stress That We Are Not the Enemy'," *The Irrawaddy*, June 12, 2015.

Shan State Army/Restoration Council of Shan State

After the Thein Sein-led government assumed power, the SSA/RCSS agreed to a bilateral ceasefire on January 16, 2012, and, in October 2015, became an NCA signatory. In November 2015, fighting broke out between the TNLA and the SSA/RCSS, with clashes in several townships across northern Shan State.[67]

Further fighting broke out between the Tatmadaw and the SSA/RCSS in October 2016 related to the detention of people by the SSA/RCSS over their involvement in drug use in Maing Khaing (Mong Khoung) and Hsipaw townships.[68] The Joint Monitoring Committee, an NCA stipulated body, determined in 2017 that the clashes were a result of a lack of clarity in ceasefire terms, particularly in relation to territory.[69] Reports indicate other instances of occasional fighting between the SSA/RCSS and the Tatmadaw in Shan State.[70]

Since the NCA signing, the SSA/RCSS has mobilized support in northern Shan State and the number of soldiers they have deployed in the area has markedly increased.[71] For the SSA/RCSS, the earlier presence of some of its units in some areas of northern Shan State means that social ties to elites and

[67] For accounts on clashes between the TNLA and SSA/RCSS, see Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*, pp. 291-2. PLSF/TNLA, *Statement Condemning RCSS/SSA's Act of Military Aggression Conjointly with Tatmadaw*, Statement No. (10/2015), December 10, 2015. Restoration Council of Shan State. "Statement on the armed conflicts between RCSS/SSA and TNLA," February 11, 2016, *Tai Freedom*, "RCSS/SSA find TNLA troop's drug in the battle," July 7, 2017; Sai Wansai, "Armed conflict resumes in Northern Shan State: After a month lull, conflict continues between the TNLA and Tatmadaw," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, September 20, 2017.

[68] See Lun Min Mang, "JMC looks into mass detention case and RCSS clashes," *Myanmar Times*, November 4, 2016. The *Shan Herald Agency for News* reported a clash between the two in Mong Pan (Mong Pawn) Township located in Southern Shan State - see "Burmese army clashes with RCSS/SSA in Mong Pawn," January 20, 2017

[69] Shoon Naing, "NCA breakdown led to Tatmadaw-RCSS clashes: ceasefire monitoring body," *Myanmar Times*, November 21, 2017, https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/23799-nca-breakdown-led-to-tatmadaw-rcss-clashes-ceasefire-monitoring-body.html

[70] "Burmese army, RCSS/SSA clash in Panglong," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, April 5, 2017.

[71] Troop recruitment is not permitted under the NCA; however, it remains common in practice.

local communities are very close. Recruitment, local material and intelligence support, are made easier by these long-established family and kinship ties sustained over decades.[72] Reports indicate that clashes between the SSA/RCSS and TNLA continue.[73]

Reports suggest, however, that clashes between the SSA/RCSS and TNLA have declined since July 2017.[74] The Joint Monitoring Committee, an NCA stipulated body, determined in 2017 that the clashes were a result of a lack of clarity in ceasefire terms, particularly in relation to territory.[75]

United Wa State Army/United Wa State Party

The areas of operation of the United Wa State Army (UWSA) span parts of northern and eastern Shan State. It is considered the most militarily powerful of Myanmar's EAOs, with Western defense analysts claiming the Wa army have obtained Chinese manufactured light helicopters, armored vehicles, shoulder fired anti-aircraft missiles and artillery munitions not easy to obtain on the illicit arms market.[76] On September 6, 2011, the UWSA became the first EAO to engage in a new bilateral ceasefire with the new government led by President Thein Sein. Yet the UWSA had already gained more political concessions than any other EAO from the 2008 Constitution, including their own self-administered division, a form of de facto autonomy, underscored by the Wa administration's refusal to permit

[72] Interview with local political and community leaders, northern Shan State, August 2016.
[73] Personal communication with journalists, February 2018; Nang Mya Nadi, "Two civilians killed as RCSS-TNLA fighting flares again," *DVB,* March 16, 2018.
[74] Personal communication, journalists, October 2017.
[75] Shoon Naing, "NCA breakdown led to Tatmadaw-RCSS clashes: ceasefire monitoring body," *Myanmar Times*, November 21 2017, https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/23799-nca-breakdown-led-to-tatmadaw-rcss-clashes-ceasefire-monitoring-body.html
[76] See Bertil Lintner, *The People's Republic of China and Burma. Not Only Pauk-Phaw*, Project 2049 (Washington DC: Institute, 2017), pp.27-29; Bertil Lintner, "Wa rebel group torpedoes Suu Kyi's peace drive," *Asia Times*, February 28, 2017.

elections in townships under their control in 2010 and 2015. Consequently, the UWSA did not actively engage in NCA negotiations.

Tensions in recent times have become much more evident. On September 28, 2016, after the session of the UPC/21CP in August, UWSA units occupied two mountain posts and a checkpoint operated by another EAO, the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), in eastern Shan State.[77] Several analysts suggest the move by the UWSA reflected their concerns about signs of warming political relations between the NDAA and the government, with the possibility of a government offer of an SAZ[78] and Tatmadaw units occupying areas strategic to the UWSA in Mong La territory.[79] Tatmadaw officials issued orders for UWSA troops to withdraw from their positions in October. Media reports indicate that the UWSA relinquished control of the checkpoint by March 2017.[80]

More significantly, as examined below, the UWSA has maneuvered northern EAOs into an alliance, the FPNCC, thus posing a challenge government and the peace process, reportedly providing support for several other EAOs in northern Shan State.[81] Notwithstanding, this may yet even provide an important step to opening an alternative channel. Yet to date there have been few substantive political negotiations between the UWSA

[77] "UWSA reinforces presence in Mongla territory," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, October 6, 2016. The NDAA shares similar experiences to the UWSA and MNDAA; it was formed by ex-CPB members after its collapse in 1989 and subsequently engaged in ceasefires agreements with the SLORC-led government and later with the Thein Sein-led government. Sai Leun, also known by his Chinese name Lin Ming Xian, is the Chairman of the NDAA. The NDAA maintains ties with the UWSA and the MNDAA. In fact, Sai Leun is the son-in-law of MNDAA leader Pueng Kya Shin..

[78] The NDAA did not take the government up on the offer of an SAZ and has subsequently joined the FPNCC alliance.

[79] UWSA forces withdrew from one of the bases. See "UWSA reinforces presence in Mongla territory," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, October 6, 2016; "'The Burma Army Doesn't Underestimate the Wa,'" *Irrawaddy*, October 29, 2016.

[80] Lawi Weng, "Amid Tensions, Some UWSA Troops Leave Mongla," *Irrawaddy*, November 10, 2016; "UWSA withdraws troops from Mongla territory," *Democratic Voice of Burma*, March 10, 2017.

[81] Antony Davis, "Myanmar's Northeastern Conflict Approaches Watershed," *Nikkei Asian Review*, December 16, 2016.

and the previous or current government. However, China seems to have increasingly become an important interlocutor.

Military and Political Alliances Among EAOs

A significant development in the recent escalation of conflict has been the evolution of political and military alliances between EAOs. The Northern Alliance (NA, or sometimes known as the Northern Alliance Brotherhood) represents a military alliance of four EAOs, while the FPNCC constitutes a political alliance of seven EAOs chaired by the UWSA's Bao Youxiang which has become stronger over time as more EAOs have joined. While members of both are linked through overlapping memberships of these alliances, the two should be considered as separate.

Northern Alliance

In late November 2016, units of the MNDAA, TNLA, AA, and the northern Shan State-based 4th and 6th Brigades of the KIA launched a series of attacks on a string of towns and government security checkpoints in northern Shan State. The towns were along Myanmar's border with China, and included Muse, Mong Ko and Pang Hseng. Government security checkpoints were attacked in Muse, Kutkai and Namkham townships. The groups issued a joint statement following the attack, which announced the formation of a new alliance organization of EAOs.[82]

Press statements and media interviews with leaders of Northern Alliance members indicate their concerns about the Tatmadaw's escalation of military conflict in Kachin and northern Shan State and the exclusion of three of its members from the peace process (TNLA, MNDAA, and AA). A statement released by the Northern Alliance on November 21, 2016 – a time

[82] Northern Alliance- Burma, "Press released on fighting in Northern Shan State and Request for local people," November 21, 2016.

when much attention focused on Rakhine State and a lack of progress in the peace process left EAOs feeling northern Shan State and Kachin were not getting the attention deserved – stated: "The Burma armed forces have been assaulting to destroy all political and military struggles of the ethnic peoples because they have no will to solve Myanmar's political problem by politically peaceful negotiation methods."[83] Tar Bone Kyaw, a spokesperson for the TNLA, also noted in an interview with the media:

> The main objective is to [make the government] solve political problems through political means. We hate that the [military] urges ethnic groups to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement on one hand and attacks the Kachin [Kachin Independence Army-KIA] on the other hand. We launched the joint offensive to [the pressure the military] to cease fire and to solve the root cause of the problem through political means.[84]

In an interview, General Gun Maw of the KIA explained that its involvement in the Northern Alliance operations was a "counter attack" and conducted in response to the Tatmadaw's almost three-month-long offensive on the KIA-controlled Gidon mountain post in Kachin State from October-December 2016.[85]

The formation of the Northern Alliance therefore reflected the frustration of its members with the Tatmadaw's continued military operations against them, at a time when country-wide efforts at resolving conflict through the UPC/21CP had taken place only months prior in August. Another key reason involves the government's pressure for the MNDAA, TNLA and AA to disarm – a demand rejected by the groups.[86]

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[83] Nyein Nyein and Kyaw Kha, "KIA General Gun Maw: 'To Talk and Live as Equals, That is Genuine Peace'," *The Irrawaddy*, January 17, 2017.
[84] Kyaw Kha, "TNLA Spokesman: 'The Joint Offensive is Necessary,'" *The Irrawaddy*, November 22, 2016.
[85] For interviews by media with General Gun Maw, see Nyein Nyein and Kyaw Kha, "KIA General Gun Maw: 'To Talk and Live as Equals, That is Genuine Peace'," *The Irrawaddy*, January 17, 2017.
[86] Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint "Army demands three ethnic armed groups disarm before joining peace process," *The Irrawaddy*, June 16, 2016.

The November 2016 attacks by the Northern Alliance were roundly condemned by the national government. On December 7, 2016, the Shan State Parliament approved a motion that labeled the Northern Alliance as a terrorist organization, although this motion has no binding legal status or repercussions beyond existing laws such as the Unlawful Associations Act. A similar motion proposed in the national parliament was voted down by the NLD government, and the 2014 Counter-Terrorism Law was not invoked (as it would be in August 2017 against the Rohingya Muslim militant group ARSA).[87]

The formation of the Northern Alliance is significant as it marks the first coordinated military offensive by the AA, MNDAA, KIA, and TNLA. Another important element is that its formation reflects an unusually deep level of cooperation among its members. As a veteran security analyst Anthony Davis, has remarked, it represents a level of "operational coordination, military clout and geographic reach … unprecedented in six decades of ethnic conflict." [88]

Federal Political Negotiation Consultative Committee (FPNCC)

The dynamics of the non-signatory EAOs in northern Shan State and the region's power configurations changed in 2017 with the more outspoken and critical engagement of the powerful United Wa State Army.[89] Long reluctant to engage in multilateral peace negotiations, the UWSA in April formed the Federal Political Negotiation Consultative Committee (FPNCC). This Committee incorporated the four EAOs of the Northern Alliance and their political wings together with the UWSA, the "Mong La" group or

[87] "Shan State parliament approves proposal to brand NA-B terrorists," *Mizzima*, December 8, 2016.
[88] Davis, "Myanmar's northeastern conflict approaches watershed."
[89] Before the formation of the FPNCC, the UWSA hosted several conferences in Pangsang/Pangkham, the capital of its territory, in May 2015, November 2015, March 2016, and late February 2017. The role of the UWSA in the peace process up to February 2016 is described in Paul Keenan (2016), "The UWSA and the Future: Major Concerns for Shan State and the NLD-led Government," *Euro Burma Office (EBO)*, Background Paper No 2, 2016.

National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), and the SSA/SSPP. Prompted by the insistence of Chinese officials behind the scenes, the members of this new alliance attended the May 2017 session of the UPC/21CP, although did not take part in any substantive discussions.[90] The FPNCC commands roughly 80 percent of all EAOs in the country.[91]

Table 3: Members of Federal Political Negotiation Consultative Committee (FPNCC), 2017

EAO	**Political Organization**
Kachin Independence Army (KIA)	Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)
Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA)	Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF)
Arakan Army (AA)	United League of Arakan (ULA)
Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)	Myanmar National Truth and Justice Party (MNTJP)
National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA),	Eastern Shan State Peace and Solidarity Committee (PSF)
Shan State Army (SSA)	Shan State Progress Party (SSPP)
United Wa State Army (UWSA)	United Wa State Party (UWSP)

The UWSA have corralled widespread frustration amongst many of these groups towards the government's peace efforts, grievances around intensified Tatmadaw attacks over the last two years and continued civilian abuses, and used them to advance their own interests. A key position of the FPNCC is their rejection of the NCA process and their demands for

[90] For discussion of the Chinese government's role in Myanmar's peace process, see Yun Sun, *China and Myanmar's Peace Process*, Special Report No.401. (Washington DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2017); Linter, *The People's Republic of China and Burma*, 2017.

[91] Bertil Lintner, "Spurned by West, Myanmar's Kachin look to China," *Asia Times*, January 24, 2018, http://www.atimes.com/article/spurned-west-myanmars-kachin-look-china/

increased local autonomy.[92] The Tatmadaw and government, on the other hand, have signaled their continued support for the peace process to be focused around the NCA.[93]

The drawing of the UWSA into the orbit of these groups poses difficulties for the NCA track of the peace process, because it is no longer about amending the NCA to incorporate these EAOs; it is now a rejection by these groups of the NCA. This is magnified by the fact that several of the groups maintain significant power and are engaged in ongoing fighting. Arguably, the civilian and military governments have failed to fully grasp the complexity of the peace process in the north and the grievances and interests that EAOs maintain, or how it can destabilize the broader democratic and economic transition.

[92] For discussion of the FPNCC and analysis of its statements, see International Crisis Group, *Building Critical Mass for Peace in Myanmar*, Asia Report No.287, June 29, 2017, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/ south-east-asia/myanmar/287-building-critical-mass-peace-myanmar.For positions taken by the FPNCC, see its statement: "The General Principles and Specific proposition of Revolutionary armed organizations of all nationalities upon the Political Negotiation," April 19, 2017; "Statement: First Meeting of the Steering Committee," Pan Kham, August 24, 2017; Central Committee of Unite (sic) Wa State Party, "Process of Wa State's Consultation and Negotiation with the Government of Myanmar on Modification of Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement," April 30, 2017.

[93] "The greetings extended by Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing," *Global New Light of Myanmar*, May 25, 2017. "Opening Speech by the Chairperson of the NRPC and State Counsellor of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Her Excellency Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at the ceremony to mark the 2nd Anniversary of the Signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement′," National Reconciliation and Peace Center, October 16, 2017, http://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/ nrpcen/node/135

Key Features and Trends

While some areas of Myanmar have experienced a decline in armed conflicts since the political transition began in 2011, northern Shan State is one area that has not, instead experiencing an increase in, and spread of, fighting. Having identified the main EAOs and alliances, this section outlines the key features and trends in the recent patterns of conflict in northern Shan State. These include the forms of escalation and intensification; identification of conflict hotspots and the sub-region's distinctiveness as a multi-actor conflict zone; the nexus between conflict and resources; and, not least, the consequences of violence on the local population.

Forms of Escalation

The escalation of armed conflicts involves several dimensions, including an increase in the amount of territory where militarized violence takes place; a rise in the number of armed actors engaging in violence; an upsurge in the frequency of armed clashes; the intensification of militarized violence; and a growth in the number of soldiers.

Territorial Expansion of Armed Conflicts

The area in northern Shan State where militarized violence takes place has expanded since the conflict erupted in the Kokang area in 2009. After this initial and brief resurgence of fighting in Kokang, the zones of armed conflicts expanded westward to the west bank of the Salween River where fighting between the SSA/SSPP and Tatmadaw began in areas near its Wan Hai base. From there, the fighting spread to include KIA-controlled areas in Kutkai Township, after fighting broke out between Tatmadaw and the KIA

in Kachin State in 2011. By 2012, areas further west encountered armed engagements between the TNLA and Tatmadaw. Later, in 2012 troops from the AA began operations against the Tatmadaw in northern Shan State and have supported the KIA along with the TNLA and MNDAA.

Increase in the Number of Armed Actors

A second dimension of escalation is that the number of armed actors engaged in fighting has risen since the return of conflict to northern Shan State. It includes not only the Tatmadaw and EAOs – KIA, SSA/SSPP and MNDAA – that have previously operated in the northern Shan State, but also the more recently formed TNLA and the AA. Some Tatmadaw-allied militias have played supporting roles in the military operations, and in a few cases are directly involved in combat with EAOs.[94]

Upsurge in the Frequency of Armed Clashes

While difficult to confirm, reports point to an overall trend in which the frequency of violent incidents involving EAOs and the Tatmadaw has increased in the period from 2009 to December 2016, when fieldwork for this report was concluded.[95] Militarized violence in Myanmar has sometimes experienced lulls, which can reflect shifts in the deployment of Tatmadaw units and seasonal lapses during the rainy season. Nevertheless, recent reports point to the continuation of armed conflicts between EAOs and the Tatmadaw through 2017.[96]

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[94] Buchanan, *Militias in Myanmar*; interviews with villagers, Kyaukme, Shan State, August 2016; "Burma Army, together with Manpang Bo Mon's militia," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, April 4, 2011; "Junta army employs more militias against Shan rebels," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, May 16, 2011;interviews, conflict researcher, Lashio, August 2016; PLSF/TNLA, News and Information Department, "Clash between Pansay Militia Carrying Narcotic Drug and TNLA," August 15, 2015.

[95] Interviews, conflict researchers, members of EAOs and community-based organizations, Lashio, Rangoon and Chiang Mai, August-December 2016.

[96] These estimates come from documents, reports and organizations involved in conflict monitoring. These include Burma News International (BNI), one of the few non-government organizations that

One of the clearest trends is an annual increase in the number of clashes between the TNLA and Tatmadaw in this period.[97] The patterns of armed conflict between the SSA/SSPP and Tatmadaw, meanwhile, point to patterns of fighting that include periodic intensifications of armed conflicts that involve military operations by the Tatmadaw, but also ongoing skirmishes.[98] After the initial eruption of violence in the Kokang area in 2009, heavy fighting between the MNDAA and the Tatmadaw returned in early 2015, but then subsided temporarily. However, since the attacks in late 2016, the area has experienced intensive conflict, including in the Maw Teik area of Konkyan Township.[99] The number of clashes between the Tatmadaw and KIA have increased since 2011. 2016 witnessed ongoing operations by the Tatmadaw in northern Shan State, as well as the participation of the 4th and newly formed 6th Brigades of the KIA in operations with the Northern Alliance in late 2016.[100]

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publicly reports regular updates on conflicts in Myanmar (BNI, Peace Monitoring Dashboard, (http://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/research/monitoring-archive) and "Peace and Conflict Update," which are monthly summaries of conflict produced by Burma Link (https://www.burmalink.org/peace-conflict-updates/). Also see, Sai Wansai, "Armed Conflict Resumes in Northern Shan State," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, September 20, 2017.

[97] See PSLF/TNLA, Central Executive Committee, "Statement of PSLF/TNLA on the Current Political and Military Issues in Burma," Statement No. 7/2015, September 27, 2015; PSLF/TNLA, News and Information Department, "PSLF/TNLA Review on Battles in Ta'ang Region," November 18, 2016; Trained to Torture: Systematic war crimes by the Burma Army in Ta'ang areas of northern Shan State (March 2011 - March 2016), Ta'ang Women's Organization (TWO), 2016. Interviews, local and foreign researchers of conflict areas, Yangon, September 2016.

[98] For a firsthand account by a journalist, Scott Ezell, "'We Cannot Retreat': The 2015 Myanmar Offensive in Shan State," *The Diplomat*, February 13, 2016. Ye Mon, "Attacks on SSPP despite talks, pullback," *Myanmar Times*, October 20, 2015. Also see Shan Human Rights Foundation, "Torture, extrajudicial killing and use of civilians as human shields by Burma Army during new offensive," June 1, 2016.

[99] Anthony Davis, "Tatmadaw quietly launches largest war since Myanmar's independence," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 20, 2015; Interview, humanitarian worker, Shan State, April 2017.

[100] Kachin Women's Association Thailand, A *far cry from peace: Ongoing Burma Army offensives and abuses in northern Burma under the NLD government* (2016), pp. 1, 4. Clashes continued into the early part of 2017. Gum Sha Aung, "Conflict in Kachin and Northern Shan States and its Impact on the Humanitarian Situation," *Tea Circle*, May 30, 2017, https://teacircleoxford.com/2017/05/30/conflict-in-kachin-and-northern-shan-states-and-its-impact-on-the-humanitarian-situation/

Since November 2015, after the SSA/RCSS signed the NCA, fighting between the SSA/RCSS and TNLA broke out and continued throughout the period covered in this report. The dynamics behind the two groups are difficult to confirm because of a lack of systems for reporting, investigating and independently verifying incidents.[101] Recent media reports indicate, however, continued clashes taking place.[102]

Intensification of Militarized Violence

Another element of escalation is a general intensification of militarized violence. Nevertheless, a survey of reports from various media, conflict monitoring organizations and interviews indicates that the type and intensity of clashes has, unsurprisingly, varied significantly. One of the most pervasive patterns of clashes has involved opposing groups engaging in firefights or skirmishes of limited duration that may last less than an hour, which are typical of guerrilla warfare.[103] Other clashes may last several hours. Other engagements involve military operations by the Tatmadaw involving a large number of troops. A report by *Janes Defense Weekly* describes the Tatmadaw operations in the Kokang area in early 2015 as the "largest and costliest military campaign in Myanmar since independence in 1948."[104]

[101] See statements by the TNLA and RCSS/SSA that alleged abuses of civilians by the other group. PLSF/TNLA, Central Executive Committee, "Statement Condemning RCSS/SSA's Act of Military Aggression Conjointly with Tatmadaw Statement No. (10/2015)," December 10, 2015; PSLF/TNLA, News and Information Department, "Human Rights Violations in Ta'ang Region by RCSS/SSA Forces," May 2, 2016; PSLF/TNLA, News and Information Department, Statement on Clashes Resulting from RCSS/SSA's Intrusion into the Ta'ang's Areas, December 6, 2015; RCSS/SSA, "Statement on the armed conflicts between RCSS/SSA and TNLA," February 11, 2016. "Battles occur again between NCA signatory RCSS and TNLA," *Eleven Media Group*, May 16, 2017.

[102] Sai Aw, "Civilians flee as clashes between RCSS/SSA and TNLA continue," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, July 6, 2017.

[103] Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*, p. 268.

[104] Anthony Davis, "Tatmadaw quietly launches largest war since Myanmar's independence."

The use of heavy weapons including mortars and artillery, as well as the use of airstrikes, by the Tatmadaw is an emerging trend in the intensification of violence.[105] Whereas previous periods of armed conflict typically involved infantry operations against fixed positions or routine territorial sweeps and ambushes, since 1989 the Tatmadaw has engaged in profligate arms purchases from external sources that have enhanced its firepower and thus counterinsurgency capacities. These have involved the purchase of helicopters and jet fighters from Russia, China, and other suppliers.[106] One news report indicates the use of Russian-made Mi-35 helicopter gunships, A-5 and F-7 fighter jets, K-8 light attacks planes and Mi-17 transport helicopters.[107] Indeed, the use of air strikes by the Tatmadaw in northern Shan State has increased to a level not experienced for decades.[108] Accordingly, one media report stated that the response by the Tatmadaw on positions held by Northern Alliances forces in Muse (see below) involved airstrikes that "may have been the biggest by the Tatmadaw in decades."[109]

Assessing the details of weaponry in possession of EAOs, on the other hand, is made difficult because of the lack of credible information. Several reports

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[105] For example, see "Tatmadaw forces in hot pursuit of Kokang renegade troops," *Global New Light of Myanmar*, February 12, 2015; Nan Lwin Nnin Pwint and Nang Seng Nom, "Army Airstrikes Bombard Kachin, Shan States," *The Irrawaddy*, May 19, 2016.

[106] For analysis of the Air Force's modernization in the 1988-2003, see Maung Aung Myoe, *Building the Tatmadaw,* pp. 122-129; also "New aircraft enter service with Myanmar Air Force," *Global New Light of Myanmar*, June 25, 2015.

[107] See Mratt Kyaw Thu, "Shan State Attacks: The Brotherhood Hits Back," *Frontier*, December 22, 2016.

[108] Tin Nyo Nyo, General Secretary of the Women's League of Burma, noted in 2013 that: "There has not been a single airstrike for 20 years, but now government forces are using jet fighters and helicopters to launch attacks near civilian areas." (Women's League of Burma, "International community must act to end atrocities by Thein Sein's government," January 8, 2013; Anthony Davis, "Tatmadaw quietly launches largest war since Myanmar's independence," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 20, 2015; Saw Yan Naing & Nang Seng Nom, "Aerial Assaults as Shan State Conflict Intensifies," *The Irrawaddy*, November 16, 2015. Interviews, members of civil society organizations and farmers, northern Shan State, August and December 2016; Interview with human rights researcher, Yangon, December 2016; Thu Thu Aung, "Air strikes reported as Shan State conflict spreads," *Myanmar Times*, November 24, 2016.

[109] Mratt Kyaw Thu, "Shan State Attacks: The Brotherhood Hits Back." Also see Thu Thu Aung, "Air strikes reported as Shan State conflict spreads."

suggest that groups have purchased weapons on the black market from neighboring countries as well as produced their own small arms and munitions.[110] The UWSA is generally considered to have not only the largest number of troops, but also be the most heavily armed of the EAOs.[111]

Significant, furthermore, was the emergence of the Northern Alliance in November 2016, which, as previously mentioned, involved the first coordinated offensive on urban areas by these EAOs and resulted in the capture of the town of Mong Ko for several days. The capture of a town by EAOs, even temporarily, is unprecedented in the recent history of the wars in northern Shan State.

Growth in the Number of Soldiers

Several indicators point to a continuing rise in the total number of soldiers in northern Shan State and heightened levels of militarization that involves both Tatmadaw and EAO forces. Determining the precise number of troops, whether EAO, Tatmadaw, or Tatmadaw-allied militias, is difficult because of the changing patterns of deployments and continuous recruitment, as well as a lack of available information.

In Palaung/Ta'ang areas, several reports indicate a dramatic increase in the number of Tatmadaw troops since 2011. A report by the Ta-ang Women's Organization indicates that the number of Tatmadaw soldiers in Palaung/Ta'ang areas has risen from 3,000 in 2011 to over 12,000 in 2016. This fourfold increased reportedly involved at least seven combat divisions deployed from central Myanmar.[112] Other reports also indicate the

[110] Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*, pp. 252-254, 268; Interviews, journalists, Yangon, December 2016.

[111] See, for example, Bertil Lintner, "Wa rebel group torpedoes Suu Kyi's peace drive," *Asia Times*, February 28, 2017, http://www.atimes.com/article/wa-rebel-group-torpedoes-suu-kyis-peace-drive/

[112] According to Palaung/Ta'ang sources, the number of Tatmadaw battalions stationed in Ta'ang areas in 2011 was approximately thirty-six. Since this period, approximately ninety additional battalions are reportedly deployed into Palaung/Ta'ang areas. See "Trained to Torture: Systematic war crimes by the

Tatmadaw's deployment of light infantry divisions from other areas of Myanmar to northern Shan State.[113]

The size of several EAO units has also expanded. The TNLA has exhibited one of the most dramatic rates of growth. For instance, in January 2012, when the TNLA first initiated operations in Palaung/Ta'ang areas of northern Shan State, it reportedly only had 42 soldiers. Estimates indicate that its ranks have increased rapidly, whereby they currently have several thousand troops.[114] Another example is the KIA's formation by 2015 of its 6th Brigade in areas near Mong Ko, Pang Hseng, Mongbaw areas of northern Shan State located west of the Salween River.[115] And again in 2018, it formed a new 10th Brigade in northern Shan State. In Kokang, after the 2009 conflict led to a build-up of Tatmadaw forces, the return of the Peung Kya Shin-led faction of the MNDAA in early 2015 involved another influx of armed forces. Furthermore, the deployment of AA units to northern Shan State from Kachin State also illustrates an increase in troop numbers, with some estimates of combined AA forces in Kachin and Northern Shan State in the low thousands given the regular and expanding number of basic trainings for Rakhine recruits.[116] Last but not least, since late 2015 the SSA/RCSS has increased its presence in the region. Sources in northern Shan State indicate that some of these may be former members and supporters of the now defunct Shan State National Army, which previously operated in this area.[117]

Burma Army in Ta'ang areas of northern Shan State (March 2011 - March 2016)," Ta'ang Women's Organization (TWO), 2016, pp. 1, 7; PSLF/TNLA, News and Information Department, "PSLF/TNLA Review on Battles in Ta'ang Region," November 18, 2016.

[113] Anthony Davis, "Myanmar's army struggles against a strong new rebel alliance," *Nikkei Asian Weekly*, April 6, 2017; "Government Reinforces Forces in Northern Shan State," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, April 3, 2015.

[114] Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*, p. 259.

[115] The KIA operated in these areas until 1968, when it was pushed out by the CPB.

[116] Paul Keenan, "The Arakan Army's Involvement in Rakhine State," EBO Background Paper, No. 2 / 2015, July 3, 2015; David Scott Mathieson, "Shadowy rebels extend Myanmar's wars," *Asia Times*, June 11, 2017

[117] Interviews, journalists and community leaders, Rangoon, Shan State, August, December 2016.

Conflict Hotspots and Multi-Actor Conflict Zones

Several areas of northern Shan State can be considered hotspots, which exhibit regular armed conflicts and reflect several distinct dynamics. A few of these hotspots include the Pansay Ridge, the Loi Say-Loi Leng Ridge, and the western townships of northern Shan State, including Namkham, Mong Mit, Mongbein, and Manton.

The Pansay Ridge, a mountain range running through Namkham and Kutkai townships, and surrounding areas, experiences regular fighting. Since 2013, reports indicate a cyclical outbreak of hostilities between the TNLA and units of the Tatmadaw-allied Pansay militia.[118] The conflicts emerged in conjunction with the TNLA's counter-narcotics operations that have involved the destruction of opium fields during the seasonal poppy harvest from January through April, the interdiction of illicit narcotics, and arrest of suspected drug smugglers.[119] According to reports, during a TNLA drug eradication campaign in February 2016, Palaung/Ta'ang forces came into conflict with Tatmadaw units operating in Pan Nin village in Namsan Township. It is also reported that the Tatmadaw responded with the use of airpower.[120]

Areas along the Loi Say-Loi Leng Ridge area of Tangyan and Monghsu townships are also the site of conflicts involving the SSA/SSPP and Tatmadaw forces.[121] The mountainous area is located along the western

[118] Interview, member of humanitarian organization, Lashio, August 2016; Interview, local journalist, Lashio, October 2016; Palaung Women's Organization, "TNLA burned and destroyed drug from Pan Say troop," April 8, 2013; "Violence flare-up in Namkham, Shan State: TNLA," *Eleven Media*, April 26, 2014; Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*, p. 270.

[119] Nan Tin Htwe, "Palaung group accuses Tatmadaw of failing to control drug trade," *Myanmar Times*, November 10, 2013; Palaung Women's Organization, "TNLA burned and destroyed drug from Pan Say troop," April 8, 2013; PSLF/TNLA, News and Information Department, "Battle between TNLA Troops Engaged in Destroying Opium Fields and Myanmar Tatmadaw," May 18, 2015.

[120] Thu Thu Aung, "TNLA field clearing suspended by air strikes," *Myanmar Times*, February 26, 2016. Interview, journalists, Lashio, Shan State, September 2016.

[121] Interviews, member of local humanitarian organization, Lashio, August 2016.

banks of the Salween River in Tangyan Township and possesses militarily strategic value as it overlooks the areas controlled by the UWSA across the river to the east and is near a proposed site for the Naung Pha dam on the Salween River. As a report on global security affairs notes, the Tatmadaw "has seemingly attempted to limit connection between the two groups, starting in late January 2013 with dozens of military clashes with the SSA-N [SSA/SSPP] ultimately forcing the group away from UWSA held areas."[122] The strategic value of the mountain bases is that they can be used by the Tatmadaw to project influence across the Salween River crossings and UWSA territory.[123] Several reports indicate the potential for escalation, noting that the SSA/SSPP, and perhaps the UWSA, will defend the territory from encroachment by the Tatmadaw.[124]

Since this intensification of activity by the Tatmadaw in the Loi Say-Loi Leng Ridge area began in 2013, it has been characterized by the increased deployment of Tatmadaw troops engaging in intermittent offensives, as well as requests for joint inspections paired with demands for withdrawal of SSA/SSPP troops from the area.[125] The escalation of conflict was such that the Union Election Commission canceled the 2015 general elections for eight village tracts of Tangyan Township along with entire townships of Monghsu and Kehsi, citing conflict between the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups.[126] In late August 2016, in the days leading up to the

[122] *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, Shan State Army - North (SSA-N), May 15, 2013, p. 3.
[123] Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*, p. 150. Another concern is that Tatmadaw could position artillery on the ridge and exert greater control over the area.
[124] For example, see Shan Human Rights Foundation, "Latest Burma Army Attack on Strategic SSPP/SSA Mountain Base Stokes Fears of Major War Escalation," September 8, 2016; Shan Human Rights Foundation, "Concerns about the Naung Pha dam on the Salween River," August 23, 2016.
[125] Lawi Weng, "SSA-N Official: 'We Will Not Let Them Take Our Headquarters,'" *The Irrawaddy*, November 26, 2015; *The Burma Army's Offensive Against the Shan State Army – North*, EBO Analysis Paper, 2011; Shan Human Rights Foundation, "Latest Burma Army Attack"; Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*, pp. 151-153.
[126] Aye Min Soe, "Regional Strife Bars Polls," *Global New Light of Myanmar*, October 28, 2015. The UEC cited earlier request by the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP). The elections were delayed until April 2017.

UPC/21CPC, human rights groups reported that the Tatmadaw had launched another series of attacks in these areas.[127] Recent reports indicate continued tensions and clashes in the area related to troop movements and the resurgence of fighting in SSA/SSPP areas in northern Shan State and its adjacent areas in southern Shan State in Mong Hsu.[128]

Multi Actor Conflict Zone

The presence of multiple EAOs in part reflects the multi-ethnic composition of the population and the salience of ethnicity as the basis for mobilizing support. As a result, the close proximity of armed actors makes northern Shan State volatile and susceptible to an escalation in conflict.

Deployment by EAOs in non-contiguous areas may see members of EAOs crossing from one base area to another, which can lead to conflict if they have to go through another EAO's territory.[129] For example, one element of the fighting between the SSA/RCSS and TNLA involves incursions on territory claimed by the other.[130] In some cases, close ties between EAOs mean that they can negotiate with each other for safe passage. However, taxation or recruitment by one EAO in the area of another can be considered a breach of this understanding.

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[127] Shan Human Rights Foundation, "Latest Burma Army Attack;" Interviews, Lashio, Shan State, October 2016.

[128] "SSPP/SSA, Tatmadaw clash in southern Shan State," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, August 23, 2017. Shan Human Rights Foundation, "Indiscriminate Burma Army shelling, shooting cause 300 villagers to flee in Mong Yai, northern Shan State," September 14, 2017. Editor's note: In January 2018, the SSA/SSPP released a statement claiming that the Tatmadaw had launched more than 500 attacks against them since 2012. The SSA/SSPP subsequently applied to withdraw from the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), which had been engaged in negotiating the NCA, in August 2017 to join the FPNCC. See: "Tatmadaw attacked SSPP/SSA-N over 500 times since the signing of the union-level ceasefire," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, January 16, 2018, https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/tatmadaw-attacked-ssppssa-n-over-500-times-signing-union-level-ceasefire

[129] Interview, former SSA soldier, Shan State, October 2016.

[130] For a detailed discussion of the sources of recent fighting between RCSS/SSA and TNLA, see Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*, pp. 289-298.

The above also presents challenges for the de-escalation of armed violence. One implication is that ceasefire agreements between the government and EAOs that involve territorial demarcation are susceptible to violations in the case that fighting between another EAO and the Tatmadaw spills over. If only a few groups engage in the ceasefire process and others do not, it is possible for fighting to emerge between the Tatmadaw and a non-ceasefire EAO and for it to spill over into areas of a ceasefire EAO.

Unsurprisingly, a change in the strength or position of one armed group can also disrupt the equilibrium and create a power vacuum and lead to competition for influence over an area and the outbreak of violence. For instance, the 2015 withdrawal of SSA/SSPP troops from positions in Kyaukme and Mongmit to other areas that include Wan Hai allowed for the SSA/RCSS to fill the void.[131] Similarly, activities or influence by one armed group in the area of operation or influence of another can lead to the outbreak of armed conflicts. The TNLA points to the increase in opium cultivation and drug use in Palaung/Ta'ang areas involving Tatmadaw-allied militias in the period after their disarmament as a core grievance that led to the later reemergence of a Palaung/Ta'ang resistance organization.[132]

Resource Extraction and Illicit Trade

As a country rich in resources, combined with China's booming economy, an economic synergy has been created which involves commodity flows, both licit and illicit, of high-value timber, narcotics, and even cattle through northern Shan State. This creates opportunities for taxation by armed groups. Furthermore, the area is also the site of large-scale investment projects involving extractive industries. These factors contribute to the dynamics of conflict.

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[131] Ibid., p. 286; Interview, journalist, Lashio, October 2016.
[132] PSLF/TNLA, News and Information Department, "Clash between Pansay Militia Carrying Narcotic Drug and TNLA."

Timber

The townships of Namkham, Mong Mit, Mongbein and Manton constitute key sites for illicit commodity flows. Though difficult to confirm, local sources interviewed in Lashio and recent media reports indicate that the flow of high-value, illicit timber through northern Shan State has given rise to increased militarization in the aforementioned townships, and with it fighting between the Tatmadaw and EAOs in these areas.[133] This is just one example of the nexus between trade flows and conflict.

Narcotics

The presence of opium has led many EAOs, government organizations and other groups in northern Shan State to engage in counter narcotics activities and provides financial opportunities for armed groups and criminal syndicates to engage in narcotics trafficking. Second only to Afghanistan, Shan State is the most productive opium producing area in the world. Since independence, EAOs, militias, and the Tatmadaw have been implicated in the cultivation, refining and trafficking of illicit narcotics. From 2006 to 2015, estimates by the United Nations Office on Drug Control indicate that Myanmar experienced a steady rise in opium cultivation from over 20,000 hectares to roughly 55,000 hectares (or 647 tons). Over 90 percent of opium cultivation takes place in Shan State.[134] Shan State is also a major site in Southeast Asia for the production for amphetamine-type substances in Southeast Asia.[135]

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[133] Interviews, journalist and businessman, Lashio, October 2016; Ann Wang, "Checkpoint China: The shadowy world of timber smuggling," Mongabay Series: Global Forests, Myanmar Forest Trade, October 31, 2017. For a study of the illicit timber flows from Sagaing across Mandalay and into Kachin State for transit to China, see Environmental Investigation Agency, *Organized Chaos. The illicit overland timber trade between Myanmar and China* (London: EIA, September 2015).

[134] United Nations Office on Drug Control, *Southeast Asia Opium Survey*, 2015, pp. 4, 30, 36.

[135] United States Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, 2016.

Drug addiction has become a pressing issue for many communities. Several non-state organizations, including EAOs, have adopted counter-narcotics activities aimed at addressing these concerns.[136] The counter-narcotics activities pursued by some EAOs involve drug education, the detention of drug sellers, harm reduction, support for crop substitution initiatives, the seizure of drugs, destruction of opium fields and narcotics refineries and drug-burning ceremonies.[137] Yet the destruction of drug crops by government officials and EAOs threatens the livelihoods of opium farmers, as many depend on its cultivation for their livelihood.

Several conflicts across Shan State are related to counter narcotics enforcement activities by EAOs. As mentioned earlier, during TNLA-led crop eradication operations, fighting broke out between the TNLA and the Pan Say militia units, and in some cases the Tatmadaw. Although not in northern Shan State, a clash between the SSA/RCSS and Tatmadaw took place in October 2016, just south of Hsipaw Township in the areas surrounding Pang Poi village in the northern part of Mong Khoung Township and led to an estimated two thousand people fleeing to areas in northern and southern Shan State. [138] An exact account of the event remains unclear, but reports indicate that fighting took place near an RCSS/SSA-S operated drug treatment center. The ceasefire Joint Monitoring Committee

[136] For an example of a community-based counter narcotics initiative in northern Shan State, see Nang Seng Nom, "Hkaw Sha Hpung: The All-Women Anti-Drug Task Force," *The Irrawaddy*, January 11, 2017.

[137] Tai Freedom, "Shan State Army RCSS/SSA holds drug-burning ceremony," November 1, 2016; Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army, "Statement on International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking," June 26, 2016; Nawdin Laphai, "KIO declares war against drugs before Burma elections," *Kachin News Group*, October 8, 2010.

[138] "RCSS/SSA and government army fight intensively," *Taifreedom*, October 4, 2016, http://www.taifreedom.com/english/index.php/news/battle/603-rcss-ssa-and-government-army-fight-intensively

was called on to investigate the incident as it constituted a violation of the NCA.[139]

Investment Projects

Several large-scale investment projects in extractive and energy sectors are associated with the outbreak of violence.[140] These include the construction and operation of mega-projects such as dams, mines, oil and gas pipelines. The deployment of troops by the Tatmadaw to provide security for such projects can in turn lead to violent clashes.[141]

For instance, several reports indicate that the increasing number of troops in ethnic conflict areas, such as along the Shwe Gas pipelines in northern Shan State, has led to increased conflict between the Tatmadaw and EAOs as well as civilian abuses.[142] A report by the Shan Human Rights Foundation documented, furthermore, the outbreak of armed conflict in a coal-mining area of Hsipaw Township in May 2016. The fighting reportedly involved an attack by the Tatmadaw and its allied militias on SSA/SSPP positions resulting in large-scale militarized violence. The report examines the

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139 "JMC looks into mass detention case and RCSS clashes," *Myanmar Times*, November 4, 2016, https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/23474-jmc-looks-into-mass-detention-case-and-rcss-clashes.html

140 For discussion of the impact of regional foreign investment in conflict areas, see John Buchanan, Tom Kramer and Kevin Woods, *Developing Disparity: Regional investment in Burma's borderlands* (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 2013), https://www.tni.org/files/download/tni-2013-burmasborderlands-def-klein-def.pdf

141 For examples of the increased deployment of Tatmadaw troops in conjunction with mega projects, see reports about the construction of the Shwe gas pipelines. Shwe Gas Movement, *Corridor of Power*. (Chiang Mai, Thailand), 2009; Kevin Woods, "Ceasefire capitalism: military–private partnerships, resource concessions and military–state building in the Burma–China Borderlands," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 4 (2011): 747-770.

142 See, among others, Buchanan, et al. *Developing Disparity*; "Fighting in N.Shan state continues along Shwe pipeline route," March 7, 2012, *Kachin News Group*, http://www.kachinnews.com/news/2249-fighting-in-n-shan-state-continues-along-shwe-pipeline-route.html; Northern Shan Farmers Committee, "Shan farmers oppose the Shwe pipelines," April 2013, https://business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/media/shan-pipeline-april-2013.pdf; "Shwe Gas pipeline security soldiers demand money from locals," May 3, 2012, *The Palaung Land* (News), http://nawwhment.blogspot.com/2012/06/shwe-gas-pipeline-security-soldiers.html

connection between resource extraction projects in conflict areas and the outbreak of violence involving the abuses and displacement of civilians.[143]

Armed conflicts are also related to hydropower projects.[144] According to Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization, the Tatmadaw in March 2013 issued orders for the SSA/SSPP to vacate areas along the west bank of the Salween (east of the Tangyan-Mong Kao Road) or face attacks. This is an area near the proposed construction site of the Naung Pha dam.[145] The earlier presence of multiple armed groups and the fighting between Tatmadaw and EAOs in nearby areas has raised concerns of local groups that other proposed dam projects may also lead to further fighting.[146] Local environmental NGOs report that several other dams are likely to be constructed in northern Shan State using foreign investment. These include the Shweli 3 dam, which is located on the Shweli River in Mongmit Township, where there were heavy clashes between the TNLA and the Tatmadaw in 2015.[147] The construction of four dams along the Namtu River in northern Shan State pose further concern. One of the dams is known as the Upper Yeywa dam, located in Nawngkhio Township, which is apparently expected to be completed in 2018.[148] Planning reportedly

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[143] For a detailed account, see Shan Human Rights Foundation, Killing for Coal: Arbitrary arrest, torture, and killing of villagers by Burma Army to secure Nam Ma coal mines, August 2, 2016.

[144] For an overview of hydropower projects and militarization, see Diana Suhardiman, Jeff Rutherford, and Saw John Bright, "Putting violent armed conflict in the center of the Salween hydropower debates," *Critical Asian Studies*, vol.49, issue 3, 2017: 1-16. One report notes that Tatmadaw militias stationed near the Shweli 1 (completed in 2008) and Shweli 2 dam sites engaged in attacks against the KIA in northern Shan states in 2011. See "Shweli Under Siege: Dams amid civil war in Burma", The Ta'ang Students and Youth Organization (TSYO), 2011, p.23.

[145] Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization, "Press Release: Burmese military stokes war in northern Shan State to clear way for Salween dam," April 1, 2013.

[146] Action for Shan State Rivers, "Concerns about the Naung Pha dam on the Salween River," August 23, 2016.

[147] Ta'ang Students and Youth Union, "TSYU demand immediate suspension of Shweli 3 Hydropower Project," October 4, 2016.

[148] According to *Shan Herald Agency for News*, the Upper Yeywa Dam, involving Chinese, Swiss, German and Japanese firms, is expected to create a 60-kilometre-long (37-mile) reservoir, flooding Hsipaw Township and submerging the homes and lands of about 650 villagers. "Hundreds protest

continues for two other dams, the Middle Yeywa in Nawngkhio and Namtu Dam in Hsipaw Township.[149] In November 2016, some 1,500 protesters gathered in Hsipaw Township to demand an immediate cancellation of the Upper Yeywa dam in Kyaukme Township. The area near the proposed site dam on the Namtu River, which is not yet under construction, is a conflict zone where the Tatmadaw and EAOs have been fighting.[150]

The central government's support for mega-projects and natural resource concessions are also a source of grievance among some communities in northern Shan State and, indeed, across Myanmar. Such grievances have further been exacerbated by years of land grabbing by the Tatmadaw and government for agro-industry and other ventures.[151] There have been repeated calls from some local civil society organizations to halt all further mega projects in conflict-affected areas until a national peace agreement is made to prevent further conflict.[152] Continued investment in mega projects in these areas is likely to lead to more fighting, displacement, and abuse of civilians.

dam on Namtu River," November 29, 2016. Also see Thu Thu Aung, "Hundreds of Shan farmers protest Upper Yeywa dam," *Myanmar Times*, November 29, 2016.

[149] "Four hydropower projects get green light," *Eleven News,* January 8, 2016.

[150] Shan State Farmers' Network, "Press Release: 1,500 farmers demand cancellation of Upper Yeywa Dam as war in N. Shan State escalates," November 28, 2016; Thu Thu Aung, "Hundreds of Shan farmers protest Upper Yeywa dam."

[151] Global Witness, *Guns, Cronies and Crops*, London, March 26, 2015.

[152] Twelve Shan community-based organizations (CBOs) issued a joint statement, stating that "there must be a moratorium on resource extraction and large-scale development projects in ethnic conflict areas until there is a political resolution to the conflict and constitutional reform guaranteeing locals people's rights." See "Statement by Shan Community Based Organizations," November 13, 2014. In another statement, twenty-six CBOs from Shan State have called for the national government to suspend plans for dams on the Salween River. In August 2016, the Committee for Shan State Unity (CSSU), comprised of ethnic Shan political parties and EAOs, also issued a joint statement calling for the NLD government "to review the dam projects on the Salween River." The statement also said that, "If the Salween dams go ahead against the wishes of local ethnic communities, we will join with all the ethnic people, civil society groups and environmental groups in opposing the dams." See "Open Letter from 26 Shan community Groups to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to cancel Salween dams," August 17, 2016.

Impacts on the Local Population

Analysis of conflicts in northern Shan State often emphasizes violent clashes or skirmishes between armed actors. The violence that occurs "in between" clashes and its impacts on communities are often neglected in analysis of armed conflicts. These incidents reflect the militarization of society by the Tatmadaw and EAOs, structural inequalities, a lack of socio-economic development, and abuses perpetrated against civilians. The latter include reports of extrajudicial killing, torture, forced recruitment, forced portering, taxation and destruction of property. These activities impinge on people's livelihoods and promote insecurity and vulnerability leading, among others, to displacement and lack of access to basic health services.

As the conflict has intensified in northern Shan State, reports indicate that abuses by armed groups against civilians have increased.[153] It is important to note that reports indicate the involvement of both Tatmadaw troops and EAOs. The level and types of abuses vary from groups to group. As a result of a lack of impartial and factual information, it is difficult to know the full extent of the situation, a fact which necessitates further investigation. This section primarily relies on a review of existing reports and field interviews.[154]

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[153] Amnesty International. *"All the Civilians Suffer:" Conflict Displacement and Abuses in Northern Myanmar*, London: ASI 16/6429/2017. June 14, 2017, https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Myanmar-report-FINAL-VERSION.pdf

[154] For accounts of recent human rights abuses in northern Shan State, see reports produced by the following organizations: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Kachin Women's Association Thailand, Shan Human Rights Foundation, and Ta'ang Women's Organization. Other media organizations also reporting on human rights abuses include the *Shan Herald Agency for News, Kachin News Group, Frontier* magazine, and *The Irrawaddy*. Specific reports include Amnesty International, *All the Civilians Suffer;* Human Rights Watch, "Burma: Protect Civilians in Northern Fighting," HRW Press Release, December 22, 2016; Ta'ang Women's Organization, Trained to Torture: Systematic war crimes by the Burma Army in Ta'ang areas of northern Shan State (March 2011 - March 2016), Ta'ang Women's Organisation (TWO), 2016; Kachin Women's Association Thailand, *A Far Cry from Peace*, 2016; Shan Human Rights Foundation, *Killing for Coal*. Shan Human Rights Foundation, "Burma Army expansion, abuses along Kokang-China border creating scores of 'ghost villages,'" May 12, 2016.

Extrajudicial Killings

Several reports by media and human rights organizations indicate patterns of abuses that involve extrajudicial killings by armed groups.[155] One high-profile instance in June 2016 involved the deaths of seven villagers near Mong Yaw village in Lashio Township. The Tatmadaw subsequently convened a court martial for seven of its soldiers and convicted them of the murder of five of the villagers.[156] The prosecution of Tatmadaw soldiers for abuses against civilians is rare, and the trial was an unusually direct response by the Tatmadaw to reports of abuses by its own members. While it represents a positive step forward, other reports, including those by human rights and media organizations, indicate other instances of civilian abuses and deaths involving the Tatmadaw and EAOs in northern Shan State, thus being illustrative of a systematic lack of accountability.[157] Local and international human rights organizations and journalists have also documented instances of the Tatmadaw's involvement in the torture of civilians and imprisonment of civilians as porters.[158]

[155] Kachin Women's Association Thailand. A *far cry from peace.*

[156] Wa Lone, "Myanmar soldiers jailed with hard, labor for village killings," *Reuters*, September 16, 2016; "Servicemen given five-year prison sentences for deaths of Mongyaw villagers," *Global New Light of Myanmar*, September 16, 2016, p.4.

[157] For reports of extrajudicial killings, see Shan Human Rights Foundation, "Burma Army tortures three farmers, and shoots one farmer in Mong Yen, northern Shan State," December 6, 2016. Shan Human Rights Foundation, "Torture, extrajudicial killing, and use of civilians as human shields by Burma Army during new offensive," June 1, 2016. Amnesty International, *All the Civilians Suffer*, p. 21.

[158] For accounts, see Amnesty International, *All the Civilians Suffer*, p. 15; David Doyle and Jennifer Rigby, "Burma's latest ethnic conflict intensifies as violence spreads in Shan State," *Independent*, March 13, 2016; Hanna Hindstrom, "Burma's Transition to Civilian Rule Hasn't Stopped the Abuses of Its Ethnic Wars," *Time*, April 1, 2016; Kachin Women's Association Thailand, *A Far Cry from Peace*; Shan Human Rights Foundation, *Killing for Coal*; Ta'ang Women's Organization, "Trained to Torture: Systematic war crimes by the Burma Army in Ta'ang areas of northern Shan State (March 2011 - March 2016)", *Ta'ang Women's Organisation (TWO)*, 2016.

Forced Recruitment, Detention and Portering

Forced recruitment, detention and conscription of civilians by armed groups is another outcome of militarization in northern Shan State that has a significant impact on the local population and is linked to all armed actors.[159] As one humanitarian aid worker noted, "people from IDP camps are afraid to leave the areas near the camp for fear that they will be conscripted by EAOs."[160]

Several reports, including local human rights organizations and interviews with villagers in northern Shan State, which endured heavy fighting in May 2016, indicate the involvement of Tatmadaw units in the conscription of villagers for the portering of supplies.[161]

The arbitrary detention of civilians by armed groups also takes place in northern Shan State. Interviews and reports from human rights and media organizations suggest different rationales behind the detentions. One apparent basis for the detention of people by armed groups is that they are suspected of supporting an EAO. Reports indicate the involvement of the Tatmadaw, TNLA and SSA/RCSS units in this practice.[162] In some cases,

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[159] Fiona MacGregor and Thu Thu Aung, "More fighting and more abductions: Northern Shan villages robbed of children," *Myanmar Times*, February 5, 2016.
[160] Interview, member of humanitarian organization, Lashio, October 2016.
[161] Shan Human Rights Foundation, *Killing for Coal*; "Burma army takes villagers captive during clashes with RCSS/SSA," *Shan Herald Agency For News*, October 7, 2016; Ta'ang Women's Organization, "Trained to Torture: Systematic war crimes by the Burma Army in Ta'ang areas of northern Shan State (March 2011 - March 2016)", *Ta'ang Women's Organisation (TWO)*, 2016; Interviews conducted with villagers in Kyaukme and Kutkai allege forced conscription by units of the Tatmadaw and EAOs.
[162] Several sources report detention of civilians by EAOs. See Fiona MacGregor and Thu Thu Aung, "Empty villages stand testimony to ever-more-bitter ethnic conflict," *Myanmar Times*, February 12, 2016; "SNLD condemns KIA forced recruitment," *Eleven News*, January 3, 2016; Nyein Nyein, "KIO Denies Allegations of Forced Recruitment in Shan State," *The Irrawaddy*, January 4, 2016; "Government accuses TNLA of forced recruitment," *Mizzima*, December 13, 2016; Fiona MacGregor and Thu Thu Aung, "More fighting and more abductions: Northern Shan villages robbed of children," *Myanmar Times*, February 5, 2016; "SNDP demands release of detainees amidst Shan and Ta'ang clashes," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, December 07, 2015; PSLF/TNLA, News and Information Department, "Human Rights Violations in Ta'ang Region by RCSS/SSA Forces," May 2, 2016; Lawi Weng, "TNLA Frees 11 People Suspected of Being RCSS Militiamen," *The Irrawaddy*, December 13, 2016.

interviews indicate that arbitrary detention by some EAOs has also come under the guise of drug enforcement operations, including the targeted arrest and detention of suspected drug users and dealers.[163] These reports require further investigation, however.

The conscription or removal of an able-bodied member of a household can have drastic consequences on livelihoods. For rural communities, the impact of even the temporary removal of a productive member of a household is amplified during key periods of the agricultural cycle, when labor is necessary for planting or harvesting.

Taxation

One manifestation of militarization is the engagement of armed groups in the taxation of the population. The practice by the Tatmadaw, militias and EAOs is a long-standing one in Myanmar.[164] The institutionalization of the practice is reflected in the Burmese term *seh kyet*, which refers to protection money paid by individuals to armed groups.

Taxation by armed groups involves many methods. One is the use of checkpoints by armed groups, where "taxes" are levied. This is a practice dating back to the early days of the insurrection. Local informants claim that Tatmadaw militias and EAOs collect taxes in some areas of northern Shan state, but the full extent is not known.[165] Since May 2016, reports from local organizations and business people indicate that EAOs have engaged in more frequent taxation on the stretch of the highway running from Lashio

[163] Lun Min Mang, "Villagers released after detention by RCSS," *Myanmar Times*, September 23, 2016; Interviews, journalist and member of humanitarian organization, Lashio, Chiang Mai, August 2016.
[164] See Alison Vicary and Teresa Walentyna, *"We have to give them so much that our stomachs are empty of food': the hidden impact of Burma's arbitrary & corrupt taxation"* (Chiang Mai: Network for Human Rights Documentation - Burma, 2010); Alison Vicary, "The Actual System of Taxation in Burma's Ethnic Minority States," Conference paper, June 2011, retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/ publication/ 269223491
[165] Shan Human Rights Foundation, Checkpoint Banditry: Rampant Extortion at Checkpoints, January 2013. Amnesty International, All the Civilians Suffer.

to the border town of Muse.[166] In January 2017, the reopening of the Nam Oon Gate, a security checkpoint on the road from Lashio to Hsenwi, led to opposition from members of parliament and traders, citing concerns about the possibility of bribery.[167] Other forms of taxation target businesses and households involving the Tatmadaw, its allied militias, and EAOs.[168] Reports by local and international human rights organizations and interviews have also alleged instances of the destruction of property by armed groups.[169]

Displacement

One of the most far-reaching effects of the conflict has been the displacement of the civilian population. Even the anticipation of violence, amid reports of troop movements, abuses by armed actors, and rumors of fighting that portend militarized violence, have served as triggers for people to leave an area. In addition to settlement in IDP camps, reports indicate individuals and even entire households moving out of northern Shan State. Another development has been the dissolution of households involving the placement of children in monasteries and schools in central Myanmar while parents find work in other areas of the country, such as Mandalay, or even as far away as Thailand.[170] Consequently, the full extent of displacement may not be fully assessed through measures of IDPs.

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[166] Interviews with Kachin, Shan, Ta'ang residents of northern Shan State, Lashio, Kutkai and Muse, August and October 2016. Interview with humanitarian organizations, Lashio, Shan State; Lawi Weng, "Surviving the Night," *Irrawaddy*, November 23, 2016. Amnesty International, *All the Civilians Suffer*, p. 37.

[167] "SNLD cites bribery concerns at Hsenwi checkpoint," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, January 18, 2017.

[168] Interview, journalist, Chiang Mai, August 2016; Interviews, journalists, businessmen, villagers, northern Shan State, August and October 2016. Amnesty International, *All the Civilians Suffer*.

[169] Interviews, farmers, businessmen, and members of humanitarian organizations, northern Shan State, Kyaukme, August and October 2016. Amnesty International, *All the Civilians Suffer*, p. 23. "Trained to Torture: Systematic war crimes by the Burma Army in Ta'ang areas of northern Shan State (March 2011 - March 2016)," Ta'ang Women's Organisation (TWO), 2016, pp. 24-25.

[170] Interviews, IDPs, Kyaukme, Namkham, and Kutkai, August 2016; Interview, members of humanitarian organizations, Lashio, Shan State, August and October 2016.

The continued and escalation of violent conflict exacerbates vulnerabilities of communities with preexisting challenges and needs. For instance, the continued displacement of people presents challenges to humanitarian assistance. As one humanitarian aid worker noted, the communities that have supported displaced people have become increasingly saddled with the burdens stemming from the intensification of conflict and further displacements.[171] Humanitarian relief organizations are also challenged by authorities and the Tatmadaw and its regulations which have restricted their access to some communities in conflict areas and IDP camps.[172]

Limited Access to Medical Services

The presence of conflict and the experience of displacement have limited people's access to basic medical care and facilities. The access to medical services is especially limited in rural areas and traveling to cities has become dangerous because of fighting. The area north of Laukkai, the capital city of Kokang area, lacks basic medical services and people from this area have encountered government restrictions on their movement, which limits their access to medical care.[173]

Intercommunal Tensions

The confluence of multiple conflict actors, inadequate systems for reporting on conflict, and ongoing violence have fueled feelings of insecurity among many communities, and produced concerns about the possibility of inter-communal violence between communities of different ethnicities in ethnically diverse northern Shan State. These may follow patterns of armed

[171] Interview, member of humanitarian organization, Lashio, Shan State, October 2016.
[172] Gum Sha Aung, "Conflict in Kachin and Northern Shan States and its Impact on the Humanitarian Situation"; David Scott Mathieson, *Burma's Northern Shan State and Prospects for Peace*; Amnesty International, *All the Civilians Suffer*, pp. 34-36.
[173] Interview, member of humanitarian organization, Lashio, Shan State, October 2016.

conflict – for example, tensions between Burmans and ethnic groups, or it could follow armed conflict patterns between EAOs, for example tensions between Karen and Mon[174] In several communities, including Kyaukme, Lashio, Namkham and Hsipaw, a concern of many people is over the fate of missing relatives and members of their community. In a few instances whole groups of people had inexplicably disappeared, and in the absence of reliable news and fueled by rumors, several people expressed fear that people had been killed because of their ethnicity, although reports of such remain unconfirmed.[175] Nevertheless, the presence of multiple armed actors creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity. As one Lashio-based local humanitarian aid worker noted,

> In Kachin State when someone goes missing, you know that it was likely the KIA or the Tatmadaw. But in northern Shan State, there are so many [armed groups] you don't know what happened or who might be responsible.[176]

The fighting between the TNLA and the RCSS/SSA, furthermore, has led to concerns about ethnic tensions between ethnic Shans and Palaung/Ta'ang. One respected Buddhist monk reportedly advised members of his community not to travel outside of their village because of concerns of potential violence.[177]

One Lashio-based journalist presented an alarming, but still yet unconfirmed development, that social media platforms were promoting unsubstantiated allegations of communal conflict involving the brutal killing of civilians. The journalist added that he and his colleagues could

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[174] Fiona MacGregor and Thu Thu Aung, "Empty villages stand testimony to ever-more-bitter ethnic conflict," *Myanmar Times*, February 12, 2016.

[175] Interviews, farmers, members of civil society organizations, members of humanitarian organizations, August and October 2016, Hsipaw, Kyaukme, Lashio, Kutkai and Muse in Shan State. For instance, during research in Namkham and Muse in 2016, the author was told of a van with approximately a dozen civilian passengers travelling from Namkham town south which had disappeared with no clear explanation of what had happened.

[176] Interview, member of local humanitarian organization, October, Lashio, Shan State.

[177] Interview, member of a humanitarian organization, Lashio, September 2016.

neither confirm the events nor identify the persons who posted it.[178] The Namphaka area in Kutkai Township is described by one aid worker as a "black hole" in that reports indicate that the area has several active armed groups, narcotics trafficking and violence, but only limited information is available.[179]

Several community-based organizations from different ethnicities across northern Shan State have cooperated in addressing the situation.[180] These organizations, including ethnic youth organizations and government bodies, have taken initiatives and exchange information about reports of violence and addressing in dispelling unsubstantiated rumors.[181] Additionally, the TNLA and SSA/RCSS have issued statements, noting that the fighting is between the two organizations rather than ethnic groups.[182]

In August 2016, a peace march involving over one thousand people from across northern Shan State was held in Lashio coordinated by a pan-ethnic group of community-based organization Tai Youth Organization, Kachin Youth Organization, Ta'ang Women's Organization and Ta'ang Students and Youth Union.[183] It is clear, from such examples and from interviews, that there is support for a resolution of conflict.

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[178] Interview, journalist, Lashio, Shan State, October 2016.
[179] For instance, it was reported that since June 2016, 30-45 people had gone missing from this area. Interview, member of a local humanitarian organization, Lashio, September 2016.
[180] Kaw Dai Organization, Love Thy Neighbor. Fear They Neighbor. Listening to the Voice of Shan and Palaung Communities in Shan State, Lashio: Kaw Dai, April 2017. See also Citizen Voices in Myanmar's Transition: Northern Shan State (Yangon: Myanmar Peace Center, March 2015).
[181] Interview, ethnic youth leaders, Lashio, Shan State, August and October 2016.
[182] RCSS, "Statement on the armed conflicts between RCSS/SSA and TNLA," February 11, 2016; RCSS, "Statement concerning the armed conflict between TNLA and RCSS/SSA," December 9, 2015. Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army. Central Executive Committee. "Statement of Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army Requesting Sanghas, Elders and People for Avoiding Racial Conflict," May 29, 2016.
[183] "Lashio protesters call for end to killings," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, July 18, 2016; Lawi Weng, "Shan, Palaung & Kachin Youth March Against Conflict in Lashio," *The Irrawaddy*, July 18, 2016.

Origins of Armed Conflict: A Historical Perspective[184]

A more in-depth explanation of the conflict dynamics in northern Shan State is predicated on understanding their historical antecedents. Armed conflicts emerged in northern Shan State following Myanmar's independence in 1948. Many of the EAOs currently operating there trace their origins to the mobilization of armed resistance in the late 1950s and early 1960s. While the ceasefire period represented a break in the conflict between 1996 and 2009, the current pattern of conflicts are in fact a continuation of earlier dynamics and practices, which involves militarized violence between the Tatmadaw and EAOs, but also alliance formation, inter-EAO conflict, the Tatmadaw's use of militias, as well as ceasefires and abuses against civilians.

This section accordingly provides a necessary overview and historically informed analysis of how armed conflicts in northern Shan State have evolved. The history of the conflicts in this sub-region can be divided into five periods.

[184] A detailed examination of the political history of northern Shan State is beyond the scope of this report. For further analysis, see Chao Tzang Yawnghwe, *The Shan: Memoirs of an Exile* (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asia Studies, 2010); Bertil Lintner, "The Shans and the Shan State of Burma," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 5, no. 4 (1984): 403-450; Sai Aung Tun, Sao Sanda, *Great lords of the sky: Burma's Shan aristocracy*, Asian Highlands Perspectives 48 (2017); Sai Aung Tun, *History of the Shan State: From its origins to 1962* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2008); Samara Yawnghwe and Tin Maung Maung Than, "Ceasefires Sans Peace Process in Myanmar: The Shan State Army, 1989-2011," *Asia Security Initiative Policy Series Working Paper* 26 (2011); Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*; Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Dhaka: University Press, 1999).

Table 4: Armed Conflicts in Northern Shan State by Period, 1949–2018

No.	Time	Period
1	1949 – 1958	Onset of Armed Conflicts
2	1959 – 1967	The Rise of Armed Ethno-nationalist Movements
3	1968 – 1989	The Communist Party of Burma: Its Expansion and Collapse
4	1989 – 2009	The Ceasefire Period
5	2009 – 2018	The Return of Armed Conflicts

Onset of Armed Conflicts (1949–1958)

The Shan States became part of the newly constituted Union of Burma known as Shan State in 1948. Several features of Shan State made it different, however, from other areas of Myanmar. Local chiefs, or *sawbwa*, who administered over thirty statelets as part of the British system of indirect rule, initially retained their administrative authority.[185] The 1947 Constitution also granted the right for Shan and Kayah states to hold a referendum on the issue of secession after ten years, which was not subsequently held. Shan State furthermore experienced an incursion by a foreign army, when units of Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang Army (KMT) entered Shan State in late 1949.

In the first period of conflict from 1949 to 1958, armed groups emerged to challenge the authority of the central state, resulting in the eruption of militarized violence. The main armed actors in northern Shan State included several local armed resistance organizations, Chinese troops from the KMT, and the Tatmadaw.[186] In addition to the latter, local security forces included the *sawbwa* police forces, village defense forces, and levies raised for village

[185] Under British colonial administration (1886-1942), the areas of the Shan plateau ruled by local monarchs, known in *sawbwa* (Burmese) or *saopha* (Shan), became the Shan States. The *sawbwa* political system dates back to the 14th century.

[186] Units from the Kuomintang operated in the area of present-day Shan State. For a well-researched study of the Kuomintang in Myanmar and Thailand, see Richard Gibson, *The Secret Army: Chiang Kai-shek and the drug warlords of the Golden Triangle* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

defense by local leaders, which fought both the KMT and armed resistance organizations.[187] The emergence of armed groups in this period marked the beginning of a process of militarization in northern Shan State, and a predominant role for such groups, that continues to the present day.

In the early days of independence, the Tatmadaw encountered several mutinies by non-ethnic Burman units.[188] In February 1949, Captain Naw Seng of the Tatmadaw's 1st Kachin Rifles led a mutiny that led to the establishment of the Pawngyawng National Defense Force (PNDF), which represented the first, albeit short-lived, ethnic Kachin rebellion. In mid-1949, Naw Seng's combined Karen and Kachin forces captured and briefly held the towns of Lashio and Namkham in northern Shan State. By April 1950, Tatmadaw units had pinned his forces down in northern Shan State, and many withdrew to China, where they received permission from Chinese authorities to settle.[189]

In late 1949, KMT units first crossed the Sino-Burmese frontier into northern Shan State to escape the onslaught by the Chinese Communists taking place in China's Yunnan Province. The number increased to the point that, by 1953, reports indicate there were over 10,000 KMT soldiers spread across many parts of Shan State. The bulk of these operated from bases located in eastern Shan State and received covert material assistance from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. After repeated and failed attempts to establish base areas within China, KMT units increasingly focused on trafficking opium.[190]

Another significant development was that in 1948, the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) broke with the ruling government coalition of the Anti-

[187] Ba Thann Win, "Administration of Shan States from the Panglong Conference to the Cessation of the Powers of the Saophas 1947-1959" (M.A. thesis, Rangoon Arts and Sciences University, n.d.), p. 170.
[188] For comprehensive accounts of Burma's civil wars, see Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*; Smith, *Burma*.
[189] Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, pp. 106-109, 512.
[190] Government of the Union of Burma, *Kuomintang Aggression against Burma* (Rangoon: Ministry of Information, 1953).

Fascists People's Freedom League (AFPFL), a Burman-led coalition of political groups that negotiated independence from the British. The CPB subsequently went underground and adopted armed struggle. By the mid-1950s, the CPB had established rural bases in many areas across Myanmar that included the Shweli River Valley in northern Shan State's Namkham Township.[191]

Yet by the same time, the civil war had begun to subside in northern Shan State. Many of the armed resistance organizations mustered only limited support from the local population, often in remote areas. Their lack of success suggests that the varied goals of these "multi-colored" insurgents that ranged from Communist-inspired goals to ethnic autonomy did not resonate with the population at that time. Indeed, it is important to note that large segments of the population in northern Shan State, in contrast to later periods, supported the government. Local leaders, which included the *sawbwa* administrators, mobilized the population to form village defense forces and raised levies for village defense forces that fought against not only KMT forces, but also against Naw Seng's PNDF.[192]

A general amnesty initiated by Prime Minister U Nu in 1958, known as "Arms for Democracy," led to the surrenders by members of armed resistance organizations, while many others simply returned to civilian life.[193] The KMT was not part of the amnesty as they were an invading foreign force. In spite of this, other political issues were fomenting and would soon produce a resurgence of armed conflicts in northern Shan State.

The Rise of Armed Ethno-nationalist Movements (1959–1967)

The second period of conflict (1959–1967) featured the emergence of four main ethno-nationalist movements – from the Shan, Kachin,

[191] Frank Trager, *Burma: From Kingdom to Republic* (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 49.
[192] Ba Thann Win, n.d., p. 170.
[193] Smith, *Burma*, pp.168-169.

Palaung/Ta'ang, and Kokang ethnic groups – which mobilized into ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). This period also saw the creation of Tatmadaw-allied militias. During this time, militarized violence overwhelmingly took place between EAOs and the Tatmadaw. But there were also episodic instances of conflict between EAOs, such as in 1967 when the KIA and the SSA engaged in a series of short-lived clashes.[194] While pin-pointing the political dynamics behind the emergence of EAOs is complex and beyond the scope of this paper, the evidence points to a number of factors.[195]

The 1962 *coup d'état* led by General Ne Win against the elected government is often considered a key rupture that marks the break between an earlier period of parliamentary democracy and military authoritarianism. It is necessary to note, however, that the emergence of ethno-nationalist conflict in northern Shan State predates the authoritarian turn in 1962, and took place in a period widely considered democratic.[196] Accordingly, one important factor was popular dissatisfaction in northern Shan State with the political arrangements between the central and state-level governments, which saw the transfer of the local administrative authority of *sawbwa* bureaucracy to the state-level government in 1959.[197] The short-lived military takeover from 1958 to 1960 by General Ne Win (known as the

[194] Tzang Yawnghwe, *The Shan of Burma: Memoirs of a Shan Exile* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010); Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), and the Palaung National Front (PNF), *Cooperation Agreement Between the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the Palaung National Front (PNF) on the 15th September 1974*, 1974.

[195] For analysis of politics of this period, see, Josef Silverstein, "Politics in the Shan State: The question of secession from the Union of Burma," *The Journal of Asian Studies* vol. 18, no.1 (1958): 43-57; Mandy Sadan, *Being and Becoming Kachin: Histories Beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Mandy Sadan, *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar*; Bertil Lintner, *The Kachin: Lords of Burma's Northern Frontier* (Chiang Mai: Teak House, 1997); Lintner, "The Shans"; Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*; Smith, *Burma*; Jackie Yang, *The House of Yang*; Yawnghwe, *Shan of Burma*; Shan State Army (1975).

[196] For discussion, see John Buchanan "Beyond Rangoon and the 1962 Coup: A Decentered Approach to Armed Conflicts Onset in Myanmar," *Myanmar Quarterly* 1 (2).

[197] For discussion of the *sawbwa* administration (1948-1959), see Ba Thann Winn (n.d.).

Caretaker government) saw the Tatmadaw's imposition of martial law and the deployment of Tatmadaw units to northern Shan State to combat the KMT and local armed groups in bloody counter-insurgency operations. This impinged on local livelihoods and generated grievances regarding the treatment of civilians by the Tatmadaw [198] – a key driver of armed resistance against the Tatmadaw and central state for decades to come – as well as concerns about the dominance of the ethnic Burman majority.

Several political leaders from Shan State attempted to address their concerns about the lack of local autonomy through legal reforms. Their efforts initiated in 1961 became known as the Federal Movement. The 1962 *coup d'état* ended this initiative. After the coup, the newly ascendant military clique formed a ruling body known as the Revolutionary Council (RC) and implemented sweeping economic and political reforms. Among these were the establishment of a political system with single-party rule, the suspension of elections, and the detention of several political leaders, including members of the Federal Movement from Shan State. The new government also implemented socialist-inspired economic policies that proved disastrous for the economy.[199] The practices of the RC led to the further mobilization of anti-government resistance in northern Shan State and other areas of Myanmar.[200]

The aforementioned factors, along with the appeal of ethno-nationalist inspired reformist goals that ranged from secession to securing greater autonomy, helps account for the increased level of support received by

[198] See for example the following accounts: Yawnghwe, *Shan of Burma,* pp. 6, 106-8; "Acting Head of Shan State Tours Troubled Areas," *Guardian* (Rangoon), May 30, 1961; "Army Also to Blame for Shan Rebellions,'" *The Nation* (Rangoon), May 30, 1961; Lintner 1984; Shan State Army, "A short outline of Shan political history from World War Two to the present," 1975.
[199] For discussion of economic policies, see Mya Maung, *The Burma road to poverty* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991).
[200] Smith, *Burma*, pp. 191, 220; Yawnghwe, *Shan of Burma,* p. 113.

EAOs and distinguishes this period from the previous one. The formation of EAOs, including Tatmadaw-allied militias, are considered in turn below.

Shan

While an organization called the *Num Suk Harn* (or Brave Young Warriors) had already been established in May 1958 in a remote area along Shan State's border with Thailand,[201] it was an attack by an armed band led by a former police officer and a university student on the town of Tangyan in Shan State on November 22, 1959, that marked the emergence of an ethnic Shan armed movement.[202] News of this attack triggered the emergence of several small armed resistance bands across Shan State. Many of these groups gradually formed into one of the handful of EAOs that emerged in this period.

The early Shan resistance featured several groups of varying size, and their activities were not well coordinated. Among these was a group of Rangoon University students from Shan State that went underground and joined the *Num Suk Harn.* After breaking away from the *Num Suk Harn*, they formed the Shan State Independence Army (SSIA) in 1960. In 1964, the students formed a new EAO – the Shan State Army (SSA) – as part of an effort by resistance leaders to coordinate the many armed bands and small EAOs operating across the Shan State. One of these was the Kokang Resistance Force (KRF), comprised of former members of the Kokang *sawbwa's* security force. The other was the Shan National United Front (SNUF) led by Mo Heng, a veteran Shan insurgent leader from southern Shan State.[203] In 1969,

[201] The *Num Suk Harn* was established in May 1958, before the Battle of Tangyan. Yawnghwe, *Shan of Burma,* pp. 185-186, 213.
[202] Khuensai Jaiyen, "The Battle of Tangyan," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, Vol. 16, No. 6, November 1999.
[203] In northern Shan State, the SSA initially operated in two Brigade areas. The 1st Brigade operated in Hsipaw, Lashio and Monghsu townships. The 3rd Brigade area comprised Kyaukme, Namhsan and Namtu townships. The KRF operating in Kokang became the SSA's 5th Brigade. Two other Brigades

the SSA formed a political wing, known as the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP).

Kachin

A new ethnic Kachin resistance movement emerged in February 1961 with the formation of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Hsenwi Township of northern Shan State.[204] The organization grew out of an ethnic Kachin nationalist movement. Its early members included Kachin students and its leader was Zau Seng, who had earlier served with Naw Seng's PNDF. Unlike the bulk of Naw Seng's forces that went to China, Zau Seng remained in Myanmar with another armed resistance organization – the Karen National Defense Organization.[205] The KIA expanded out of northern Shan State, where it formed a 4th Brigade, to operate in the ethnic Kachin inhabited hills, and expanded its areas of operations into Kachin State.

Palaung/Ta'ang

The first ethnic Palaung/Ta'ang-led armed resistance organization emerged on January 12, 1963, with the establishment of the Palaung National Front (PNF). Several of its leaders had earlier served in the *Num Suk Harn*. Initially, the PNF cooperated with the SSIA. In 1964, the forces operated as the 5th and 6th Brigades of the SSA's 1st Battalion. In 1966, the 5th Brigade, led by sons of the ethnic Palaung *sawbwa* of Namhsan (also known as Tawnpeng), and the 6th Battalion led by Kham Thaung (sometimes transliterated as Kwan Tong

operated in areas outside of northern Shan State. See Lintner, *Burma in Revolt,* p. 485; Smith, *Burma,* p. 333, Yawnghwe, *Shan of Burma.*

[204] The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) – the political wing of the KIA - was founded on October 25, 1960, in Lashio Township. The northern Shan State has a sizeable ethnic Kachin population, and its first commander, Zau Seng, hailed from Lashio Township. The decision to launch operations in northern Shan State, rather than Kachin State, reflected their strategic interests. For accounts of Kachin resistance movements, see Lintner, *The Kachin*; Sadan, *Being and Becoming Kachin.*

[205] As Bertil Lintner notes, their goals were to fulfill Naw Seng's dream of establishing a free Kachin republic. Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, pp. 199-201.

or Khun Thaung), left the SSA to operate independently. The 5th Brigade allied with the KMT, while Kham Thaung's 6th Brigade established close ties with the KIA. Their areas of operation included the ethnic Palaung/Ta'ang inhabited hills in Namtu and Manton Townships.[206]

Kokang

Kokang is an area located in northern Shan State adjacent to the Chinese border and inhabited by ethnic Chinese, known as Kokang Chinese. In December 1963, the local defense force commanded by Jimmy Yang, the son of the *sawbwa* of Kokang, took up arms against the central government and formed the Kokang Revolutionary Force (KRF).[207] In the mid-1960s, the KRF joined the SSA and became its 5th Brigade. While Jimmy Yang operated along the Thai-Shan border, some KRF units remained in Kokang. One was led by Pheung Kya Shin. In 1967, Pheung Kya Shin led his forces in strategic retreat to China. He would continue to play an important role in northern Shan State through his involvement in Communist Party of Burma (CPB) operations, his role in the mutiny that triggered the collapse of the CPB in 1989, and as the founder and leader of the MNDAA.

Tatmadaw-allied militias

Tatmadaw-allied militias are another type of armed group that emerged in northern Shan State during this period. There were several types. The *Ka Kwe Ye*, or Homeguard militias, were one of the early militia arrangements

[206] Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the Palaung National Front (PNF), Cooperation Agreement Between the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the Palaung National Front (PNF) on the 15th September 1974, 1974; Patrick Meehan, "The Continuation of War," p. 331; Ta'ang Students and Youth Organization, Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF)'s Analysis on Palaung Political Situation, January 11, 2011; Interview, former PSLO member, October 2016; Smith, Burma, p. 220.

[207] The Kokang Revolutionary Force is sometimes referred to as the Kokang Resistance Force. For a discussion of the Kokang rebellion, see Jackie Yang, *House of Yang: Guardians of an Unknown Frontier* (Sydney: Bookpress, 2001); Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, pp. 230-231.

formed in northern Shan State by the early 1960s. Faced with widespread rebellion across the country, the formalization of a militia system in the 1960s became a component of the Tatmadaw's evolving national security strategy. Several *Ka Kwe Ye* militia leaders expanded their armed forces into large armed groups. Until his arrest in 1969, Khun Sa commanded a militia that operated in several areas of northern Shan State and briefly became the unofficial head of the *Ka Kwe Ye* militias in Shan State.[208] He later became head of the Mong Tai Army (MTA), one of the most powerful EAOs in Shan State. Lo Hsing Han was the leader of another powerful *Ka Kwe Ye* militia. Earlier he had served in the Kokang *sawbwa's* security forces that would later become the KRF, but became a *Ka Kwe Ye* militia leader by the mid-1960s.

Several Tatmadaw-sanctioned militias inserted themselves as intermediaries in the Shan State's burgeoning illicit opium trade. The boom in opium cultivation from the 1960s to the late 1990s provided them with a source of tax revenue to finance their operations. As Adrian Cowell, a British documentary filmmaker embedded with the SSA in the early 1970s, noted, by 1973 the *Ka Kwe Ye* militias had taken over the bulk of the trade, shipping an estimated 95 percent of the opium in Shan State to the Thai border. The success of the militias in the opium trade denied a potential source of revenue useful for the EAOs to finance their operations against the government.[209] The Tatmadaw's use of various types of militias continues to the present day and the northern Shan State currently has one of the highest concentrations of active militia units in Myanmar.

[208] One account indicates that Khun Sa involvement in opium and his questionable loyalty led the military to arrest him. See Maung Wint Thu, *Myanmar's Endeavours Towards Elimination of Narcotic Drugs* (Yangon: Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control, 2003), p. 36.

[209] Adrian Cowell, Testimony (U.S. Congress. House of Representatives, 94th Congress. 1st Session. Subcommittee on Future Foreign Policy Research and Development of the Committee on International Relations, Proposal to Control Opium from the Golden Triangle and Terminate the Shan Opium Trade. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), pp. 13-40, 114-121.

The Expansion and Collapse of the Communist Party of Burma (1968–1989)[210]

On January 1, 1968, armed soldiers crossed from China into northern Shan State. Among these were Pheung Kya Shin and units of the CPB led by former PNDF commander Naw Seng. Their entry signaled the beginning of a significant shift in the patterns of conflict in northern Shan State. The infusion of weapons and aid from the Chinese government made the CPB the most formidable armed resistance organization in Shan State and provided resources useful for cultivating alliances with other EAOs.[211]

The CPB first established control over areas in Mong Ko in Muse Township across eastern Shan State and parts of southeastern Kachin State. By 1986, they exercised control over a 20,000 square kilometer area, which became known as the Northeast Command. Of this, approximately 10,000 square kilometers of northern Shan State was under their influence, making it one of the largest counter state orders in Myanmar.[212]

The CPB's military strategy was to push down from the Chinese border to the Pegu (Bago) mountain range areas of central Burma north of the then capital city Rangoon (Yangon), which had served as its stronghold. As the CPB advanced out from the China border areas, they came into conflict with not only the Tatmadaw and its allied *Ka Kwe Ye* militias, but also Kokang, Shan, Kachin and Palaung/Ta'ang EAOs. Conflict broke out between the KIA and the CPB in Kachin areas of northern Shan State as early as 1968, and continued in fits and starts until they reached a truce in 1976. In June 1972, the KIA and the local Tatmadaw commander Colonel Aye Ko of the

[210] For an account of the history of the CPB, see Bertil Lintner, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).
[211] Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, p. 26; Smith, *Burma*, pp. 248-249.
[212] Lintner, *Rise and Fall*, Appendix II.

Northeast Command worked out an informal, three-and-a-half month long truce, so that they could each focus on containing the CPB juggernaut.[213]

As the CPB moved west into Palaung/ Ta'ang areas, the groups also came into conflict with the PNF.[214] The CPB's expansion into the ethnic Wa areas also drove several Tatmadaw-allied *Ka Kwe Ye* militias out of the areas located on the east bank of the Salween River.[215] Many ethnic Wa came to serve in the CPB's armed forces. Among these were Bao Yuchang and Chao Ngi Lai, who became party members and later in 1989 established the United Wa State Army.

The Battle of the Kunlong Bridge between the CPB and the Tatmadaw is one of the most significant among the many in Myanmar's long civil wars.[216] The fierce 45-day battle that raged from December 1972 to January 1973 along the banks of the Salween River in northern Shan State featured the CPB's use of Maoist-inspired human wave assaults and the Tatmadaw's use of massive artillery, augmented by aerial bombardments. The Tatmadaw stalled the CPB efforts to move westwards across the Salween River and expand territorial control into its former strongholds in the ethnic Burman areas of central Myanmar. As Martin Smith contends, "If the Tatmadaw was prepared to use such heavy firepower to defend selected towns and positions in the middle of a vast mountain landscape, CPB leaders reasoned it would be better to concede control and simply filter troops through along the many hidden trails in the forest."[217]

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[213] Martin Smith notes that during this period efforts by Colonel Aye Ko to have the KIA join forces with the Tatmadaw against the CPB in exchange for supplies from the government were turned down by Brigadier General San Yu and fighting resumed after a Tatmadaw unit ambushed a KIO party in northern Shan State. See Smith, *Burma,* p. 330.

[214] The PNF's 5th Brigade dissolved in 1970, after joint PNF/KIA forces defeated them. Meehan, "The Continuation of War," p. 268.

[215] Smith, *Burma*, p. 255.

[216] Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, pp. 195-198. Several Tatmadaw veterans of the battle have also published accounts of the event.

[217] Smith, *Burma*, p. 254.

Patterns of Fighting and Cooperation

This period involved various patterns of armed conflicts among EAOs, the CPB, the Tatmadaw and other groups.[218] As was the case in the previous period, the main axis of fighting was between armed resistance groups – both EAOs and the CPB – and the Tatmadaw. In a few instances fighting broke out between EAOs and armed groups other than the Tatmadaw. For instance, the SSA fought with both the PNF 5th Brigade and units of the KMT remnants. After several clashes in 1969-70, the PNF 5th Brigade dissolved. And in 1971-72, the KIA and SSA engaged in a brief territorial dispute in the areas of Kutkai and Hsenwi townships in northern Shan State.[219]

At the same time, there were also several instances of cooperation among EAOs. These took various forms and involved both military and political alliances. For example, on September 14, 1974, the PNF, KIO and SSPP jointly issued an agreement of cooperation. The treaty provided provisions for cooperation among the groups, noting, "though on [the] surface it seems to be directed against the Ne Win government, the real intention … is to constitute a strong Third Force vis a vis, Ne Win and the CPB (Burmese Communists)."[220] Another form of cooperation between EAOs was the provision of support and training. The areas under the control of the KIA also became safe havens and training sites for other EAOs, including the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA, formerly the PNF) and the Arakan Independence Organization (AIO).[221] In 1975, prior to their truce, the KIA spearheaded a military operation, named Black Cat Storm, against the CPB. The operation involved over 1,000 troops, including units from the PNF (later the PSLA) and the AIO. These represent early instances of

[218] Ibid., p. 220.
[219] Yawnghwe, *Shan of Burma*, p. 26; Smith, *Burma*, p. 333.
[220]Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), and the Palaung National Front (PNF), *Cooperation Agreement*.
[221] The Rangoon University students from Rakhine State formed the AIO on May 20, 1970, and received training from the KIA in Kachin State. See Smith, *Burma*, p. 239.

coordination among EAOs in northern Shan State, which continues to the present.[222]

In 1976, the political wings of several EAOs established an alliance, known as the National Democratic Front (NDF), in territory controlled by the Karen National Union.[223] The NDF included EAOs operating in northern Shan State – the SSA/SSPP, KIA, and PSLA. Another significant outcome of the NDF was the coordination of a common political position among its members. At its Third Plenary Central Presidium Meeting held in 1984, its members coordinated their demands for a federal union.[224] Previously, the EAOs had not held a common position – a position which "has remained the basic political demand for most nationality movements in the country until the present day."[225]

Notwithstanding, one of the most far-reaching impacts of the entrance of the CPB into northern Shan State was the emergence of political divisions within and among the EAOs, about whether or not to cooperate with the CPB. While the westward advance by the CPB across northern Shan State initially brought them into conflict with several EAOs, the CPB gradually made inroads with members of some EAOs by offering them supplies and arms. From the perspective of many EAOs, they were sandwiched between two powerful ethnic-Burman led groups – the Tatmadaw and the CPB.[226] By the mid-1970s, many members of EAOs across Shan State began to consider the advantages of engagement with the Communists. The abundance of

[222] Smith, *Burma*, p. 330; Interview with former PSLA member, Lashio, October 2016.
[223] See National Democratic Front Burma, *The Brief Profile of National Democratic Front – NDF*, May 25, 2009. There were nine founding member organizations of the NDF, but its membership has changed over time.
[224] Smith, *Burma*, p. 386. TNI, *Beyond Panglong*, p. 12.
[225] TNI, *Beyond Panglong*, p. 12.
[226] The CPB leadership was mainly ethnic Burman, but its troops were mostly from ethnic groups from the border regions.

Chinese-supplied weapons made cooperation with the CPB appealing to some EAO leaders.

Several EAOs received arms in return for an alliance against the Tatmadaw that involved allowing CPB units to operate in their areas. In 1976, after eight years of fighting, the CPB and KIA entered into a peace agreement. The CPB provided weapons and materials, which the KIA used to expand and fortify their positions.[227] And, in 1976, the PSLA also signed a treaty with the CPB.[228] By the mid-1970s, furthermore, offers of material assistance by the CPB in exchange for a military alliance had created a rift within the leadership of the SSA.[229] SSA units operating in northern Shan State cooperated with the CPB in order to receive arms. Members of the units operating in southern Shan State, meanwhile, eventually merged with the forces of the Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA) in April 1984 to form the Thailand Revolutionary Army (TRA).[230] Mo Heng (also known as Korn Zurng), a veteran of several Shan resistance movements who had split from the SSA in 1968 and allied with the KMT 3rd Army based in northern Thailand, led the anti-communist SURA.

Failure of Militias to Disband

During this period, Tatmadaw-allied *Ka Kwe Ye* militias had become an important component of the Tatmadaw's military doctrine of People's War.[231] But a few militias in Shan State had grown powerful through their involvement in the opium trade. In 1969, the military arrested Khun Sa, who

[227] Smith, *Burma*, pp. 330-331.
[228] At this time, the PSLA also formed a political wing – the Palaung State Liberation Organization (PSLO).
[229] For a firsthand account of the division over engagement with the CPB in SSA, see Yawnghwe, *Shan of Burma*, pp. 30-33. Also see Linter, *Burma in Revolt*, pp. 282-3, 285, 300-301.
[230] Yawnghwe, *Shan of Burma*, p. 141; Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, p. 489.
[231] For discussion of the emergence of this doctrine, see Defense Services Historical Museum and Archives, *Tatmadaw Thamain [History of the Armed Forces]*, vol. 5: 1962-1974 (Yangon: News and Periodicals Enterprise, 1997-1998), pp. 139-158.

had opened negotiations with the SSA about joining the Shan resistance movement.[232] After his detention, his lieutenants led his remaining troops underground. In the early 1970s, the organization coordinated military operations with the SSA in northern Shan State, among other areas of Shan State, and adopted Shan United Army (SUA) as its new moniker.[233]

In 1973, the Tatmadaw ordered all the remaining *Ka Kwe Ye* militia units to disband. Of the twenty-three *Ka Kwe Ye* units, nine of them refused to accept the order.[234] One was a large force led by Lo Hsing Han which had grown to over a thousand strong. After forming an alliance with the SSA and the SUA, Lo was arrested by Thai officials and extradited to Myanmar, where a court sentenced him on charges of "high treason" and "rebellion against the state."[235] Maha San, another *Ka Kwe Ye* militia commander from Wa areas, also allied with the SSA.

Khun Sa's detention was temporary. In 1976, he returned to his army, which was now opposed to the government. By 1985, he had merged with the Tai-land Revolutionary Army TRA, led by veteran resistance leader Mo Heng and established the Mong Tai Army (MTA). Much of the MTA's areas of operations were in areas of eastern and southern Shan State along its border with Thailand. However, some units operated in other areas of Shan State, including those led by Gunyawd and Bo Mon which were in northern Shan State.

The CPB's Collapse

In 1988, the eruption of popular anti-government protests against the government spawned the growth of a democracy movement and the

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[232] Yawnghwe, *Shan of Burma*, p. 27.
[233] Yawnghwe, *Shan of Burma*.
[234] A Tatmadaw Researcher, *A Concise History of Myanmar and the* Tatmadaw*'s Role 1948-1988* (Yangon: Ministry of Education, 1991 [volume 2]), p. 107.
[235] Bertil Lintner, "Rangoon generals groom a new drugs kingpin: The new dealer," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 148, No. 26, June 28, 1990, p. 22.

formation of the National League for Democracy (NLD). Tatmadaw leaders dispatched the armed forces to suppress the civilian protests in the capital (then Rangoon) and scores of towns across Myanmar, including those in Shan State. In September, a military-led government known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) replaced the political order of the BSPP established by General Ne Win.[236] The SLORC subsequently embarked on a military modernization campaign, which involved the acquisition of weapons.[237]

The CPB collapsed in 1989 as the result of a mutiny. The discord that had simmered between its ethnic Burman leadership and the non-Burman rank-and-file, who were largely comprised of ethnic Wa but also included other ethnic minority hill tribes in the north, erupted with dramatic results. One source of dissension stemmed from the mounting casualties among the latter sustained through the use of human wave assaults. In March, Peung Kya Shin dispatched troops under his command to seize the local CPB administrative headquarters, and other non-Burman CPB leaders in other regions also rose up in support.[238] In the wake of the collapse, two new EAOs – the MNDAA and the UWSA – emerged in the former CPB-controlled areas of northern Shan State.[239]

The Ceasefire Period, 1989–2009

The fourth period saw the military government's application of a new strategy for managing EAOs through negotiation. In 1989, after the collapse

[236] In 1989, after the establishment of the SLORC, the Burmese junta implemented many far-reaching changes that included changing the name of the country from Burma to Myanmar.
[237] Andrew Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces: Power without Glory* (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2002); Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, p. 389.
[238] For analysis of the CPB's collapse, see Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*; Lintner, *Rise and Fall*.
[239] Two other former CPB groups emerged in other regions. The National Democratic Army-Kachin in Kachin State and the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) in eastern Shan State.

of the CPB, a power vacuum emerged in northeastern Myanmar. The SLORC leadership took this opportunity to neutralize the possibility of armed insurrection by CPB mutineers and their alliance with other EAOs through instituting ceasefire arrangements. Successive negotiations involving the Tatmadaw and leaders of EAOs operating in northern Shan State took place in the period from 1989 to 1996.[240] These resulted in eight ceasefire arrangements including one unconditional surrender (see Table 5 overleaf). In total, 40 ceasefire arrangements emerged across Myanmar in the same period. This process brought a halt to widespread armed conflicts in northern Shan State, bringing a degree of relief to areas which had suffered from decades of violence.[241]

Ceasefire Arrangements

The first ceasefire agreement in 1989 involved the MNDAA, a newly formed EAO led by veteran Kokang political leader Pheung Kya Shin. Another newly formed EAO led by two ethnic Wa, ex-CPB members, Bao Yuchang and Chao Ngi Lai, also entered into a ceasefire arrangement with the military government. The group was first known as the Myanmar National Solidarity Party. Later, in November 1989, it adopted United Wa State Army as its name.[242] The success of the Tatmadaw ceasefire arrangements thwarted an attempt by Mahasang, an ethnic Wa leader working on behalf of the NDF, to bring the new organizations to their side.[243] One consequence

[240] For analysis of the ceasefire process, see Zaw Oo and Win Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, Vol. 39 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007); Martin Smith, *State of Strife: the Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma*. Vol. 36 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007); Mary Callahan, *Political Authority in Burma's Ethnic Minority States: Devolution, Occupation and Coexistence*. Vol. 31 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007); Tom Kramer, *Neither War nor Peace: The Future of the Cease-Fire Agreements in Burma* (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 2009); Yan Nyein Aye, *Endeavors of the Myanmar Armed Forces.* Yangon: U Aung Zaw, 2000.

[241] In 1996, the SLORC even launched a tourism campaign titled "Visit Myanmar Year" and areas of northern Shan State, including Hsipaw, became open to foreign tourists.

[242] In the initial period after the CPB collapse, the United Wa State Army was initially known as the Myanmar National Solidarity Party. The UWSA was formed in November 1989.

[243] Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, p. 509.

of these initial arrangements is that it also created opportunities for the Tatmadaw to concentrate resources on EAOs in other areas and apply military and political pressure on them to participate in the ceasefire initiative.

Table 5: Ceasefire and Surrender Agreements by EAOs in northern Shan State, 1989 – 1996

Name	Ceasefire	Leadership	Notes
Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) (Kokang)	March 21, 1989	Pheung Kya Shin	Former CPB
United Wa State Army (UWSA)	May 9, 1989	Pao Yuchang Chao Ngi Lai	Former CPB
Shan State Army/ Shan State Progress Party (SSA/SSPP)	September 2, 1989	Hso Ten	3rd and 7th Brigades became Tatmadaw-allied militias in 2010
Kachin Democratic Army (KDA)	January 13, 1991	Mahtu Naw	Former KIA 4th brigade. Became a Tatmadaw-allied militias in 2009
Palaung State Liberation Army/ Palaung State Liberation Organization (PSLA/PSLO)	April 21, 1991	Aik Mone	Disarmed in 2005. Several members became Tatmadaw-allied militias and TNLA
Kachin Independence Organization/Army (KIO/A)	February 24, 1994	Brang Seng	Ceasefire from 1994 to 2011
Shan State National Army (SSNA)[244]	June 11, 1995	Gunyawd	Disarmed in 2005. Several Brigades joined RCSS/SSA

[244] "Col Sai Yi: Ceasefire pact torn down by Rangoon," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, September 21, 2005.

Mong Tai Army (MTA)	January 1996	Khun Sa	Unconditional surrender in 1996. Several units became Tatmadaw-allied militias. Remnants that refused to surrender formed the SURA, which later adopted RCSS/SSA as its name[245]

The SSA units in northern Shan State were the next group to enter into the ceasefire process. While one SSA faction – its 2nd Brigade – operating in southern Shan State had merged with Mo Heng's SURA in 1984 to form the TRA, the SSA units in the north maintained ties with the CPB.[246] After the CPB's collapse, the decline in assistance from the CPB weakened the SSA forces in the north. On September 2, 1989, the SSA and the Tatmadaw also agreed to a ceasefire arrangement.

By late 1990, the Kutkai Township-based 4th Brigade of the KIA came under increased military pressure by the Tatmadaw as it sought to pacify northern Shan State. Mahtu Naw, a brigade commander, broke with the KIA central command and began negotiations with the Tatmadaw. He established a new organization with his former 4th Brigade followers, known as the Kachin Democratic Army (KDA), and agreed to a ceasefire arrangement with the Tatmadaw in January 1991.[247]

In April 1991, the PSLA also agreed to a ceasefire with the military government. According to Palaung/Ta'ang sources, the agreement took

[245] A group of MTA soldiers did not accept the surrender. Initially, the group was known as SURA, the name formerly used by the Mo Heng-led EAO from 1968 to 1984. As Bertil Lintner notes, SURA "was later renamed Shan State Army, sometimes with (South) added to the name to distinguish it from the SSA in northern Shan State." Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, p. 492.

[246] Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, p. 326.

[247] Ibid., pp. 395, 402, 420.

place after a counter-insurgency campaign launched by the Tatmadaw in Manton and Namtu Townships in January 1991. The operation involved the use of counter-insurgency tactics similar to the "Four Cuts" policy[248] that involved the cordoning off of the operational areas of the PSLA and restricting movement, farming, and livelihoods of the local population.[249]

While PSLA/PSLO units in northern Shan State agreed to the ceasefire, one faction did not. PSLA/O officials posted in Manerplaw, Kayin/ Karen State[250] – the headquarters of the Karen National Union – to liaise with several other EAOs did not accept the terms of the ceasefire. On January 12, 1992, they formed the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF) in Manerplaw.

The KIO ceasefire was one of the last and most significant of the accords. The agreement, which went into effect in 1994 after months of negotiation, involved extensive deliberations among Kachin leaders and consultation with communities. This is a major reason the KIA and Kachin civil society want to do the same with the current peace negotiations.

In 1995, Colonel Gun Yawd, a commander of Khun Sa's MTA broke away and formed the Shan State National Army. The split by Gun Yawd – an ethnic Shan – and his followers reflected disagreements with MTA leader Khun Sa.[251] Col. Gun Yawd and many of his troops operated in areas in southern and northern Shan State. In the same year, the organization had come to a ceasefire arrangement with the military government.[252]

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[248] For a discussion of the early use of the "Four Cuts" approach by the Tatmadaw, see Smith, *Burma*, pp. 258-262.

[249] Interviews, Palaung elders, Lashio, Shan State, October 2016; "Shan rebels hand over arms to Myanmar military," *Deutsche Presse*, April 14, 2005; Palaung Women's Organization (PWO), *Poisoned Flowers* (Chiang Mai: PWO, 2006); Meehan, "Continuation of War," pp. 363-379.

[250] "Kayin" is the official name given to Karen State by the Burmese military-led government in 1989.

[251] The concern that the ethnic Chinese officers of the MTA mistreated ethnic Shans is cited as one reason that he broke away from the MTA. Jai Wan Mai, "More Than 50 Years of Struggle," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, March 18, 2011.

[252] "Col Sai Yi: Ceasefire pact torn down by Rangoon," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, September 21, 2005; "Young still sing songs of resistance," *The Nation* (Bangkok), September 20, 1996.

The unexpected decision by MTA leader Khun Sa to engage in an unconditional surrender in early January 1996 precipitated major changes throughout Shan State. The surrender meant that the MTA, the largest EAO in the Shan State at that time, had dissolved and fighting that had been taking place against both the Tatmadaw and the MTA was stopped. Previously, from its Homong headquarters in southern Shan State's Langkho Township, the MTA maintained control of areas between the Salween River and the Thai border. But its units also operated in other areas outside of southern Shan State that included northern Shan State. Unlike other ceasefire arrangements, the terms of surrender involved several MTA units becoming Tatmadaw-allied militias. Among these are the Manpang people's militia led by Bo Mon, which operates in Lashio and Tangyan townships in northern Shan State.[253] However, some MTA soldiers refused to surrender. A group broke away and formed an EAO, initially known as SURA. In 1997, this group adopted SSA/RCSS as its name (also referred to as Shan State Army – South).[254]

Impact of Ceasefires and Unresolved Grievances

Many details about the ceasefire arrangements of this period are not known because almost all ceasefires were apparently verbal agreements. The KIO/KIA ceasefire arrangement is unique in that it is only one known to have produced a written agreement.[255]

In spite of this, a few elements of the arrangements can be discerned. First, they brought a halt to the large-scale militarized violence in northern Shan

[253] "Hand in Glove: The Burma Army and the Drug Trade in Shan State" (Chiang Mai: Shan Herald Agency for News, 2005), p. 42.
[254] The organization led by Colonel Yawd Serk is presently known as Restoration Council of the Shan State/Shan State Army.
[255] For the terms of the ceasefire agreement, see Bilateral Agreement Between the SLORC and the KIO in Paul Keenan, *The Kachins' Dilemma – Became a Border Guard Force or Return to Warfare* (Euro Burma Office Analysis Paper No.2/2010).

State. Second, the areas of the larger EAOs received official recognition and were designated special regions by the government. Smaller EAOs, such as the SSNA, did not receive their own designated special region. Third, the military government supported several projects aimed at improving the socio-economic development of the areas.[256] Despite the government's commitment, the improvement in socio-economic conditions often did not materialize to the level anticipated by groups.[257] In some areas, the government consolidated its control through the deployment of troops and economic engagement with local elites in efforts to gain their support and capture control of resources and rents. This process is described by Kevin Woods, a scholar examining resources and conflict in Myanmar, as "ceasefire capitalism."[258] Fourth, the EAOs participated in ceasefires with the anticipation that they would have an opportunity to address their political concerns. This, as will be seen below, proved not to be the case.

On August 30, 2003, the SPDC introduced its "Roadmap to Discipline flourishing democracy." In accordance with this, the Tatmadaw initiated seven steps that led to changes in Myanmar's political system, beginning with the resumption of the moribund National Convention schedule to resume after several years hiatus on May 17, 2004.

But the experience for EAO leaders of northern Shan State in the National Convention also did not to match up to their expectations. On at least two separate occasions, EAOs in northern Shan State submitted proposals to the National Convention that included demands for the delegation of increased

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[256] For an account of ceasefires from the government's perspective, see Yan Nyein Aye, *Endeavors of the Myanmar Armed Forces Government*.

[257] For analysis of the socio-economic dimensions of the ceasefire period, see Woods, "Ceasefire capitalism: military–private partnerships, resource concessions and military–state building in the Burma–China Borderlands"; Curtis W. Lambrecht, "Oxymoronic Development: The Military as Benefactor in the Border Regions of Burma," in Duncan, Christopher R., ed. *Civilizing the Margins: Southeast Asian Government policies for the development of minorities* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), pp. 150-181; Tom Kramer, *Neither war nor peace: The future of the cease-fire agreements in Burma*.

[258] Woods, 2011, pp. 747–770.

authority to ethnic states.[259] But they were not addressed. In another significant development, on February 7, 2005, Shan National Day, the military government arrested ten senior Shan political and military leaders present at a dinner to discuss the political future of Shan State. General Hso Ten, head of the SSA, received a prison sentence of 106 years for "high treason."[260] Representatives of the SSA and the SSNA thereafter boycotted the National Convention.

Furthermore, the experience of ceasefire arrangements in northern Shan State varied from group to group. The smaller EAOs received pressure from the Tatmadaw to disarm. The PSLA did so on April 29, 2005,[261] and several units of the SSNA disarmed in April and May of 2005.[262] The arrangements sometimes referred to by military government as an "unconditional exchange of arms for peace" involved the military government's assurances of assistance for improving socio-economic conditions in the area.[263] Some members of these two EAOs became part of the Tatmadaw-operated militias system.[264] But, not all of the units accepted the disarmament proposal.

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[259] Proposals submitted by 13 ceasefire groups in June 2004 and another by the Kachin Independence Organization in July 2007 were not addressed in the National Convention. See KIO proposal for constitutional provisions and clauses, Central Committee, Kachin Independence Organization, mid-July, 2007; *Shan Herald Agency for News*, "Junta plays dirty game, claims convention delegate," June 26, 2004; Solomon, "KIO to abstain from referendum: Interview with Major Gun Maw (KIO)," *Mizzima*, April 9, 2008.

[260] The government arrested nine other Shan leaders and sentenced them to long prison terms. Among these, Khun Htun Oo, the head of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), received a sentence of 95 years. The SNLD is a political party that won 23 Parliamentary seats in the 1990 election. See *New Light of Myanmar*, "Big nations of west bloc use ILO as political forum to put pressure on Myanmar in order to install their puppet government in power," March 16, 2005.

[261] *New Light of Myanmar*, "PSLA serves as pioneer and example for other nationality groups to reach the correct way PSLA led by U Aik Mone unconditionally exchanges arms for peace," April 30, 2005.

[262] The 11th and 19th Brigades of SSNA disarmed in April and May 2005. See Thaung Win Bo, "SSNA abandons destructive acts, armed insurgency," *New Light of Myanmar*, April 26, 2005; *New Light of Myanmar*, "U Kan Na, Declaration of SSNA Brigade (11) Commander U Kan Na and members," April 22, 2005; *Democratic Voice of Burma*, "Shan ceasefire group members pressured to surrender weapons," May 27, 2005.

[263] Yan Nyein Aye, *Endeavours of the Myanmar Armed Forces Government.*

[264] Interviews, former PSLO member and members of community-based organizations, Lashio, Shan State. October 2016.

Several members of the SSNA rejected the proposal and joined the Shan State Army - South under Colonel Yawd Serk.[265] The larger, more powerful EAOs and the Tatmadaw nevertheless maintained their ceasefire arrangements during this period.

In sum, while the period of ceasefires (1989-2009) proved a halt to conflict, they did not address the fundamental political issues, which helps account for the resumption of fighting in northern Shan State and the failure to renegotiate ceasefire arrangements.

Continuity and Change in Northern Shan State

Historical analysis of the different periods of armed conflicts within northern Shan State helps identify changes and continuities useful for contextualizing the current situation.

Persistence of Militarized Violence

One pattern of change is that armed resistance organizations have emerged at different times, and their formation reflects particular challenges and concerns that are not always the same. For instance, the widespread mobilization by ethno-nationalist movements that began in 1959 reflected conditions that differed from the earlier period. In this first period (1948-1958), mobilization took place on a lesser scale as armed resistance was largely limited to Naw Seng's short-lived rebellion and the early CPB's operation in northern Shan State. It was only in the late 1950s that the appeals of ethno-nationalist movements began to resonate with broader segments of the population. By consequence, the conflict slowly intensified as more EAOs emerged and their ranks began to grow.

[265] "Ex-ceasefire group urges former allies to renew efforts for three-way talks," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, July 18, 2005; "Col Sai Yi, *Shan Herald Agency for News*."

A persistent feature of northern Shan State nevertheless is militarized violence between EAOs and the Tatmadaw, albeit the intensity of armed conflict has waxed and waned. The second and third periods of conflict in particular (1959-1988) witnessed widespread fighting in the sub-region. The ceasefire period between 1989 and 2009 can be considered a temporary break in the longer trend of armed conflicts. Therefore, the recent upsurge in fighting reflects the continued inability of the Tatmadaw, the government, and EAOs to reach a solution through peaceful negotiation that addresses core grievances.

Alliances, Support, and Competition

Another continuity involves the coordination of activities among EAOs. The forms of cooperation involve both military and political activities.[266] The formation of the Northern Alliance is only the most recent manifestation of an alliance involving northern Shan State armed resistance groups. This practice in fact dates back to 1961 with the founding of the Nationalities Liberation Alliance, described by Yawnghwe as a "non-communist front."[267] Among its members were the KIO and the *Num Suk Harn* as well as the Karenni National Progressive Party and the Kawthoolei Revolutionary Council.[268] Another early example of an alliance among groups based in northern Shan State was the tripartite agreement among the PNF, KIA, and SSA in 1974. Other notable examples include the National Democratic Front alliance of several EAOs from across Myanmar. This involved the formation

[266] The formation of alliances among armed resistance groups has taken place periodically throughout Burma's civil wars. One of the earliest was the formation of the Democratic Nationalities United Front (DNUF) in 1956. This alliance included Karen, Mon, Karenni and Pa-O armed resistance groups. For a history of alliances among armed resistance organizations, see Khaing Soe Naing Aung, *Brief History of the National Democratic Movement of Ethnic Nationalities: Union of Burma* (Bangkok: National Democratic Front, 2000).

[267] Yawnghwe, *Shan of Burma*, p. 168.

[268] Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, p. 494; Smith, *Burma*, pp. 190, 195, 214-215.

of the PSLA, SSA, and KIA into a northern branch to coordinate military activities in the 1980s.[269]

In addition to alliance formation, the provision of support from one EAO to another is another continuity. For instance, the KIA's recent provision of access to the AA and TNLA to training areas has precedents dating back to the period of conflict between 1959 and 1967. As early as the 1960s, the KIA and the SSA supported units of the early Palaung/Ta'ang resistance movement that included the 6th Brigade of the PNF and later the PSLA. In the 1970s, the KIA also supported an ethnic Rakhine armed group – the Arakan Independence Organization. In each case, armed groups receiving support reciprocated through participation in military operations. Another significant example was the CPB's provision of weapons to the KIA, PSLA, and the SSA.

Furthermore, alliances among EAOs for political negotiations are another recurring feature in northern Shan State. Recent instances are the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) and the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC). These organizations have several earlier precedents. Of these, the formation of the NDF and the coordination of their political positions of EAOs is one of the most significant. These political alliances represent efforts by ethnic armed organizations to strengthen their negotiating positions with the government.

At the same time, however, instances of inter-EAO conflict have also taken place, albeit on a limited scale. Thus, the recent outbreak of violence between two EAOs in northern Shan State – in this case, the SSA/RCSS and the TNLA – is not unprecedented. As early as the second period of conflict after 1959, there were brief instances of inter-EAO conflicts.[270] As mentioned

[269] Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, p. 330.

[270] For accounts of earlier limited fighting between the KIA and the SSA, see Shan State Progress Party, Kachin Independence Organization, Palaung National Front, *Cooperation Agreement*; Yawnghwe, *Shan of Burma*.

earlier, northern Shan State is a multi-actor conflict zone and the presence of multiple armed groups operating in one area creates the potential for misunderstandings about troop movements and access to resources resulting in clashes.

Patterns of Fighting

In 2016, the launch of the Northern Alliance saw fighting take place in some urban areas located near the China border, including the towns of Mong Ko and the key border trading city of Muse. Fighting in urban areas of northern Shan State and Myanmar is rare. Nonetheless, there are a few precedents.[271] Naw Seng briefly held the northern Shan State capitol Lashio during his early revolt. Additionally, the campaigns of the CPB from 1968 to 1972 involved the capture and consolidation of control over small towns and villages in northern Shan State, including Mong Ko and Laukkai, both of which have again experienced violence in the past several years.[272] However, EAOs in northern Shan State have traditionally pursued a strategy of guerilla warfare. They have operated in rural areas and have sought to avoid both large battles and the difficulties of holding large amounts of territory. The few recent attacks in urban areas of the northern part of northern Shan State by members of the Northern Alliance are not unprecedented and represent a response to the escalation of violence by the Tatmadaw.

[271] Other incidents of EAO assaults on towns include an attack by the 5th Brigade breakaway faction of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army's on Myawaddy, Karen State, on election day in November 2010, and an attack on Tachilek, Shan State, by Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army in March 1995. In these two cases, the EAOs did not capture or hold the towns.

[272] Lintner, *Rise and Fall*, 1990, p. 25; Ann Wang, "China-linked rebels' casino cash grab stills Myanmar border city," *South China Morning Post*, June 4, 2017.

Effects of Multiple Ceasefires

A ceasefire arrangement with one EAO also provided opportunities for the Tatmadaw to apply military and political pressure on other armed groups. For instance, the securing of ceasefire arrangements with the four EAOs that emerged in the wake of the Communist Party of Burma's collapse allowed for the Tatmadaw to pressure other groups in Shan State. One example is the Tatmadaw enlistment of support from the UWSA in its military operations against the MTA in the mid-1990s that led to its eventual surrender, and the UWSA being used again to attack SSA/RCSS bases along the Thailand-Myanmar border in 2001-2002 and it sustained assaults against its army headquarters at Loi Tai Leng in 2005. Another notable case involves the KIA. The collapse of the CPB cut into the KIA's access to supplies, and the ceasefires with other EAOs in Shan State – including the SSA/SSPP – blocked the KIA's access to the Thai border.[273] These changes contributed to the KIA's decision to enter into a ceasefire with the Tatmadaw in 1994.

Splits, Mergers, and Transformations

Throughout northern Shan State's armed conflicts, EAOs have encountered forces that have led to various adaptations and changes. Among these are splits among EAOs that involve the formation of a new armed group and also the merger of one armed group with another. One of the earliest instances took place in 1960, when several students that had left the *Num Suk Harn* formed the SSIA. And, in 1964, these students established the SSA, which involved the merger of the Kokang Resistance Force. More recently in 2005, elements of the SSNA that did not disarm instead joined the SSA/RCSS. Another change has involved the transformation of EAOs or some of its units into Tatmadaw-allied militias. One notable example is that in 2009, one faction of the MNDAA became a Border Guard Force. As

[273] Linter, *Burma in Revolt*, p. 405.

mentioned earlier, there are several others instances of EAOs becoming Tatmadaw-allied militias. These dynamics and others have produced a dizzyingly large number of armed groups that makes comprehending the civil wars in both northern Shan State and Myanmar as a whole difficult. The long list of acronyms of armed groups in many studies of Myanmar's civil wars is a symptom of this complexity.

One of the most significant changes in the ceasefire period involved pressure by the Tatmadaw for EAOs to transform into Tatmadaw-allied militia units in 2009 and 2010. A historical approach shows that there are earlier instances of units of EAOs becoming Tatmadaw-allied militias. One instance dates back to the late 1960s, when a few units of the SSA became *Ka Kwe Ye* militias.[274] Another more recent example involves the surrender of the MTA in 1996. Several MTA units also became Tatmadaw-allied militias.[275] Finally, after engaging in a ceasefire arrangement, the SSNA and the PSLA disarmed in 2005 and some of their units became Tatmadaw-allied militias.

It is important to note that these earlier instances of ceasefire groups becoming militias had different outcomes. In the case of the SSNA, several units complied and became militia units, while other SSNA units defied orders and merged with the SSA/RCSS.[276] The disarmament of the PSLA and the formation of Tatmadaw-allied militias with former PSLA members proved effective in alleviating outright conflict in the short term. But, the recent emergence of the TNLA involves both former PSLA members and weapons and new recruits in a post-disarmament zone points to the challenges of addressing grievances in post-conflict zones.[277] The mixed success of these early instances draws attention to the need for paying closer

[274] Yawnghwe, *Shan of Burma*, p. 24.
[275] *Show Business* (Chiang Mai, Shan Herald Agency for News, 2003).
[276] "Col Sai Yi: Ceasefire pact torn down by Rangoon," *Shan Herald Agency for News*, September 21, 2005.
[277] Meehan, "The Continuation of War," p. 377; Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*, p. 298.

attention to the conditions under which EAOs disarm and transform into militias.

Salience of Ethnic Armed Resistance

Despite these changes, a historical approach shows continued mobilization by armed ethno-nationalist movements. For instance, the establishment of the Palaung National Front in 1963 marks the onset of the Palaung/Ta'ang resistance movement. The movement has experienced several changes. For instance, in 1976, the PNF changed its name to the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA) and formed a political wing known as the Palaung State Liberation Organization. The PSLA agreed to a ceasefire in 1991 with the SLORC military government, but opposition to the government among Palaung/Ta'ang continued. In January 1992, ethnic Ta'ang/Palaung dissidents based at the KNU headquarters in Kayin/Karen State formed a new political organization – the Palaung State Liberation Front. In 2009, at the PSLF's 3rd conference attended by former PSLA commanders, it took steps to establish an armed wing – the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA).[278] Despite name changes, ceasefires and disarmament, a historical view places the establishment of TNLA as part of a long tradition of armed resistance among ethnic Palaung/Ta'ang that dates back to the second period of armed conflict in the late 1950s.[279] While the SSA and KIA have experienced splits and engaged in ceasefires, the organizations have not undergone radical changes since their formation in the 1960s.

The establishment of the MNDAA in 1989 is relatively recent. One element of continuity is the long-running role played by its leader – Pheung Kya Shin – in the armed conflicts of northern Shan State. He was a commander in the Kokang Revolutionary Force, which fought the Tatmadaw in the mid-1960s.

[278] Maung Maung Soe, *A Glimpse of the EAOs*, p. 298.
[279] Ibid.

Later, he helped lead the CPB's move into Kokang in 1968. After launching a mutiny that triggered the downfall of the CPB, he engaged in a ceasefire arrangement with the Tatmadaw. In 2009, the outbreak of conflict between his faction of the MNDAA and state security forces led to a brief resumption of fighting with the Tatmadaw. Six years later, after reorganizing their forces, the same faction of MNDAA troops remerged in the Kokang area in early 2015, and fighting continues.

Despite its formation in 1989, one ongoing feature of northern Shan State is an absence of direct conflict between the UWSA and the Tatmadaw. This reflects several dynamics. One is that the UWSA has shown its support for engagement in ceasefire arrangements. It was the second group to engage with the Tatmadaw during the initial ceasefire period, and, after the Thein Sein-led government came to power, it was the first group to engage in an arrangement with the government. The UWSA is also formidable. It is the largest and best armed of the EAOs. However, chairing the FPNCC, it has not signed the NCA, voicing its opposition to the NCA track of political negotiations.

The historical patterns of engagement between the SSA/RCSS and the Tatmadaw are different from many other groups in northern Shan State. Their operational areas are primarily in southern Shan State, which endured militarized conflict that involved the Tatmadaw's engagement in large-scale, forced relocation of the population from rural areas to resettlement sites more easily regulated by the military as part of its counter- insurgency operations.[280] It was not until December 2011 that they engaged in a bilateral

[280] Gary Riser, Oum Kher, and Sein Htun, *Running the Gauntlet: The impact of internal displacement in southern Shan State* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 2003) ; Shan Human Rights Foundation, *Dispossessed: A Report on Forced Relocation and Extrajudicial Killings in Shan State* (Chiang Mai, 1998): Karen Human Rights Group, *Killing the Shan: The Continuing Campaign of Forced Relocation in Shan State* (#98-03, 1998).

ceasefire agreement with the Thein Sein-led government. The SSA/RCSS became a signatory of the NCA in October 2015.

Conclusion

Armed conflicts have returned to northern Shan State. Broadly coinciding with a breakdown in ceasefire arrangements, the current period of fighting began in 2009 and has continued to escalate. This has included an upsurge in the frequency and intensification of militarized violence in many areas, involved an increased number of troops, and witnessed the emergence of new ethnic armed organizations.

The return of widespread militarized violence to northern Shan State, which has experienced a complex, multi-actor civil war since 1949, reflects a continuation of what remain fundamentally political disputes related to local autonomy and ethnic aspirations. These have continued to drive armed resistance as well as fuel state abuses against the civilian population. The fact that only one EAO operating in northern Shan State has signed the NCA, along with the establishment in 2015 of the Northern Alliance and the FPNCC, illustrates that these longstanding issues have not been resolved.

As this paper has also shown, taking into account the earlier periods of armed conflicts in northern Shan State – and their complexities – is essential for contextualizing their current patterns. Indeed, a historical perspective reveals significant continuities with previous phases, which includes not only the enduring salience of ethnic armed resistance against the central government, but also the antecedents to patterns of alliance formation and competition, splits and mergers, as well as the presence of Tatmadaw-allied militias, witnessed to the present day. Other enduring features of northern Shan State include the presence of large-scale opium and drug production, as well as natural resource extraction including the construction of dams and logging. This complex concentration of armed groups combined with

competing interests over resource revenue make northern Shan State susceptible to violent clashes.

Tragically, the resumption of fighting has had a destructive impact on the livelihoods of the population in northern Shan State. This involves a wide range of abuses against civilians perpetrated by armed groups, generates hardships for many communities, and increases the insecurity and vulnerability of the population with little recourse to basic healthcare and education. Indeed, the recent fighting has led to the displacement of tens of thousands of people and an unknown number of deaths.

A de-escalation of the fighting in northern Shan State is critical not only for alleviating the burdens on its long-suffering population, but also central to efforts at resolving decades of civil war in Myanmar. Including some of the largest and most politically influential EAOs in the country, a de-escalation of violence through the establishment of meaningful ceasefires with all groups is a necessary precursor for creating space and trust conducive to dialogue among armed actors in order to address the roots and sources of conflict. Failure to achieve this entails a serious risk of further escalation and continued fighting.

The prioritizing of peace by the two successive governments presents opportunities for resolving Myanmar's armed conflicts. The NLD's designation of the regularly scheduled meetings of the Union Peace Conference to discuss political issues as the 21st Century Panglong Conference draws on the symbolism of earlier inter-ethnic cooperation at the original Panglong meeting in 1947. Yet the intensification of fighting in recent years has contributed to the stalling of the NCA track of negotiations. Furthermore, that this comes at a time when the government has publically declared its priority to be peace and national reconciliation has generated skepticism among the civilian population and EAOs of northern Shan State about the sincerity of these stated commitments.

In conclusion, there is no quick-fix or easy resolution of the issues. Ultimately, the peace process needs to be able to account for and accommodate the complex array of actors and dynamics that northern Shan State displays. It is predicated on a better understanding of such that this paper hopes to be used for further monitoring, research, and initiatives in support of peace.

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