

People's War, People's Peace

Fostering a 'social contract' for Myanmar's Karen civil war

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ABSTRACT

Myanmar's recent moves to liberalise its economy and loosen its authoritarian approach to governance have attracted a host of international development partners. Following decades of protracted ethnic conflict, a nationwide peace process has begun, naturally opening space for international peacebuilding interventions. Globally, such programmes have evolved to typically focus on the halting of conflict and allow room for statebuilding. This paper argues that a more sophisticated approach to the KNU conflict is necessary to achieve lasting reconciliation, and to address local security concerns. By analysing the core determinants of the conflict, I will demonstrate that severe tensions over militarisation, governance, development and social services will undermine all other peacebuilding efforts if not addressed sensitively and slowly. Achieving lasting peace and an end to protracted security crises will require the formation of a social contract between the state, rival elites, and marginalised populations. This process can be supported from the base up by international peacebuilding actors.

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Executive Summary

Myanmar's recent moves to liberalise its economy and loosen its authoritarian approach to governance have attracted a host of international development partners. A fresh peace process has gotten underway, and is showing progress. This has opened space for international peacebuilding actors, a number of which have already begun interventions. The majority so far have focused on the country's longest running armed conflict, that between the Bamar-dominated government and the Karen National Union (KNU).

As is typical for modern-day peace processes, that between the KNU and the government looks set to be drawn out and stagnated, focusing on reductions of armed hostilities with unavoidably limited progress towards comprehensive resolution of the core determinants of antagonism. Despite its imperfections, this fragile truce remains in place, opening a notable – though incredibly sensitive – space for peacebuilding actors. As the potential for the peace process to resolve the underlying drivers of conflict remains questionable, lasting solutions depend on broader structural changes that peacebuilding can encourage.

International actors have the opportunity to help locals use this space to address key determinants of conflict and insecurity through what this paper will introduce as a 'social contract' approach to peacebuilding. Such an approach has emerged in peacebuilding policy frameworks in recent years and has the potential to avoid the pitfalls of what have been dubbed over-expansive 'maximalist' approaches, and the more practical but short-sighted 'minimalist/moderate' approaches. The legitimate use of force must ultimately be ceded by all stakeholders to a legitimate and capable authority, while guarantees must be provided for the security and prosperity of all populations in return. This will depend on the empowerment of all marginalised parties and considerable concessions by all centres of power, particularly the state.

The KNU conflict has historically revolved around power politics between elites over the governance of populations. While the Government claims patronage over the entire Karen population as a subgroup of the nation of Myanmar, numerous Karen factions attest to being more rightful leaders due to long established nationalist framings. Connectedly, Karen civilian populations have been the target of brutal counterinsurgency campaigns for decades, suffering endemic human rights abuse. While the KNU is generally viewed as more legitimate by much of the said population, the Government has a near monopoly on international legitimacy by virtue of its statehood. It is these conditions that shape the conflict in Karen areas of Myanmar, and that will inevitably shape the way in which a lasting social contract can take hold.

Today, the main drivers of conflict and insecurity appear to lie in ever-evolving tensions related to militarisation, governance, development and social services. To aid the evolution of a social contract, peacebuilding interventions must work both to alleviate, and avoid exacerbating, existing tensions in these areas. In some cases, tensions are at risk of being worsened by the peace process's current trajectory. Peacebuilding must work to bring the Government down towards the people and to empower disenfranchised parts of society, including rivaling elites, to assert their expectations of the state.

Notable progress will depend on top-down and bottom-up initiatives that deal with sensitive matters of politics and security yet to be broached by external actors in Myanmar. While political obstacles to such intervention cannot be overlooked, there is a stark need for increased pressure on the state for reforms in these areas and a greater commitment to the protection and empowerment of conflict-affected communities. If this cannot be made priority, there is a severe risk that the Bamar military elite will continue to dedicate its own resources to strengthening its grip on power while international aid provides a veneer of peace and token improvements in arbitrary areas of governance. If international actors fail to address the sensitive political and security issues driving conflict and insecurity, all other peacebuilding efforts risk being severely undermined.

1. Introduction

Since 2011, Myanmar has undergone an unprecedented transformation as a result of domestic reforms aimed at bringing it out of decades of military rule, and into the international community. This has been met with great enthusiasm by the liberal developed world as the country has become increasingly important economically and geostrategically, sitting between India, China and the rest of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) region. A new peace process has gotten underway, and is showing progress. This has opened space for international peacebuilding actors, a number of which have already begun interventions. While many of the country's border areas have been embroiled in ethnic armed conflict, the majority of peacebuilding projects have started with a focus on the longest-running and most publicised contest, between the Bamar-dominated government and the Karen National Union (KNU),¹ which will thus be the topic of this paper.²

In particular this paper explores the potential for peacebuilding initiatives to facilitate the reconciliation process, and address local security concerns. These two aims have been chosen in specific relation to the local context. Scholars tackling the many issues that Myanmar faced under military rule, from political repression through to economic failure, have long focused on the need for 'national reconciliation' between the military government, ethnic armed groups (EAGs),³ and the popular democratic opposition characterised by Aung San Suu Kyi.⁴ Taking guidance from this concept, this paper will hone in primarily on reconciliation between the Government, armed ethnic elites, and the much-neglected ethnic minority populations.⁵ Concomitantly I will explore the prospects for peacebuilding to address the abject security crises that exist in many conflict-affected areas as a result of decades of militarisation and protracted crises in local governance.⁶

Myanmar has received less attention from scholars compared with other conflict-torn countries, particularly those in Africa and the Middle East. Thus, research in this area has a lot to contribute to the field of study, especially as the region becomes more important economically and geopolitically. Perhaps the most seminal works on Myanmar's ethnic conflict have been provided by Smith, Lintner, Callahan, South and Kramer.⁷ Their contributions paint a picture of warlordism, nationalism, greed, and systematic violence, in a context of oppression and neglect of civilian communities at the hands of 'competing systems of authority'.⁸ In particular, the state is viewed as the main oppressor, responsible for systematic abuse and oppression of civilians and competing elite networks. South (2011) in particular has contributed significantly to the study of the KNU conflict, while Callahan (2007) has produced one of few studies that look specifically at the prospects for peacebuilding in Myanmar.

Following drastic transformations of the context since 2011, further study is needed to examine the present opportunities and challenges for peacebuilding, now that a comprehensive nationwide peace process is underway. Drawing on the growing body of scholarly literature and selected policy contributions surrounding approaches to peacebuilding and statebuilding, I aim to conceptualise a macro-level peacebuilding model for the KNU conflict, able to facilitate reconciliation, and address local

¹ Bamar and Karen are both major ethnic groups. The Bamar are the dominant group in Myanmar.

² For the sake of simplicity, I shall henceforth refer just to the 'KNU conflict' and the 'KNU peace process'

³ When referring to the largest and most institutionalised armed groups, the term ethnic armed groups (EAGs) is locally considered more sensitive than 'non-state armed group', which are perceived to place value judgement on their claims to legitimacy as nationalist actors.

⁴ For a broader discussion on the often emphasised need for 'national reconciliation' see Holliday (2011), pp.92-96

⁵ The term 'ethnic nationality' is preferred locally to 'ethnic minority', and will be used henceforth.

⁶ These crises will be discussed throughout this paper. But for a preliminary review, refer to Callahan (2007)

⁷ For example: Smith (1994), Smith (1998), Lintner (1990), Lintner (1997), Lintner (2000), Lintner (2011), Lintner and Black (2009), Callahan (2005), Callahan (2007), South (2003), South (2008), South (2011), Kramer (2009),

⁸ Callahan (2007)

security concerns. While taking much guidance from critical scholars such as Paris, Richmond, Pugh, Chandler and Selby, I will approach the question from a balanced position, sympathetic to the realities faced by peacebuilding practitioners and policy makers by drawing on policy contributions themselves as well as evaluative studies from Call, Cousens, Barnett, Lund, Cammack and Murshed, Guelke among others.

Despite the specificity of the topic, a wide range of questions need to be answered to ascertain the potential for peacebuilding in Myanmar. There is first the need for a below-the-surface examination of contemporary peace processes and peacebuilding, to assess their typical scope and purpose, both on the ground and in relation to the broader global security strategies of the liberal developed world. In Section 2 I will provide a representative overview of these factors, showing that 'peace processes' and 'peacebuilding' are modern innovations and have evolved to support state-led *détente* strategies of peacemaking, often focusing on the drawdown of armed hostilities to allow space for statebuilding, rather than the reconciliation of key drivers of conflict or genuine reconciliation. Engaging ongoing debates over the extent that peacebuilding interventions should take, I suggest that the pitfalls of both the over-expansive 'maximalist' approach, and the more practical but short-sighted 'minimalist/moderate' approaches, can be avoided. This, as Section 4 will expand on, depends on a longer-term strategic approach that aims to facilitate the emergence of a social contract between society, the state, and various competing elites.

Before assessing the practicalities of such an approach, I will need to answer a number of questions regarding the specific context surrounding the KNU peace process. To understand the nature of the relationships driving peacebuilding interventions in Myanmar, sections 3.1 and 3.2 will explore the recent transformation of Myanmar's international relations and the scope of its burgeoning peace process, respectively. Section 3.3 will then provide a practical overview of peacebuilding programmes that are underway or on the horizon. Ultimately, Section 3 will demonstrate that the KNU peace process risks heading down a typical *détente* trajectory, but that space exists for a deeper process to take hold. An upcoming peace building needs assessment, that aims engage all stakeholders, provides an encouraging opportunity for peacebuilding to go deeper. This, I will show depends on a comprehensive strategy based on the primary determinants of conflict and insecurity.

In Section 4.1 I will firstly assess the extent to which Myanmar allows space for such a comprehensive and sophisticated approach and introduce guidelines provided by the United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP) for fostering a social contract in fragile states. I will then present a simple conflict analysis model that avoids the clumsiness of seeking illusive 'root causes', and looks instead more specifically at 'systemic' determinants that must be understood as practical realities, and 'proximate' determinants, wherein the more immediate drivers of ongoing conflict and insecurity lie. Section 4.3 will seek the systemic causes of conflict, looking at the processes that have led to the divisions and imbalance of material circumstances of conflicting elites. Section 4.4 will then draw on primary data to ascertain what the most immediate drivers of conflict and insecurity are today. Drawing on the UNDP guidelines, I will analyse evolving tensions in four problematic areas in the relationships between the state, society and various armed factions.

In the Conclusion, I will summarise my findings and key conclusions, focusing especially on the implications for peacebuilding programme development. Based on evidence from the field, I will demonstrate the need for top-down and bottom-up initiatives that deal with sensitive matters of politics and security yet to be broached. Though acknowledging the political obstacles faced by external actors, I will emphasise the need primarily for increased pressure on the state for reforms, and a greater commitment to the protection and empowerment of conflict-affected communities.

Research Methodology

For the majority of primary data, I conducted research in Yangon and three townships of Kayin State, where I held 23 interviews and five participatory workshops. These provided detailed information from individuals living and working in 8 out of around 12 main townships affected by the KNU conflict. Interlocutors were from a wide range of backgrounds, spanning KNU and KNLA representatives of various ranks; civil society networks operating in Karen areas of the Southeast; local teachers; peace volunteers and activists; local NGO workers; residents of conflict-affected areas; and internally displaced people.

Prior to this, I undertook a preliminary study of current held interviews and detailed discussions with eleven members of foreign international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) and foreign government sinvolved in peacebuilding in Myanmar; one government Minister; two government advisers; nine Myanmar national INGO staff (including three Karen); eight civil society representatives (including six Karen); and attended one session of a forum for international peacebuilding implementing bodies and individuals.

Throughout this paper, I will keep the identities of all interlocutors anonymous, denominated only with loose characterisations and affiliations. This 'safety first' approach is necessary given the political complexity of the environment and ever-shifting nature of relationships among stakeholders. Out of the three townships I visited, I shall only name one – Hpa'an Township – for similar reasons. While Hpa'an is under the firm jurisdiction of the government, the other two are not, with one being contested by numerous authorities and the other mostly controlled by the KNU/KNLA.

Much of my data on the specific experiences of conflict-affected communities came from three participatory ranking methodology (PRM) sessions.⁹ PRM is a tool for ranking local needs by priority during disaster responses,¹⁰ that I have adapted to determine local security priorities in post-conflict settings. While assumptions are often made about what the most desperate needs are in such settings, I saw a need in Myanmar for an approach that brought communities together as a group, rather than relying solely on local patriarchs or English-speaking community workers. The approach is designed for rapid appraisals, and is far from sufficient in determining the actual needs of a specific community for programme design. But, it is optimal for obtaining indicative samples from a range of communities, to obtain of key trends. Participants were asked as a group: 'What are the main threats to your safety and security where you live?' Collating answers from around the room, participants are then asked to put the issues in order of priority. Detailed notes of the conversations going on during this process provide insight into the complex reasons that certain issues are considered more important than others.

Although the PRM sessions held were largely successful, problems related to security and local politics meant I was only able to conduct one session in the 'contested' township, and two in the KNU controlled area. I therefore failed to obtain the amount of data planned. Nonetheless, the small samples I gained appear to be indicative of a broader population, when findings are corroborated with secondary data. Detailed interviews with civil society workers, NGO employees and others also provided enough of a broad overview to allow a rich body of data for most of the areas of Southeast Myanmar affected by the KNU conflict.¹¹

⁹ The findings of these sessions are presented in Appendices 5,6 and 7

¹⁰ Detailed guide to PRM: Ager et al (2011)

¹¹ Profiles and results of each of these sessions are provided in the appendices.

2. Peace building and peace processes

In this section, I will explore the broad context in which emerging peacebuilding programmes in Myanmar sit. In particular I aim to outline the typical structures of modern-day peace processes and peacebuilding to determine a representative overview of their scope and purpose, both on the ground and in relation to the broader global security strategies of the liberal developed world.

2.1 Peace processes, peacebuilding and international security

The concepts of 'peace processes' and 'peacebuilding', distinct from one another are modern innovations for managing conflicts, developed over recent decades. In essence, both have evolved to focus on the drawdown of armed hostilities, rather than the reconciliation of key drivers of conflict and genuine reconciliation. While the former is most often a local enterprise,¹² and the latter almost always a form of international intervention, both tend to work in tandem towards what can be considered a *détente* approach to peace making, slowly dissolving old tensions whilst allowing crucial space for other joint aims, such as economic development and state building.

The concept and practice of peace processes were pioneered by Henry Kissinger in the 1970s for managing hostilities peripheral to the US's struggle with the Soviet Union.¹³ Prior to this wars had typically ended by a decisive military victory or occasionally by simple agreements based on territories, or distribution of other spoils. A growing understanding that stability was central to all other foreign policy objectives led to the conception that trust was no longer a prerequisite to engage belligerents in practical discussions,¹⁴ and instead placed the emphasis on developing well-orchestrated, carefully timed and stagnated 'processes' that allowed hostilities to be brought down and other objectives to be met without a necessary end to the initial antagonism.¹⁵

When the Cold War ended, an unprecedented array of non-traditional security threats entered the security policy discourse, stemming largely from instability, or 'state fragility' in the developing world. These ranged from those established in the realm of security, such as the proliferation of non-state armed actors, small arms and transnational crime, through to new conceptions about the knock-on and spillover effects of crises like drought, famine, and disease.¹⁶ It soon became commonly accepted that modern-day threats to the West and its allies would not come from other world powers but from the dysfunction of developing states.¹⁷ Around the same time, seminal UN policy documents brought the term 'human security' into the international lexicon, encompassing a wide range of threats to the individual, influencing common perceptions of what the attainment of peace entailed, beyond an end to hostilities.¹⁸ Thus, UN 'peacebuilding' emerged, typically incorporating a mixture of international orchestration or involvement in peace negotiations as well as conflict-targeted packages of development and humanitarian support.¹⁹ Over the following decade, such theoretical framings shaped UN doctrine significantly, entwining the sectors of development and humanitarian assistance with that of international security.²⁰ As Western security institutions set up their own frameworks to deal with state fragility, development

¹² Selby (2008b), p.14

¹³ Selby (2008a), p.2

¹⁴ Guelke (2003), p. 53

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 55

¹⁶ Cammack et al (2006), p.22

¹⁷ Patrick (2006), p.27

¹⁸ UNDP (1994), p.22; UNROL (1992); 'Introduction to Peacebuilding', See section 'The conceptual origins of peacebuilding'

¹⁹ Paris and Sisk (2007), p.3

²⁰ Later examples are UNOCHA (2009), UNOCHA (2003), UNSC (2000), UNSC (2000), ICISS (2001),

programmes designed to concomitantly deal with conflict and poverty emerged,²¹ and relief and humanitarian agencies became accepted as viable agents for peace.²² Throughout this period, the concerns that aid could be a contributing factor to either war or peace led to the creation of 'Do No Harm' principles, a common feature of modern policy for interventions in fragile contexts.²³

In 2001, the realisation that the most deadly act of war on US soil since the civil war could be carried out by a small band of idealists based mostly in Afghanistan²⁴ spelt to many that a more rigorous state-building agenda was necessary.²⁵ While the USA declared it was now 'less threatened by conquering states than by failing ones';²⁶ the EU committed to wide ranging liberalist foreign policy reforms, claiming that 'the best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states';²⁷ and the UK noted the importance of multilateral development programmes in fragile states in order to 'prevent the growth of failed-state havens for terrorists'.²⁸ By the 2010s, the notion that key threats now emanated from 'ungoverned spaces' rather than hostile regimes,²⁹ alongside cuts to UK and USA military budgets, laid the groundwork for a growing focus on building partnerships with other states, including non-traditional partners.³⁰ The formulation of the Busan Principles then placed an increasing emphasis on local government 'ownership' of development processes and projects too.³¹ Chandler has called this the 'post-interventionist' approach to statebuilding, taking the emphasis away from overt intervention, though maintaining that developing countries are in need of external assistance in order to govern properly.³² Notably there appears to be little interrogation of the existing or potential roles of non-state actors, even in areas where other political systems have filled vacuums left by states.³³

Central to modern international security practices is that all geographic spaces remain under the authority of state actors that can be held accountable through international laws, conventions and norms. As the only viable guarantors for such multilateral agreements, centralised state governments are tantamount to the integrated and globalised world envisioned by UN and its leading member states, especially in the realm of security.³⁴ Key to understanding, for example, the EU's vision of 'a world of well-governed democratic states',³⁵ is not just the notion that target states are being 'helped', but that the absolute focus is on expanding the influence of the institutions of states themselves, potentially at the expense of any number of non-state actors.

2.2 Peacebuilding theory and practice

In 2006, the UN transformed its peacebuilding frameworks, forming the UN Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF), the UN Peacebuilding Commission (UNPBC), and the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (UNPBSO), which develops policy. Overtime, a loose 'peacebuilding consensus' has emerged among governments, intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), INGOS and international financial institutions

²¹ Cammack et al (2006), p.22

²² Ibid. p.20

²³ 'Do no Harm' was developed by Mary Anderson in Anderson (1999); For a more practical policy focused overview see Do No Harm Project (2004)

²⁴ Jenkins and Hodges (2011), p.1

²⁵ Fukuyama (2004), p.18

²⁶ President of the USA (2002), p.1

²⁷ European Union (2003), p.10

²⁸ House of Commons (2002), p. 22

²⁹ Lamb (2008), p. 34

³⁰ Department of Defense (2010), pp. 57-71 and pp. 26-28; HM Government (2010a), p. 59-65

³¹ "The Busan Partnership...", OECD, July 2012; <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/Busan%20partnership.pdf>

³² Pugh et al (2012), p. 193

³³ Chesterman et al (2004), p. i

³⁴ Stanislawski (2008), p. 369

³⁵ European Union (2003), p.10

(IFIs),³⁶ that aims to 'reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities [and laying] the foundations for sustainable peace and development.'³⁷ The most frequent areas of intervention are thus:

- Basic safety and security
- Political processes and reconciliation
- Basic services like health, water and sanitation, education and return of displaced people
- Restoration (or strengthening) of government functions
- Economic revitalisation³⁸

Within this broad framework though, there are number of key differences in the theories and practices among different actors, particularly in relation to the extent of the intervention. A key question is whether peacebuilding should hone its focus on the immediate drivers of conflicts and present peace negotiations, or if it should go deeper to address 'root causes', as well as broader state-building challenges faced by the host country.³⁹ These two general approaches correlate respectively to the divergent aims of achieving a 'negative peace' (the absence of armed conflict) or the more ambitious 'positive' peace (a sustainable peace ensured by comprehensive transformation of socio-political and economic systems).

Expanding this concept, Call and Cousens found that UN peacebuilding interventions could be categorised along this scale into maximalist, minimalist and moderate standards.⁴⁰ UNPBC policy framings were found to be designed intentionally to sit around the threshold of the minimalist and moderate standards,⁴¹ in which the reduction of armed conflict itself is the focus, with a lesser aim to deal with other structural or governance issues.⁴²

The reasons for this are multiple, and relate to criticism of peacebuilding agendas for becoming too broad and convoluted, detracting from core aims. Primarily, the risk of trying to solve illusive so-called 'root causes' is that it opens the floodgates for programmes focusing on a wide range of disparate issues without strategy or cohesion.⁴³ Also, in crises where human lives are being lost en masse, any detraction from the core aim of halting the violence is considered intolerable.⁴⁴ Expansive peacebuilding projects have also come under fire for becoming broad liberal statebuilding projects, foisting Western liberal political and economic systems on non-Western states.⁴⁵ While extreme critiques have compared such practices to colonialism,⁴⁶ more balanced empirical studies have drawn the conclusion that their aims can become 'ideological and implausible'.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, there are functional and structural issues with the minimalistic/moderate approaches too, primarily as their lack of attention to the broader context risks prioritising short-term stability over medium to long-term goals. This can easily allow a reversion to conflict in later years, as Call and

³⁶ Richmond et al (2011), p.452

³⁷ UNPBSO, 'Peacebuilding & The United Nations', <http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pbso/pbun.shtml>

³⁸ Based on examples in UNPBSO (2010), p.12

³⁹ Barnett et al (2007), p.36

⁴⁰ Call and Cousens (2008), p. 6

⁴¹ Ibid. p.8

⁴² Ibid. pp. 7-8

⁴³ Barnett et al (2007), p.44

⁴⁴ Lund (2003), p. 28

⁴⁵ Paris (2010), pp.337-338

⁴⁶ Paris (2002)

⁴⁷ Richmond and Franks (2009), p.81; For other similar critiques see Paris (2002), Paris (2004), Barnett (2006), Pugh (2005), Sriram (2007), Pugh et al (2008)

Cousens's survey showed.⁴⁸ Critically, this approach reinforces détente peace process strategies too by easing hostilities to an uneasy halt, but not pushing for resolution of core issues, favouring the status quo.⁴⁹ In asymmetrical conflicts, this risks handing a de facto victory to the stronger party, and having significant unintended political impacts. In contexts where issues peripheral to the frequency of armed clashes are key determinants of insecurity, this can be particularly harmful. With a moderate approach, where some marginal 'good governance' indicators can be seen to have improved, there is the additional risk of providing unearned legitimacy to otherwise negligent or abusive regimes.⁵⁰

While debates have framed these 'maximalist' and 'minimalist/moderate' approaches as a near dichotomy, there is room for a more nuanced discussion of how the pitfalls of both can be avoided.⁵¹ Indeed, it can be said of both broad framings that they lack sufficient inquiry into the core drivers of conflicts, while the maximalist standard suffers primarily from a lack of proper strategy.⁵² Focusing on Myanmar, this paper will look at the potential for a more strategic approach to peacebuilding that goes beyond the rudimentary aim of reducing incidents of armed conflict, but only to address the key determinants of conflict and associated security and governance crises.

As a handful of scholarly and policy contributions in recent years have argued, a prudent approach should aim ultimately to foster the conditions for the development of a 'social contract' between the state and the society.⁵³ Such a contract ensures that the authority ceded to the state is predicated on its legitimacy in the eyes of its subjects, providing what could be the 'sole determinant of resilience'.⁵⁴ As has been noted by policy-makers, incomplete 'investments in core state institutions and functions can unintentionally intensify fragility and aggravate identity-based fault lines.' As I will outline in Section 4, there is a significant risk of this taking place in Myanmar, but given a relative lack of urgency, and the nature of international interests, there is a unique space for a more sophisticated approach.

In Section 2, I have shown how the merging of international security, development and humanitarian assistance have produced a typical approach to peacebuilding that prioritises a drawdown of armed clashes over dealing with key drivers of conflict, supporting détente strategies. This avoids getting tangled in over-expansive and ill-managed interventions, but also leaves conflicts vulnerable to reemergence in the long term. As I will explore deeply in coming sections, the success of peacebuilding could thus be predicated on processes undertaken during stable periods to improve state-society relations and form a social contract.

⁴⁸ Call and Cousens (2008), p. 7

⁴⁹ 'An introduction to Peacebuilding', Section 'Peacebuilding as "stabilization" or "transformation"'

⁵⁰ OECD (2008), p.30

⁵¹ Paris (2010), pp.337-340

⁵² Call and Cousens (2008), p. 3

⁵³ See further discussion of social contracts and civil conflicts see Addison and Mansoob Murshed (2006), Murshed and Cuesta (2008), OECD (2008), Dfid (2008), UNDP (2012), p.28, Murshed (2011), Rowson (2012), p.28

⁵⁴ OECD (2008), p.7

3. Peacebuilding comes to Myanmar

In Section 3, I'll turn specifically to Myanmar. Section 3.1 will interrogate the drivers and nature of its dramatic transformation of international relations in recent years, 3.2 will explore the scope and trajectory of the current peace process, and 3.3 and provide a practical overview of the ongoing and upcoming international peacebuilding initiatives.

3.1 Myanmar: From pariah to partner

Since 1962, Myanmar (previously Burma) has embodied the antithesis to the Western-ideal liberal state model. A coup d'état that year set the country on course for 49 years of explicit military rule, by the end of which, ethno-centric military dominance in almost every sector had generated protracted concomitant crises in the areas of political openness, human development, ethnic conflict, civil liberties, and economic performance.⁵⁵ But despite its many qualifications for 'fragile', 'weak', or 'failed' state status, decades of military rule gained Myanmar very little attention from the West. This was due to a mixture of self-imposed isolation,⁵⁶ and then widespread sanctions.⁵⁷ Though it began opening up to foreign aid in the 2000s, it was shunned by many donors for the denial of humanitarian access to many of its most vulnerable areas, among other reputational factors.⁵⁸

However, following the inauguration of a quasi-civilian government in 2011, previously experimental re-engagement initiatives accelerated significantly,⁵⁹ as the new President former General Thein Sein began a process of sweeping reforms, statedly in pursuit of forming a modern democratic nation.⁶⁰ As the new Constitution provides for the military to appoint a quarter of the Parliament, name key ministers and dominate security policy, rights campaigners especially were sceptical about prospects comprehensive change.⁶¹ However, within a year this had led to the release of the majority of prisoners conscience, the allowance of Aung San Suu Kyi into Parliament, the invitation of all exiled dissidents back to the country, the signing of ceasefires and holding of open discussions with opposition armed groups, as well as improved freedom of information and association regimes.⁶² Come Autumn 2012, almost all Western trade sanctions had been lifted, including measures restricting developmental aid to or via the state, and reputational hindrances to engagement all but evaporated. By 2013, partnerships in multiple areas of security and defence were being brokered by the USA, UK, EU and Australia.⁶³

The easing of authoritarian governance has dominated public discourse, but more motivational to improved relations were strategic priorities on both sides. Myanmar has structured economic and political reforms to suit Western demands for re-engagement,⁶⁴ particularly in an effort to repair relations with the USA, and offset the country's ever-growing dependence on China.⁶⁵ The trade potential for Myanmar is

⁵⁵ Steinberg (2010), p.13

⁵⁶ Holliday (2011), pp. 103-105

⁵⁷ Ibid. p.105

⁵⁸ Currie (2012), p.9

⁵⁹ UNESCAP, p.11

⁶⁰ ICG (2012). pp.2-4

⁶¹ For example: 'Fake Election Won't...', Burma Campaign UK,

<http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/campaigns/more-info/fake-election-wont-bring-real-change-to-burma>

⁶² ICG (2012). pp.2-4

⁶³ 'US and Myanmar up military engagement', Myanmar Times, 01/08/13 <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/7656-us-and-myanmar-to-commence-military-cooperation.html>; 'Australia boosts Burma aid and defence co-operation', BBC, 18/03/13 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21826135>; 'Council conclusions on the...' p.2, European Council, 22 July 2013, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/138272.pdf

⁶⁴ UNESCAP (2012), p.14

⁶⁵ Haacke p.59

immense, with long borders with the booming economies India, China, and the ASEAN region, which together make up more than 45% of the world's population.⁶⁶ This provides great incentive, not just for Myanmar to liberalise its economy, but for the USA, EU and other Western economic powers to ensure they become part of the process. In line with the USA's recent strategic 'pivot' to the Asia Pacific region, which has included a particular economic focus on ASEAN, long-term strategic aims such as a counter to the growth of China were also key drivers.⁶⁷ With such a willing new partner, the opportunity to spread liberal values and gain resultant political praise and recognition has also become key for such actors.⁶⁸ Less in the headlines, but perhaps more crucial, this strategic reordering has opened the gates for an enthusiastic return of Japan as a leading development partner.⁶⁹

By 2013, to the diplomats and politicians of many developed liberal states, Myanmar could be heralded as a success of the global endeavour for liberalisation and integration.⁷⁰ It also proved that the liberal state model could be embraced by even the most authoritarian of regimes if they are given the right kind of diplomatic encouragement. This provided the perfect environment for 'post-interventionist' engagement, and in line with the Busan Principles, January 2013 saw the signing of the Napyidaw Accord for Effective Development Cooperation.⁷¹ With careful reference to dominant international accords and standards, the accord lays out guidelines and obligations for the government and donors for working toward government-determined development goals.⁷²

It specifically calls for support in ending ethnic conflict,⁷³ an area that was already being ventured into by a number of international actors, intersecting multiple mutual interests held by the Myanmar Government and new partner states. The reconciliation of armed conflict in Myanmar is firstly seen by donors and scholars alike as a prerequisite to progress towards genuine democratic reform and other liberal aims.⁷⁴ Further, the issue of ethnic conflict was repeatedly tied to the debates regarding sanctions by most Western actors, as politicians and activists called for benchmarks in this area to be met before sanctions were lifted,⁷⁵ so improvements therein are crucial to the legitimacy of the ongoing engagement. For developmental progress too, at the very least a drawdown of hostilities and a removal of conflict-related hazards such as indiscriminate explosives is key. This is particularly crucial as conflicts and hostile armed actors flank many of the country's mountainous borders, and thus impede cross-border trade and complicate areas abundant in natural resources.⁷⁶ A recent success in this area was hailed when border crossings between Thailand and Myanmar were fully opened for tourists, a possibility attributed to the peace process.⁷⁷ Moreover, international actors have long struggled to provide support to conflict refugees fleeing the country.⁷⁸

⁶⁶ (ASEAN 598,498,000) + (India 1,241,491,960.00) + (China 1,344,130,000.00) = 3,184,119,960. 3184119960 = 45.66% of (Global 6,973,738,433.00) Data from (ASEAN) 2011 and World Bank : <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>

⁶⁷ Haacke (2013)

⁶⁸ For the US, see Haacke (2013), p.53; for EU: du Rocher (2012), pp.165-167

⁶⁹ Reilly (2013), p.153

⁷⁰ For an indicative example, 'Clinton Counts Improved Burma Ties among Top Accomplishments', The Irrawaddy, 01/02/13, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/25762>

⁷¹ 'Govt and Donors Forge Aid Plans for Burma', The Irrawaddy, 22/01/13, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/24867>

⁷² MMPED (2013)

⁷³ When referring to the largest and most institutionalised armed groups, the term ethnic armed groups (EAGs) is locally considered more sensitive than 'non-state armed group' or 'non-state actor', which are perceived to place value judgements on their claims to legitimacy as nationalist actors. Similarly, the term 'ethnic nationality' is preferred to 'ethnic minority'.

⁷⁴ For example: EC's José Manuel Barroso speaking at the MPC: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-12-771_en.htm; Kramer (2009), p. 2; Walton (2008); Holliday (2011), p. 188

⁷⁵ See for example: 'MYANMAR: Ethnic minorities call for caution as sanctions ease', IRIN, 27/04/13, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/95370/myanmar-ethnic-minorities-call-for-caution-as-sanctions-ease>

⁷⁶ Kramer and Woods (2012), p. 11

⁷⁷ 'Opening of Overland...', The Irrawaddy, 29/08/13, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/43135>

⁷⁸ UNHCR – Myanmar, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e4877d6.html>

Naturally, bringing a permanent end to hostilities, all in a manner admissible to their new international partners became central to the aims of Myanmar's leaders. 60 years of military struggle had failed to pacify and unify the country, and the risk of increased hostilities in 2011 meant a significant change in tact was needed.⁷⁹ The long-repeated chauvinistic slogan of 'one blood, once voice, one command,'⁸⁰ was thus replaced with a new lexical set, including 'resource sharing', 'trust building' and 'lasting peace'.⁸¹ In 2011, the government began an all-out effort to bring EAGs to the negotiation table, providing the necessary space for peacebuilding to take place.

3.2 The KNU - Myanmar Government Peace Process

Armed conflict in Myanmar has historic roots and is tied inextricably to the importance that people from all backgrounds place on their collective ethnic and cultural identities as markers of personhood,⁸² and thus their political realities. This has manifested primarily in grievances based on governance policy, particularly over levels of local autonomy, as well as the long-running dominance of politics by the ethnic Bamar military elite.⁸³ These desires have been linked by Myanmar's other ethnic elites to the concepts of self-determination and equality, and have translated into matured demands for a federal and democratic political order that provides for protection of their people's rights.⁸⁴ While such demands have not been met, recent enthusiastic efforts from the government to end the conflicts have been seen by foreign experts as 'the best opportunity in half a century' to achieve such aims.⁸⁵ There are currently 15 main EAGs. At the time of writing, agreements of varying depths with all major groups are keeping armed clashes relatively subdued.⁸⁶

Over the year previous to the 2010 election, unrealistic demands from the junta for all EAGs to come under their control rendered over a dozen long-standing ceasefires effectively void. One of the first tasks for the new government therefore was to repair these existing deals. However, the programme had also accelerated tensions between the government and the country's second largest EAG, the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), which was dismayed that 16 years of ceasefire had yet to yield promised political discussions. The new government therefore found itself embroiled in a new conflict, which largely due to the Myanmar Armed Forces' (Tatmadaw's) aggressive and uncompromising posture, escalated in following years significantly, becoming the bane of all their otherwise lauded peace efforts.⁸⁷

Through late 2011 and 2012, the government was able not just to repair all of the other pre-existing ceasefires, but to seal preliminary deals with its longest and most traditional enemies, the KNU and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP).⁸⁸ While much praise has gone to the Thein Sein administration for such 'achievements',⁸⁹ a sober reflection is warranted given that it was the first time

⁷⁹ Jolliffe (2012a) pp.14-15

⁸⁰ Holliday (2011), p.92

⁸¹ 'President U Thein Sein's speech...', President Office [Myanmar], 07/02/13, <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/briefing-room/news/2013/07/02/id-2283>

⁸² Walton (2013), p.4

⁸³ Kramer (2009), p.5

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Petrie and South (2013), p.2

⁸⁶ Horsey (2013)

⁸⁷ From 'Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - Southeast Asia', Section: Security, Country: Myanmar, <https://janes.ihs.com/CustomPages/Janes/DisplayPage.aspx?DocType=Reference&ItemId=+++1305090>

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ ICG awarded him a peace prize for example. See 'In Pursuit of Peace Award Dinner: Peace, Prosperity and the Presidency' <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/media-releases/2012/general/in-pursuit-of-peace-award-dinner.aspx>

the governing elite had ever made an attempt at credible dialogue,⁹⁰ and little was needed other than to invite the groups to the table and state a non-binding agreement to all demands 'in principle'.⁹¹ At the table, government negotiators have shown an unprecedented enthusiasm, while the military maintains an uncompromisingly aggressive posture.⁹² Nonetheless, Thein Sein's reformist credentials helped to build EAG's confidence,⁹³ and the deals soon led to increasingly comprehensive talks.

On the government side, these discussions have been led by a peace committee formed and led by the President, that in 2012, came to include commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing.⁹⁴ The most influential negotiator has been Minister Aung Min, who, through the committee, oversees a government organised non-governmental organisation (GONGO), called the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC). The central function of the MPC, which was started up with EU funding and support from Government of Japan and UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), is to handle logistical matters related to the peace process.⁹⁵ But with 5 operational departments it has also become a key advisory think tank, and central actor in the coordination of humanitarian affairs, especially in relation to landmines.⁹⁶ Negotiations with EAGs took place firstly on a group-by-group basis, but have moved onto multilateral talks. These have been taking place via both the ethnic political-military alliance the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) and a looser forum for coordination including many of the same groups called the Working Group for Ethnic Coordination (WGEC).⁹⁷

However, through mid-2013, the aims of these two joint platforms have diverged. In August 2013, the WGEC had a proposed roadmap for the peace process accepted by the Government 'in principle'. This provides for a stagnated negotiation process moving from a signed nationwide ceasefire through to political talks and the formation of 'National Accord', potentially consisting of constitutional amendments, to propose to Parliament. However, the UNFC has pulled away from WGEC since, and stated its own platform demanding an entirely new constitution and for political talks to commence immediately and determine all future benchmarks.⁹⁸ This has led to continually evolving tensions among and even within armed groups and could potentially disrupt the peace process.⁹⁹ At the time of writing this report, the KNU stands firmly behind the WGEC approach and has withdrawn from the UNFC entirely.¹⁰⁰ This largely matches the progressive stance the current KNU leadership has taken, aiming to move with the times and become an active player in Myanmar's political transition.

The WGEC approach can be likened to a typical process-heavy approach to peacebuilding, drawing out talks and avoiding the need to deal directly with underlying causes of conflict prematurely, for fear it could destabilise the process. The UNFC's demands reflect their perceived need to make the most of the leverage EAGs hold to obtain guarantees for comprehensive change before the government's

⁹⁰ Holliday (2011), p.92

⁹¹ Jolliffe (2012a), pp.15-16

⁹² For a more detailed discussion of the military's posture in KNU areas, see Section 4.4, under the sub-heading 'Militarisation'

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ 'Myanmar Peace Centre', Myanmar Peace Monitor, <http://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/stakeholders/myanmar-peace-center>;

For UNOPS grant, see: 'UNOPS in Myanmar', UNOPS,

<http://www.unops.org/english/whatwedo/Locations/Europe/Myanmar-Operations-Centre/Pages/MyanmarOperationsCentre.aspx>

⁹⁶ BNI (2013), p. 40-42

⁹⁷ From Jane's Sentinel, see footnote 87.

⁹⁸ For a detailed overview of these developments, see Keenan (2013)

⁹⁹ As these political tensions remain sensitive and continue to evolve, a closer analysis of these tensions would be imprudent and likely unhelpful.

¹⁰⁰ Keenan (2013); for an official overview of the KNU's official position as of September 2013: see KNU, 'Nationwide Ceasefire Discussions', 17/09/13, <http://www.knuhq.org/nationwide-cease-discussion.html>

statebuilding plans can take over.¹⁰¹ Both approaches remain centred on talks between conflict protagonists themselves and have involved little engagement with civil society or conflict-affected societies at large.

The Government's approach has been harder to read, but it appears to focus primarily on getting signatures on paper, despite the Tatmadaw's continued expansion and low-intensity offensives. Though many hard to achieve conditions put forward by EAGs have been accepted 'in principle', there has been a distinct lack of convincing steps towards meeting them. Along with provisions to end human rights abuses by the Tatmadaw, the most crucial common EAG demand is for comprehensive political dialogue. As demonstrated by the UNFC's rejection of plans proposed by the WGEC, faith among some EAG leaders that this will actually take place has worn thin. Meanwhile, negotiators have admitted their main aim to be the maintenance of ceasefires to allow space for humanitarian rehabilitation and development, to discourage popular support for the armed struggle.¹⁰² According to one MPC representative, the primary area of support needed from the international community is in providing money to 'feed the insurgents, so they choose to stop fighting'.¹⁰³ Alongside the perception that 'making [the EAGs] rich', will lead them to 'automatically abandon the army',¹⁰⁴ such aims make the Government's language of 'trust-building' look like a veneer for a more realist *détente* strategy. In KNU areas meanwhile, the Tatmadaw is taking an ever-aggressive posture, augmenting its infrastructure and war capabilities,¹⁰⁵ alongside new government salary programmes for traditional village leaders in former KNU regions.¹⁰⁶

Nonetheless, agreements between the KNU and Government have laid the groundwork for a relatively stable ceasefire, with just sporadic clashes taking place, resembling a near negative peace. For civilians, travelling has become much easier, while incidents of shelling or destruction of villages, and attacks on farms and food stores have reduced significantly.¹⁰⁷ However, 9,000-11,500 troops remain active in Karen armed groups (including BGFs),¹⁰⁸ while more than 100 Tatmadaw infantry battalions (likely at least 20,000 troops¹⁰⁹) remain in Karen areas of the Southeast,¹¹⁰ and there has been very little change in modes of local governance. Many forms of human rights abuses stemming from such high levels of militarisation and an engrained culture of impunity also remain.¹¹¹ As such, it is hard to claim that anything resembling a positive peace, providing adequate space for humanitarian, developmental or economic progress, yet exists.

Despite its imperfections, this fragile truce remains in place. Where antagonisms lie deep, peacebuilding theory often places emphasis on the processes which take place within the space provided by a drawdown in armed clashes. Indeed, Myanmar's peace process is opening a notable – though incredibly sensitive – space for peacebuilding actors. While the potential for the peace process to resolve the underlying drivers of conflict remains questionable, lasting solutions depend on broader structural changes that

¹⁰¹ Interviews with UNFC members, Thailand, September 2013

¹⁰² Jolliffe (2012a), p.15-16

¹⁰³ Interview with MPC representative, June 2013

¹⁰⁴ Minister U Aung Min, speaking to Mizzima News following KNU ceasefire 11/01/13, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mBno7Wi-QE>

¹⁰⁵ Discussions with KNLA personnel and local residents in KNU territory, undisclosed location, June 2013 – The developments will be discussed in greater detail in Section 4.4

¹⁰⁶ Interviews with teachers from Thandaunggyi, Hlaingbwe, Hpa'an, Hpapun, Thaton Townships; Local NGO worker in Hpa'an; KNLA commanders from Kawkereik and Kyainseikgyi

¹⁰⁷ TBC (2012), p.2

¹⁰⁸ Estimates collected from numerous local non-state intel agencies place KNLA's potential mobilisable force at 4000-6000, DKBA at around 2000, and the BGFs at 3000-3500 (officially 4238)

¹⁰⁹ These battalions, mostly Light Infantry Battalions (LIBs), often consist of around 200-300 troops. Maung Aung Myoe (2009), p. 78

¹¹⁰ See map in Appendix 2

¹¹¹ TBC (2012), pp.28-34

peacebuilding can encourage. International actors have the opportunity to use this space to help locals address key determinants of conflict and insecurity and facilitate the slow but sure formation of a social contract. However, there is also a risk that peacebuilding will - intentionally or unintentionally - support a détente strategy that neglects local security concerns, fails to support the genuine reconciliation necessary for lasting solutions, and merely provides the stability required by current elites from both sides to achieve other aims.

3.3 Inchoate peacebuilding in Myanmar

Though a comprehensive assessment of the peacebuilding projects already underway in Myanmar would be premature and beyond the scope of this paper, this section aims to give a practical overview of projects taking place.

The first international initiatives to startup are funded by the Norwegian Government, namely the Peace Donor Support Group (PDSG), and the Myanmar Peace Support Initiative (MPSI). Initiated by Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), The MPSI began in January 2012 with the aim of consolidating gains made through ceasefires by coordinating interventions which address the needs of war-affected populations and provide space and impetus for trust building and dialogue between stakeholders. This has been attempted via local civil society-led humanitarian projects and the provision of logistical support for the ceasefire activities of EAGs, both through direct and explicit partnerships with the political leaderships of such groups. The PDSG is essentially a forum to ensure cohesion between donors.¹¹²

Typically, MPSI humanitarian initiatives have been guided by EAGs, and implemented by their associated civil society organisations.¹¹³ Starting with pilot projects, three small initiatives have been initiated in areas affected by conflict between the KNU and Tatmadaw, one in Bago Region and another in Tanintharyi Region.¹¹⁴ NPA is also the central partner of the MPC's Myanmar Mine Action Center (MMAC), which is positioning itself as the conduit for all mine action in the country.¹¹⁵ The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is meanwhile leading the way in the building of shelters and schools to facilitate the return of displaced people while supporting citizenship registration programmes in post-conflict areas of Kayin and Kayah States.¹¹⁶

The Government of Japan is another crucial actor, not only becoming the primary funder of the MPC, but also administering significant peace interventions through its overseas development agency (ODA), the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the multi-sector organisation, Japan Platform. With a focus on 'poverty reduction' and 'living standards', JICA has allocated just short of 50 million USD to ethnic minority areas.¹¹⁷ Around USD 11 million, has been provided by Japan Platform to support the return of displaced people.¹¹⁸ Partnering with both the UNFC and the Government, Japan's Nippon Foundation is providing humanitarian relief in conflict areas, in conjunction with the Japanese Embassy.¹¹⁹

¹¹² 'Peace Donor Support Group and Myanmar Peace Support Initiative', Government of Norway; available at http://www.emb-norway.or.th/News_and_events/MPSI/Peace-Donor-Support-Group-and-Myanmar-Peace-Support-Initiative/

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ PDSG, 'MPSI initiates projects', <http://www.peacedonorsupportgroup.com/projects.html>

¹¹⁵ 'NPA signs agreement...', 25/06/13, <http://www.npaid.org/News/2013/NPA-signs-agreement-with-the-EU-on-Mine-Action-in-Myanmar#sthash.gLVyQ6cK.dpuf>

¹¹⁶ 'NRC's Country Programme...', 15/03/13, <http://www.nrc.no/?did=9452298>

¹¹⁷ Up to YEN 4.651 billion, approx. USD 47.78 billion – see 'Grant Agreement for...', 22/03/13, http://www.jica.go.jp/english/news/press/2012/130322_01.html

¹¹⁸ 'JAPAN'S GRANT ASSISTANCE...', 25/03/13, <http://www.mm.emb-japan.go.jp/profile/english/press/2013-03-25-1.html>

¹¹⁹ 'Nippon Foundation Conference...', 19/10/12, <http://www.nippon.com/en/features/c01201/>

Other initiatives on the horizon include 5 UNPBF projects, all in Mon and Kayin States, which are both affected by conflict between the KNU/KNLA and Tatmadaw as well as other groups. These initiatives aim to support provision of social services, issuance of civil documentation, woman's empowerment, peacebuilding training for ethnic minority youth, and media capacity-building. Following requests from the Ministry of Border Affairs (MoBA), one of 3 Ministries placed within the military command structure, the UN has also identified a comprehensive list of potential humanitarian focuses in the South East.¹²⁰ A joint project has begun between the MoBA and the UNDP to explore options for livelihoods and other support in other areas.¹²¹

The World Bank is looking ahead to two main projects, one focused on supporting the MPC with an upcoming peacebuilding needs assessment and another that aims to support community-driven development, in line with government initiatives.¹²² As well as supporting the MPC, the EU has committed EUR 20-25 million for 2013,¹²³ to support efforts to reduce hostilities, facilitate a political settlement, encourage lesser restrictions for humanitarian support, as well as rehabilitation and development in post-conflict areas with a focus on clearing landmines and improving local livelihoods.¹²⁴

All of these activities are being coordinated to some extent via the PDSG and at the implementation level through an informal association, the International Peace Support Group (IPSG) forum.¹²⁵ Also, via a department dedicated to 'Peacebuilding Operations Coordination (PBOC),¹²⁶ the MPC has become central to the peacebuilding activities of international and local actors, being the main provider of travel permits to the former and official registration to the latter.¹²⁷ Further, an ad hoc taskforce of mostly international actors led by the MPC has been established to coordinate a needs assessment in all of the country's conflict areas.¹²⁸ At the Government's request this aims to be a 'joint peacebuilding needs assessment' (JPNA), incorporating a large array of stakeholders from different sides of conflicts, and various stratum of society. Encouragingly, this initiative deeply reflects the early requirements laid out by UNPBSO, for an early assessment to allow a coordinated peacebuilding strategy in line with the country's needs.¹²⁹

A preliminary desktop review of existing knowledge and gaps, produced by the taskforce indicates an open mindset, and acknowledgement that a variety of sectors will need to be targeted.¹³⁰ Judging by this, and the lack of stark trends across the above initiatives, there are no clear signs of an emerging strategy as yet, which is typical prior to assessment. In the JPNA lies a propitious opportunity to establish such a strategy, based on local needs, to address not only the most immediate security concerns, but to help the country move towards reconciliation.

However, with operational areas already laid out to some extent by most of the major actors, there is also a risk that projects will continue ahead uncoordinated, shooting at varied targets under the loose denomination of peacebuilding. If peacebuilding takes place in this way, and the peace process continues to stagnate, the outcome would likely resemble a typical 'moderate standard' scenario whereby conflict is

¹²⁰ All in UN projects: MIMU (2013), p.41

¹²¹ Ibid. p.42

¹²² Ibid. p.41-42

¹²³ Ibid. p.42

¹²⁴ 'Council conclusions on the...', European Council, 22 July 2013,

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/138272.pdf

¹²⁵ TNI (2012a), p. 3

¹²⁶ BNI (2013), p. 40-42

¹²⁷ Interviews with international and local NGO workers held in Yangon and Hpa'an, Myanmar, July 2013

¹²⁸ MIMU (2013), p.4

¹²⁹ See for example UNPBSO (2010) p6, pp.12-13

¹³⁰ MIMU (2013), p.3

kept to a minimum while limited and unsystematic progress is made in almost arbitrary areas of governance. While there is potential for the KNU peace process to go down this path, there is also a great opportunity in the JPNA to more comprehensively address ongoing security crises and key issues necessary for reconciliations.

In Section 3, I have provided an overview of the strategic interests behind the burgeoning new relationship between Myanmar and the liberal developed world, that aim to bring it out of isolation and into the integrated economic and political order. I have shown that though progress has been made towards peace across the country, the situation remains fragile. Though the KNU peace process risks heading down a typical *détente* trajectory, notable space has been opened for reparation of cleavages between the state, EAGs and society. While some international peacebuilding initiatives have begun, the upcoming JPNA provides an important opportunity for a comprehensive strategy for interventions to be developed. Section 4 will provide more detailed guidance on how such a strategy can address the key determinants of conflict and insecurity via an approach that aids the formation of a 'social contract' between all stakeholders.

4. Towards a 'social contract' peacebuilding model for the KNU peace process

A number of scholarly and policy contributions in recent years have argued that the key determinant to lasting peace is the formation – or in many cases reparation – of a 'social contract'.¹³¹ In Section 4.1, I will determine the space for such an approach in Myanmar and introduce guidelines for 'social contract' governance interventions from a policy model provided by UNDP. Crucially, such interventions must be designed and sequenced from the base up around the drivers of conflict and insecurity specific to the context. Therefore, I will then seek to identify 'systemic' determinants that form a backdrop to the KNU conflict, as well as more immediate 'proximate' determinants that define the conflict today and that peacebuilding should address directly. Taking guidance from the UNDP model, this analysis will explore the requirements for successful peacebuilding and inherent opportunities and challenges for peacebuilding actors.

4.1 A 'social contract' approach

Social contract theory, developed in Europe in the 17th and 18th Centuries, forms the basis for the modern liberal state, positing that for the state to stably assume absolute authority and a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence, an implicit agreement must be formed between all citizens as equals to cede that power to it.¹³² Such a process took hundreds of years in Europe, and laid the foundations for many post-colonial states. While contemporary civil wars typically arise over the breakdown of mechanisms and institutions that uphold such a 'contract',¹³³ Myanmar is essentially starting from scratch having never been closer to the integration of all its territory under a single sovereign. This reality of course appears to present considerable challenges. However, there are a number of reasons why the KNU conflict actually presents a unique opportunity for such endeavour to be successful.

Absolute cessation of armed conflict is usually the core aim of peacebuilding.¹³⁴ This is deemed necessary to ensure the security of populations, economic networks, and societal and political structures.¹³⁵ But in the case of the Karen conflict, the intensity of clashes between has been low for years,¹³⁶ while principal security threats have stemmed largely from civilian-targeted military tactics, and more generally from protracted governance and development crises.¹³⁷ This relative lack of urgency for a cessation of all armed hostilities, and overlap of immediate security concerns with deeper governance problems, provides space and impetus for a more holistic approach to peacebuilding.

An emphasis on drawing down conflict is also often necessary for intervening states to achieve their strategic aims, be it to target threats from spillover effects at their source or to close in on regions being exploited by transnational illicit actors. In general though, foreign interests in Myanmar depend primarily on it stably becoming a more open, accountable and cooperative member of the international community. Quite simply, a truly lasting solution should be in the direct interests of many intervening international

¹³¹ See Addison and Mansoob Murshed (2006), Murshed and Cuesta (2008), OECD (2008), Dfid (2008) p.28, UNDP (2012), Murshed (2011), Rowson (2012), p.28

¹³² Friend (2004)

¹³³ Murshed (2011), Section: 'Development and The "Conflict Trap"'

¹³⁴ Call and Cousens pp.7-8

¹³⁵ Lund (2003), p. 28

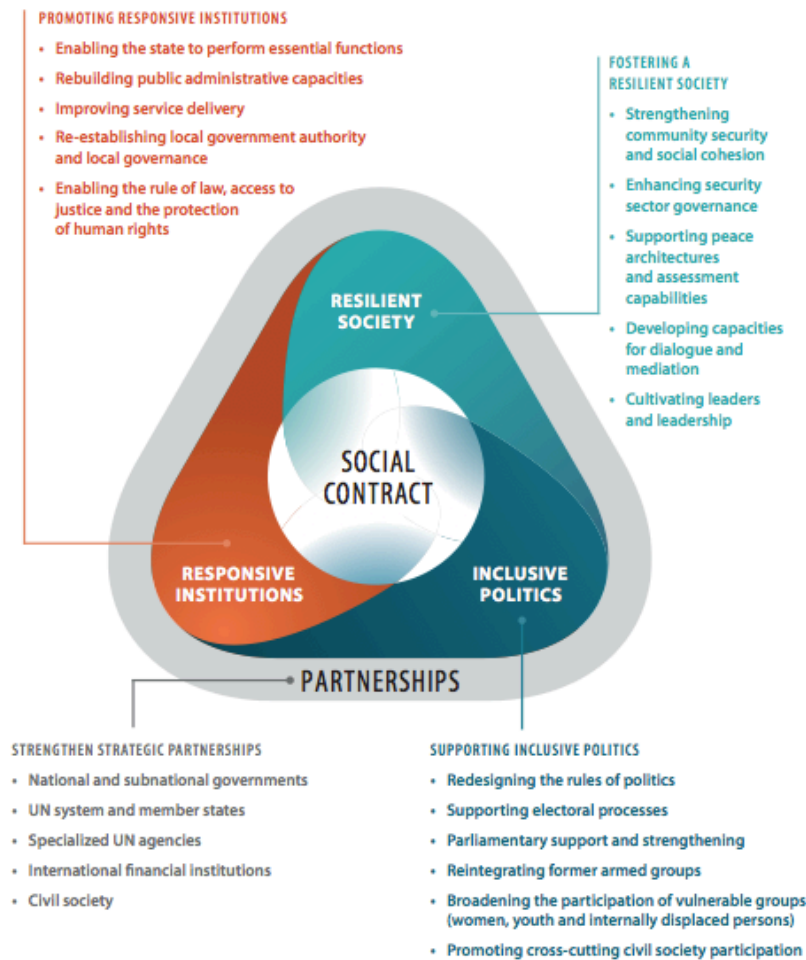
¹³⁶ Accurate figures are unavailable, but according to World Bank indicators battle deaths across the whole of Myanmar in the 6 years previous to the KNU ceasefire ranged between 66 and 232 per year. This is significantly lower overall than 13 other countries listed. 'Battle-related deaths...', World Bank,

http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.BTL.DETH?order=wbapi_data_value_2010+wbapi_data_value&sort=asc

¹³⁷ South et al (2010), p. 18

actors. Though any prioritisation of these softer strategic interests could also harm Myanmar’s evolution towards reconciliation and lasting peace, there is significantly more space for peacebuilding that supports these aims than in other contexts.

Perhaps one of the most comprehensive models for international interventions designed to help form social contracts in developing countries has come from the UNDP report ‘Governance for Peace: Securing the Social Contract’.¹³⁸ As the diagram in Figure 1 shows, three main areas in need of support are put forward, namely ‘responsive institutions’, ‘inclusive politics’, and ‘resilience of society to crisis’, which should be addressed via ‘partnerships’ between all stakeholders.



*Fig. 1 A framework for governance in fragile and conflict-affected settings*¹³⁹

While the specific forms of intervention put forward are not new or uncommon, this model emphasises the intricate relationship between these areas and the importance of sequencing peacebuilding programmes accordingly through a context-sensitive design.¹⁴⁰ While such design depends largely on a comprehensive needs assessment – like the JPNA – a crucial starting point is to determine how these areas relate to the key drivers of conflict and insecurity, to avoid the emergence of an over-expansive, or minimal but arbitrary, peacebuilding agenda. The following sections will therefore introduce and apply a

¹³⁸ UNDP (2012)

¹³⁹ Lifted from UNDP (2012) p.38

simple conflict analysis model to the KNU conflict, through which to undertake a deeper investigation into potential target areas for a 'social contract' approach.

4.2 Identifying the determinants of conflict and insecurity

During my research, local activists and NGO workers numerous times called for peacebuilding to focus on 'root causes'.¹⁴¹ While I concur with these sentiments – undoubtedly a peace that lasts beyond the specific agreements between today's elites depends on addressing core issues - I avoid the term 'root causes' as it has become clumsy and ill-defined and often refers to the initial cause of tensions, which are not always relevant in the modern context. As critics have argued, basing a strategy on such a broad concept has often led to poorly focused and ill-coordinated interventions.¹⁴² Instead, I will use an analysis model provided by Creative Associates International that more carefully differentiates between 'systemic' and 'proximate' determinants.¹⁴³

In essence **systemic** determinants are broad, often rooted in history, and shape considerably the lines upon which conflicts are formed. They are the prior causes of divisions between different groups and the disparities in their respective material circumstances. These deep-set structural challenges must be wholly understood but to some degree accepted as inevitable environmental realities when developing peacebuilding responses. They can be managed in ways that curb, or exacerbate, the potential for violent conflict or other deleterious by-products. It is in the approaches to this 'management' of underlying cleavages that we find more immediate **proximate** determinants. These include things like government policies, forms of social organisation, economic reform programmes, levels of militarisation, and levels of aid and its uses. Such a model allows us to balance the need to target the real causes of conflict below the surface, without falling into the trap of producing a long 'laundry-list' of all the country's peripheral problems.¹⁴⁴

4.3 Systemic determinants

Ethnic identities in Myanmar play a crucial role in forming its people's sense of self and society. These collective identities have been shaped and persistently reinforced by interactions with other groups, rendering them political overtime.¹⁴⁵ Above all systemic determinants of the KNU conflict are the tensions between ethnic elites over claims to patronage over populations and the way they should be governed. As Karen scholar Thawngmung has rightly argued, it is wrong to assume that entire ethnicities are at war with each other.¹⁴⁶ Essentially, while Bamar elites have claimed patronage over the Karen as a sub-group of the Myanmar nation, Karen elites have claimed such authority on the basis of their right to self-determination. While the KNU is viewed as more legitimate by much of the said population, the Government has a near monopoly on international legitimacy by virtue of its statehood. This primary contention, essentially a fight for the right to govern, remains at the heart of the conflict's many dimensions.

Collective ethnic identities in Myanmar were solidified, politicised and nationalised in the colonial era, having been seemingly transient for centuries. Avid ethnic categorisation regimes, followed by the

¹⁴¹ Interviews with Karen civil society workers and activists in Myanmar, June, July 2013; Thailand, August 2013

¹⁴² Lund (2003), p.16

¹⁴³ 'Understanding Conflict and Peace',

http://www.creativeassociatesinternational.com/CAIStaff/Dashboard_GIROAdminCAIStaff/Dashboard_CAIIAdminDatabase/resources/ghai/understanding.htm#concepts-c

¹⁴⁴ Lund (2003), p. 28

¹⁴⁵ Walton (2013), p.4

¹⁴⁶ Thawngmung (2012), p. 4

favouring of Christian Karen subjects for positions in the military, were among policies that heightened tensions, particularly between the Karen and their often subordinate Bamar counterparts.¹⁴⁷ Cleavages and tensions had always existed, not just along linguistic and cultural lines, but around distinctly divergent societal structures too, particularly between agrarian lowland kingdoms, and the mobile swidden communities of the hills and others in the intractable delta marshlands.¹⁴⁸ While these frictions, and frequent wars between kingdoms set the foundations for hostilities, ethnic identities remained somewhat protean and unattached to national struggles in the Westphalian sense during this period.¹⁴⁹

Across Southeast Asia, societies are structured not just around ethnic identities, but around deeply-respected hierarchies. In-depth analysis of this in Myanmar is not available, but studies on other Southeast Asian societies provide a solid overview that can be transferred.¹⁵⁰ Within families, explicit hierarchies are based on age and sometimes gender, while interactions with outsiders revolve around wealth, political position and other markers of status. This is reflected in Burmese language, with pronouns normatively indicative of age, being flexible to attribute status relationships between the addresser and the addressed.¹⁵¹ For those who receive such positions of status however, there is a responsibility to spread the wealth, which is mirrored by their karmically 'less fortunate' receivers in an onus to serve, and remain loyal to their patron. Collectives thus form mini-hierarchies, in which patrons gain status and power from their followers, while clients gain protection and the societal benefits of having connections, or *e-sa-tway*, further up the ladder. Consequently, as people groups in Myanmar became politicised and based on solidified notions of ethnicity, elites within these groups emerged as representatives of collective identities. It is the power politics between these elites, largely revolving around conflicts about how 'their' people should be governed, that has shaped the apparent divides upon which conflicts have been fought.

The Karen and the Bamar nationalist movements emerged in the late 1800s and early 1900s respectively, and following decades of oppression of the favoured Karen over the Bamar, they fought on opposite sides during World War II supporting the British and the Japanese respectively. Despite Karen appeals to the British for an independent Karen nation state,¹⁵² a centralised 'Burma' was formed in 1948. Following atrocities committed by the newly formed Tatmadaw against Karen populations, the KNU was formed and armed revolt got underway in full force. This persisted throughout Burma's brief period of democratic rule, only intensifying following the coup d'état of 1962, and continuing almost unflinchingly until January 2012.¹⁵³

This process saw tensions between ethnic groups become decidedly nationalistic, tied to alternate versions of history and conflicting visions of the future.¹⁵⁴ The following period exacerbated these cleavages immeasurably, as then dictator Ne Win began a military-led campaign to wipe out all insurgents and implement centralised one party rule.¹⁵⁵ Patronage systems tied to EAGs had become vast, providing groups with safe havens, and other considerable resources, presenting strategic challenges for the ruling regime. This and other strategic aims led to the implementation of the People's War Doctrine,

¹⁴⁷ Walton (2008), p.893

¹⁴⁸ Scott (2009)

¹⁴⁹ Walton (2013). P.2

¹⁵⁰ Concepts here have been taken from Chandler (1982), Richmond and Franks (2011), pp. 37-40 and 'Understanding Cambodia..' Dr. Judy Ledgerwood, <http://www.seasite.niu.edu/khmer/ledgerwood/patrons.htm>,

¹⁵¹ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ (kya. nau for males), and ကျွန်ုပ်မ (kya. ma.) are used as personal pronouns meaning 'your servant', while the addressed is referred to as မင်း (min; "your highness"), ခင်စလှော် (khang bya: "master lord")

¹⁵² Meaning 'land without evil' in Sgaw Karen language, Kawthoolei is the name given to an imagined future state by the Karen nationalist movement.

¹⁵³ Walton (2013), pp.9-10

¹⁵⁴ Walton (2008). pp.903-910

¹⁵⁵ Smith (1994), p.25

which aimed to mobilise large swathes of the population for military purposes; and the Four Cuts Strategy, which turned the focus of counterinsurgency (COIN) to the populations that supported EAGs.¹⁵⁶ This inaugurated practices that remained largely unchanged until the recent ceasefire, and have caused decades of human rights abuse.¹⁵⁷ Between just 1996 and the recent ceasefire, approximately 1600 villages were displaced in Karen conflict areas,¹⁵⁸ while destruction of food stores, laying of landmines in civilian areas, shoot-on-site policies, and demands for forced labour money or other goods were commonplace.¹⁵⁹

Resiliently, for decades, the KNU operated as de facto government throughout large portions of the country, as nationalist icons and primary patrons for Karen populations, providing rudimentary services through modern government-like departments.¹⁶⁰ Binary notions of politics and identity were only strengthened among populations as a state policy of ethnic, cultural and religious assimilation was undertaken in pursuit of forming 'a Burmese family of races', sharing one blood and history. Bamar rulers from thereon persistently declared all the country's groups to be 'based on the common blood of Union Kinship and Union Spirit'.¹⁶¹ Further, every state-run publication adorned the country's three national causes:¹⁶²

- Non-disintegration of the Union
- Non-disintegration of National Solidarity
- Consolidation of National Sovereignty

These are still seen in newspapers today, and remain on a 10-foot wide billboard in the heart of Hpa'an, the Kayin State capital.

By the early 1990s, a matured set of demands had been developed through a political alliance between EAGs, calling for a federal and fully democratic constitution, in line with their demands for both greater local autonomy and an end to Bamar military rule.¹⁶³ But with other ceasefires signed across the country,¹⁶⁴ the KNU had soon lost much of its territory,¹⁶⁵ outnumbered by some government offensives by 3 to 1, while over 50,000 of their subjects had fled to Thailand.¹⁶⁶ The military government also began implementing increasing numbers of large development projects, often displacing local populations or exploiting them for forced labour.¹⁶⁷

The dualistic political framings that had developed in Karen areas of Eastern Myanmar became challenged in the 90s and 2000s firstly as the KNU began splintering into various factions. The first was the Democratic Buddhist Army (DKBA), which formed primarily as a proxy for the government, fighting

¹⁵⁶ Maung Aung Myoe (2009), p. 23-25

¹⁵⁷ South (2011) pp. 12-13

¹⁵⁸ TBBC (2011), p.17; Total of Kayin, Bago, and roughly half of Tanintharyi and Mon, provides an extremely loose but indicative estimate.

¹⁵⁹ For example, KHRG, 'Landmines, Killings and Food Destruction: Civilian life in Toungoo District', 09/08/07 <http://www.khrg.org/khrg2007/khrg07f6.html>

¹⁶⁰ South (2011), p. 14

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Smith (1994) pp.18-19

¹⁶² Archived copies of the English-language New Light of Myanmar adorning the 'causes' can be found at: <http://www.myanmararchives.com/newspapers/?dir=/The-New-Light-of-Myanmar>

¹⁶³ Pro-democratic ethnic alliances have come and gone over the years, starting with the National Democratic Front in 1976; see Smith (1994), p. 27

¹⁶⁴ TNI (2009), pp.9-11

¹⁶⁵ South (2011), p. 14

¹⁶⁶ Smith (1994), p.45

¹⁶⁷ Callahan (2007), p. 19

directly against the KNU and soon surpassing it in power and wealth. This group has since splintered again, as more than half its battalions became Tatmdaw BGFs.¹⁶⁸ Prior to the 2010 election, 3 legal political parties were able to set up outside of direct government control, with one linked to the Tatmadaw, and another to the DKBA, all associating directly with Karen nationality.¹⁶⁹ Concomitant to this shrinking of the KNU clientage was inevitably an expansion of a 'quiet' demographic of Karen, mostly in government controlled regions, not attached to the KNU.¹⁷⁰ Nonetheless, even in government held areas, ethnic identities are deeply engrained and politicised, having become closely attached to the notion of resistance.¹⁷¹ In the Kayin State capital, and in Karen regions of outer Yangon, public and private premises can be seen showing Karen national flags and symbols.¹⁷²

In the east of the country, notable populations in the border areas continue to exist governed almost exclusively by the KNU, especially in Hpapun Township, while others in DKBA or BGF areas are tied primarily to local patronage networks more than overt relations with the state.¹⁷³ Indeed, while the BGFs have overall taken apolitical or much softer stances to national level politics compared with the KNU, they have often endeavoured to maintain local governance roles, sometimes publicly showing off their dissent for their Bamar commanders.¹⁷⁴ Thus, the remaining sociopolitical order in most Karen areas resembles Callahan's descriptions of Myanmar's other ceasefire areas in previous years. The state is generally viewed as predatory by masses and elites alike,¹⁷⁵ while patterns of coexistence are able to emerge, largely via commercial interests. In the more open and contested areas, efforts to protect some localised economic, cultural, or political interests have come at the price of accommodating a certain level of state expansion.¹⁷⁶

So how can an understanding of these systemic determinants shape approaches to peacebuilding? As this section has shown, the KNU conflict today revolves around power politics between elites over the governance of populations. While the Government claims patronage over the entire Karen population as a subgroup of the nation of Myanmar, numerous Karen factions attest to being more rightful leaders due to long established nationalist political framings and thus right to self-determination. It is these conditions that shape the conflict in Karen areas of Myanmar and that will inevitably shape the way in which a lasting social contract can take hold. Peacebuilding policy makers to an extent must accept three political realities in Karen areas of eastern Myanmar:

- The Myanmar government holds state power and is the dominant authority but is considered deeply illegitimate;
- Local Karen elites consider themselves as more legitimate, continue to hold arms and territories, and have greater – though not perfect – claims to legitimacy in the eyes of locals.
- Karen areas of the southeast have complex but firmly entrenched politico-societal structures, so do not represent a political vacuum, as some post-conflict theories would suggest.

First of all, these conclusions appear to confirm the validity of the UNDP's social contract model, displaying a need for investment in 'responsive institutions', 'inclusive politics', and 'resilience of society

¹⁶⁸ South (2011). p.19

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 27

¹⁷⁰ Thawngmung (2012), p. 1

¹⁷¹ Walton via South (2013), p. 4 via South (2011)

¹⁷² Observations: Yangon and Hpa'an,

¹⁷³ Interviews with armed actors and community members in 3 townships of Kayin State, Myanmar - June, July, 2013, and refugees and political leaders in Thailand – July, August 2013

¹⁷⁴ Interviews with a BGF deserter: Thailand June 2012

¹⁷⁵ Callahan (2007), p.18

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. p.39

to crisis', through 'partnerships' between all disaffected parties.¹⁷⁷ At the heart of the conflict is a severe disunity between the state, society and the rivaling elites between. This therefore requires efforts to bring the Government down towards the people through responsive institutions and inclusive politics, and perhaps more importantly, to empower disenfranchised parts society to assert their expectations of the state.

Central to context-sensitivity is the realisation that 'government structures are often not the most appropriate mechanisms to generate legitimate change that supports peacebuilding and statebuilding aspirations [while] informal institutions... may be viewed more positively'.¹⁷⁸ This requires interveners to respect and integrate local systems of order and authority as a matter of principle and encourage their peaceful integration into all sectors. While a social contract depends on trust building between the state and the population, local elites (regardless of their perceived legitimacy in foreign eyes) must be respected and included from the bottom-up if further conflict is to be avoided. Perhaps more crucially, this background of the conflict shows that to ensure that peace lasts beyond the current generation of elites, society as a whole must be included, presenting a need to engage local civil society and other informal institutions.

It is in the proximate causes, detailed next, that we find the more immediate exacerbating factors that perpetuate conflict and the associated governance crises. Therein lie the primary issues that should be targeted to begin bridging divides and facilitating peaceful dialogue surrounding sensitive nodes of tension. Analysis of these issues will also provide guidance for determining a logical sequence of these interventions.

4.4 Proximate determinants

Drawing guidance from the UNDP model introduced in Section 4.1, this section will analyse evolving tensions in four problematic areas of the relationships between the state, society and various armed factions. These are:

- Militarisation
- Governance
- Development
- Social Services

Determined via the collection of qualitative data from eight townships affected by the KNU conflict, these areas appear the most critical not just to bringing an end to conflict but also to addressing the primary security concerns of local populations. In some cases, they are at risk of being worsened by the peace process's current trajectory. In aid of the evolution of a social contract, interventions must be sensitive both in working to alleviate, and in avoiding inadvertently exacerbating existing tensions. While ordinary aid programmes will need to be mindful of these tensions to ensure a 'Do No Harm' approach, successful peacebuilding will need to be built around them from the base up. The long-term success of initiatives will depend on the strengthening of state-society relations in these areas in a manner that fosters a more cohesive political and security environment.

A common aim of peacebuilding interventions is to provide society with a 'peace dividend', which can take on the form of any tangible benefit provided as a result of the peace. This is used to get society

¹⁷⁷ UNDP (2012), p. 38

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p.47

behind the peace process, and ensure it lasts beyond current agreements.¹⁷⁹ Such a provision could be very effective in Myanmar if it is able to address the most critical threats faced by conflict-affected communities. However, as this section will show, there are many risks to providing even the most innocuous forms of support, especially via the state. This highlights further the need for careful sequencing appreciative of local perceptions of society's relationship with the state or other elite actors. Genuine improvements to society's overall experience of the state in these four areas will provide the most effective and tangible 'peace dividend'.

Militarisation

An ever-aggressive posture from the Tatmadaw near KNU areas remains the primary determinant of ongoing insecurity and conflict. Sceptics within the KNLA have pointed to demilitarisation as a prerequisite for trust building¹⁸⁰ while local civilians highlighted it as the primary source of ongoing insecurity, depleting faith that the ceasefire will hold for more than a year or two.¹⁸¹ Despite these deep concerns, there is no indication that any peacebuilding programme aims to address the issue.

In and around the KNU's main stronghold, its 5th Brigade in Hpapun Township, Kayin State, KNLA intelligence reported that since the ceasefire 13 new outposts, have been built, while 13 other sites have been readied to station combat helicopters and bamboo fortifications at all bases are being replaced with concrete. Mi-35 Hind helicopters, are seen regularly by KNLA soldiers and local civilians, mounted with machine guns, while bomb tests are being carried out by Karakorum jets.¹⁸² The government's military budget has continued to increase year-on-year too,¹⁸³ while new strategic partnerships are formed with Western countries,¹⁸⁴ and large-scale procurements from old partners seem afoot,¹⁸⁵ causing much alarm among the KNLA's most resilient and battle hardened factions.¹⁸⁶

The perceived threats to civilian populations were made starkly clear through two PRM sessions in the area, where there is no history of Bamar rule. In one community, fear of being shot was considered the most severe threat alongside a more general fear of the Tatmadaw building up at time that the local (KNU) leadership appears weaker. As one man who had been displaced numerous times in his life explained 'Nothing has changed for villagers. We are still being shot at, we are still at risk and they are getting stronger.'¹⁸⁷ In the other session, strategic gains being made by the Tatmadaw were considered the second highest risk, with particular mention of its improving international defence relationships. A young teacher from Thandaunggyi Township, pointed to the rebuilding of camps, and combat helicopter tests in villagers' sights, as clear indicators of the military's expansion and lack of will for 'real peace'.

¹⁷⁹ UNPBSO (2012)

¹⁸⁰ Interviews: KNLA commanders, Kayin State, Myanmar June 2013

¹⁸¹ PRM 1, see Appendix 5 and PRM 2, see Appendix 6

¹⁸² Discussions with KNLA personnel and local residents in KNU territory, undisclosed location, June 2013, Bomb tests also reported in 'Military's bombing practice terrifies villagers', 20/06/12, <http://karennews.org/2013/06/militarys-bombing-practice-terrifies-villagers.html/> Further insight into the skepticism within parts of the KNLA can also be found in <http://karennews.org/2013/09/knu-gen-baw-kyaw-heh-exposes-how-ceasefire-agenda-has-shifted-to-business.html/>

¹⁸³ While the proportion of total spending has been decreased, overall spending has increased, leading to an overall rise in defence budget. See From 'Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - Southeast Asia', Section: Defence Budget: Country: Myanmar, <https://janes.ihs.com/CustomPages/Janes/DisplayPage.aspx?DocType=Reference&ItemId=+++1305060> and 'Myanmar military handed \$2.4 billion budget', Global Post, 06/03/13

<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/afp/130306/myanmar-military-handed-24-billion-budget>

¹⁸⁴ See footnote 63

¹⁸⁵ 'Burma's Military Chief Observes Fighter Jet Production in Russia', Irrawaddy, 27/06/13, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/38717>

¹⁸⁶ Interviews with KNLA commanders from various brigades, June 2013, undisclosed location

¹⁸⁷ PRM 2, see Appendix 6; Further details on a nearby shooting that villagers referred to are available in 'Villager shot and killed in Papun District', KHRG, 02/10/12, <http://www.khrg.org/khrg2012/khrg12b78.html>

'People still aren't daring to rebuild their houses because they are always worried,' he said, 'they know, that if the ceasefire breaks it will be worse than before.'¹⁸⁸

Throughout all levels of the KNLA too, the strategic gains being made by the Tatmadaw have deepened mistrust of the process. For those holding stable territories, who prior to the ceasefire had dedicated soldiers' lives and significant resources to isolating Tatmadaw positions from resupply, the ceasefire's inherent moratorium on ambushes and laying of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and landmines was considered a severe strategic blow. This has contributed to emerging rifts within the KNU/KNLA, that deepened as the Tatmadaw was not only able to strengthen its own defences, but began conducting reconnaissance missions in areas where they have previously never had access.¹⁸⁹ As one KNLA Captain explained, 'we now feel more under threat than ever before, because in the past there were many places they could not go. Now, even if they are in our sights, we just have to watch them.'¹⁹⁰ Though there have been huge reductions since the ceasefire, skirmishes have taken place numerous times around the KNLA's main stronghold, its 5th Brigade, between the KNLA and Tatmadaw or BGF forces.¹⁹¹ While a verbal agreement has been made, there is yet to be a settlement on a code of conduct outlining specific provisions for troop movements, supply routes and access to civilian areas, which has led to persistent disagreements over who is to blame for clashes. In other brigade areas, where the KNLA has been isolated for years, these fears were pronounced, with battalion commanders deeming the current period as a final blow.¹⁹²

While resolution of these military-to-military frictions depends primarily on improved negotiations between the two armies, alleviating the state of fear in which local communities remain will be more complex. As UNDP notes 'The development of professional, impartial, and capable security forces is critical for sustaining peace in the long-term'.¹⁹³ Pervasive militarisation has been noted by peacebuilding actors as one of many concerns,¹⁹⁴ and the MPC acknowledged that the military's 'approach on the ground is different to how the government talks,' adding that 'it's like the Tatmdaw doesn't respect the ceasefire.' But there has been no explicit discussion of working towards security sector reform, or even direct advocacy on the basis of human rights, war crimes or other relevant areas of international laws or norms. Top-down and bottom-up support from peacebuilding actors is therefore crucial to make even the most rudimentary achievements in ensuring local security. Without such improvements in this most critical area, all efforts to provide a peace dividend will be severely undermined.

Governance

Governance has arguably been the primary area of contention throughout the history of the KNU conflict. Essentially, stark disagreements over who has right to govern 'the Karen' population, and how they should be governed have formed the basis of the conflict, and thus must form a crucial part of the peace agreement. For solutions to last beyond the current generation of elites, governance structures must be inclusive and legitimate if they are to encourage populations to remain committed to the social contract.

¹⁸⁸ PRM 1, see Appendix 5

¹⁸⁹ Interviews with KNLA commanders of various ranks, undisclosed location, June 2013

¹⁹⁰ Interview with KNLA captain, undisclosed location, June 2013

¹⁹¹ 'BGF and KNLA grenades...', KHRG, 05/07/13,

<http://www.khrg.org/khrg2013/khrg13b42.pdf>; 'KNU army and Govt's...', Karen News, 21/08/13

http://karennews.org/2013/08/knu-army-and-govts-militia-clash-both-sides-blame-each-other-for-shooting-first.html/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=knu-army-and-govts-militia-clash-both-sides-blame-each-other-for-shooting-first; 'Karen fighters and Burma Army'. Karen News, 16/03/13, <http://karennews.org/2012/03/karen-fighters-and-burma-army-soldiers-killed-over-ceasefire-breach.html/>

¹⁹² Interview with 2 KNLA battalion commanders, undisclosed location, June 2013

¹⁹³ UNDP (2012), p.87

¹⁹⁴ MIMU (2013), p.12

Indeed as the UNDP notes, as 'the most visible form of engagement between fractured states and societies, [local governance] also tends to be the most incendiary.'¹⁹⁵

The 2008 constitution provides for ministries and legislatures at the region/state level, but they have very little influence as the central government assumes total control over security and law enforcement, large-scale industry, imports and exports, judicial matters, education and curricula, management of development of border areas, as well as the power to void any state laws if they conflict with those of Union.¹⁹⁶ 'Chief Ministers' of each region/state are elected by the central legislature,¹⁹⁷ while the military directly appoints one third of the local legislatures and local Ministers of Defence, Border Affairs, and Home Affairs.¹⁹⁸ These are among the legal obstructions to a governance structure in line with the KNU's demands for greater local autonomy. At the grassroots level, however, grievances exist over more intricate issues, among the KNU and the population as a whole.

To gain populations' trust in the transitions taking place, this period is crucial for the government. As one internally displaced man said, 'The Bamar are good at speaking smoothly but we know they won't really change. They say many things but they only actually do 10%.' Guarantees that tangible change will come, and improve the situation for the following generation, must be provided through institutionalised guarantees. KNU members and civilians have stated numerous times that they like the language of Their Sein and Aung Min.¹⁹⁹ But until there is notable institutional change that can be felt at a local level, this will not earn total confidence. During my research, this was noted by a member of the MPC, and a dissident Karen peace activist alike, providing hope for a mutual goal in a crucial area.²⁰⁰ In the fostering of such an institutional environment, 'balanced support to both public institutions and beneficiary communities' is key to ensuring its legitimacy.²⁰¹

However, on the ground, recent evolutions of governance systems have been perceived as domineering, subversive and dishonest. As Tatmadaw and government officials have been allowed free reign into former KNU territories in numerous townships, they have begun setting up salary regimes with village, district and township heads. Associated 'administration training', has reportedly given them a new set of responsibilities to the region/state level governments.²⁰² These village heads come through traditional systems, often hereditary and sometimes elected locally. Other villagers are being hired as staff for the Border Affairs Ministry, and Immigration among others, creating tensions in some communities.²⁰³ While state presence in previously untouched areas could be seen as a positive development, the methods being used are exacerbating tensions.

During one PRM session, these political changes were listed as the 4th most severe threat to their security, specifically due to fears that the local systems would become less resilient and more vulnerable if conflict starts again.²⁰⁴ One teacher said, 'as we see all of this, we can clearly see the Karen system being broken down'. Another teacher explained that 'soldiers are also going around in civilian clothes asking questions and so on. They now know everything about our local leadership structure.' These fears point to a need

¹⁹⁵ UNDP (2012), p.54

¹⁹⁶ 2008 Constitution, pp.181-187

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. p.104

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. pp. 85-86

¹⁹⁹ Interviews with KNLA commanders of various ranks, undisclosed location, June 2013; Interviews with a retired teacher in Hpa'an, July 2013

²⁰⁰ MPC representative, Yangon, June 2013; Karen peace activist, Chiang Mai, August 2013

²⁰¹ UNDP (2012), p.45

²⁰² Interviews with teachers from Thandaunggyi, Hlaingbwe, Hpa'an, Hpapun, Thaton Townships; Local NGO worker in Hpa'an; KNLA commanders from Kawkereik and Kyainseikgyi

²⁰³ Interview with local NGO workers, Myanmar, 2013

²⁰⁴ PRM 2, see Appendix 6

for greater transparency and respect for local societal structures, and perhaps more importantly further institutional guarantees that ceasefires will hold and that lasting change will come. As populations remain isolated from the political process, there are few channels for this confidence to be built. Encouragingly, an MPC representative acknowledged, 'local people just see the same old military leaders in a new uniform, so we need to show them the system has really changed, and that these [former commanders] now have to answer to a different rule set.'²⁰⁵

Perhaps more than the other 3 determinants, governance issues depend almost wholly on local actors. However, the empowerment of local communities through citizenship training, and other programmes that help open channels at a local level to influence governance structures could provide a crucial early step to forming a social contract. Currently, avenues are opening up at a local level via government recognised organisations such as the Myanmar Red Cross, the Fire Brigade, as well political parties but must be opened further from the bottom-up.²⁰⁶ In KNU areas, the organisation's involvement in such processes too will be crucial to reconciliation at a local level. As is typical, for peacebuilding actors working in the area of local governance, there is a stark need for 'acknowledgment of multiple, overlapping, and highly localized cleavages and political economies.'²⁰⁷

Development

Development programmes are often seen as a crucial part of the post-conflict peacebuilding process and already appear central to some initiatives in Myanmar, especially those being implemented by the Japanese Government. However, development has been an extremely contentious area of engagement between Myanmar's armed actors in recent decades, and new projects have caused alarm among marginalized Karen populations.

The forceful control of access to resources and trade opportunities has for centuries been used by elites in these areas to form fiefdoms and mobilise populations for their aims and coopt other centres of power.²⁰⁸ In modern times this tradition has effectively continued in a context where the current constitution provides the state as 'ultimate owner of all lands and all natural resources above and below the ground, above and beneath the water and in the atmosphere.'²⁰⁹ All over the country, armed actors under ceasefires maintain profit-sharing deals with the government, while community-based development is scarce.²¹⁰

Particularly chaotic war economies have developed in Karen areas of the Southeast, driven largely by leaders of breakaway factions, as well as the KNU in some areas.²¹¹ Other KNU areas remained more isolated, particularly in mountainous northern Karen State, which has further widened already divergent worldviews between various brigades. To simplify, the KNU/KNLA in Hpapun and Thandaunggyi townships, and other pockets along the border have favoured and achieved greater isolation, while others have become more adept at developing business relations with state-linked actors. This has widened tensions within the organisation significantly, with the former faction and some executive KNU politicians emphasising the need for a political solution with the government before major development can begin.²¹² The other faction, primarily representing the areas most integrated into the national

²⁰⁵ Interview with MPC representative, Yangon, Myanmar. June 2013

²⁰⁶ Interview with a citizenship trainer; Hpa'an, Myanmar. July 2013

²⁰⁷ UNDP (2012), p.54

²⁰⁸ South (2011), p. 34

²⁰⁹ 2008 Constitution, p.10

²¹⁰ Kramer (2009), p.22-23

²¹¹ South (2011), p. 19-23

²¹² Jolliffe (2012b)

economy, have persistently argued that engaging in development plans is crucial to improving livelihoods and welfare.²¹³

Nonetheless, over the past decade all areas became sites of extraction, as Tatmadaw strategies evolved to secure road networks and project locations, while keeping peripheral regions in a state of chaos through arbitrary civilian-targeted attacks, adding significantly to existing human security crises.²¹⁴ Extractive industries and commercial agriculture have been major causes of displacement and land confiscation,²¹⁵ mostly by the government and its proxies.²¹⁶ Despite increases in development, poverty remains endemic in rural South East Myanmar, with 59% living in poverty, 75% without clean drinking water, 50% without sanitation facilities.²¹⁷ Since the ceasefire, major investments in primary industries have continued, and the rate of land acquisitions by foreign companies in all the Karen areas of the Southeast have intensified.²¹⁸ As a result, local communities have experienced land confiscation, displacement, and damage to livelihoods among other threats to their physical security.²¹⁹

At one PRM session in KNU territory, fears of harmful development were a central theme, as land confiscation and displacement from hydropower dam construction were listed as the first and third most severe security concerns, having increased since the ceasefire.²²⁰ Generally, people said they were happy that they finally had peace, and could move freely, but were concerned that the arrival of companies from central Myanmar and abroad would transform the order once again. 'The Tatmadaw can now move around our areas freely,' said one teacher from Hlaingbwe area. 'They are confiscating land and going around villages with businessmen and talking to village heads'. Another said that since businessmen can now meet the KNU legally, closer relationships are forming which locals worry will lead to more business that's 'not good for the people'.

Clearly, such projects provoke particular dissent as their benefits are not locally distributed. Hydropower dams for example have persistently been initiated for export of power to Thailand, despite local dependence on candles and firewood. In one PRM session where armed conflict had been minimal for over a decade, lack of electricity was found to be the primary security concern, and was being exacerbated by the acquisition of nearby forests for agribusiness, restricting their access to firewood.²²¹ This dilemma is illustrative of an acute lack of inclusive development, and the predatory nature of business and large-scale development in these areas.

Persistently villagers stated a need for development, but that they were suspicious of any plans coming from central Myanmar, and stated a greater need for guarantees for their security so they could make progress with their own development plans. As one villager from Hpapun Township remarked, 'if they [the Bamar leaders] are allowing it, it cannot be good for us... we do not need them to develop our areas, we just want to be sure they will not destroy what we build, then we can develop ourselves.'²²² This was iterated by a respected community leader in Hpa'an, who said 'they just need peace... If they are provided with basic human security, they can develop themselves.'²²³

²¹³ Jolliffe, Kim, 'Swords into Ploughshares', 29/03/12, Mzine+; *Not available online*

²¹⁴ KHRG (2007), p.16

²¹⁵ TBBC (2006), pp.18-19

²¹⁶ KHRG (2008), p.35-36

²¹⁷ Buchanan, Kramer and Woods (2013), p.16

²¹⁸ KHRG (2013), p.19

²¹⁹ Ibid. pp.10-11

²²⁰ PRM 1, see Appendix 5 and PRM 2, see Appendix 6

²²¹ PRM 3, see Appendix 7

²²² PRM 1, see Appendix 5

²²³ Interview with local civil society leader; Hpa'an, Myanmar, July 2013

There were also fears of development providing strategic benefits to the Tatmadaw. With specific mention of those being built with support from the Japanese Government as part of a USD 7.9 million project,²²⁴ roads were seen as threatening as they improved Tatmadaw access to areas currently insulated by difficult terrain. This is unsurprising given decades of clear linkages between the building of roads and state oppression, as shoot-on-sight directives have ensured villagers are unable to use them safely, while they are used primarily to deploy troops and supplies.²²⁵

International actors have a determining role to play in how development is carried out in these regions, and thus hold significant responsibility for how these complexes are managed. The central message from communities that security was needed before they feel confident in new development plans is central to ensuring a smooth transition to peace. Civil society initiatives addressing these issues range from land rights training, to support for locally led community-based development projects.²²⁶

Social services

Since the ceasefire, social services become a battleground for influence. Throughout decades of neglect by the government, local services provided in KNU areas were routinely targeted with violent attacks by the Tatmadaw.²²⁷ Since 2012, however, these areas have become the site of extensive government-related and INGO initiatives, largely with international backing, causing a great deal of suspicion as to their intentions. In the most isolated regions, even INGOs operating under Government MoUs have been treated with scepticism by KNU/KNLA leaders on the ground, and have been turned away. Villagers in these areas have in some cases reacted with equal suspicion, but in others have complained to KNU leaders for denying them such support.²²⁸ Prior to the ceasefire, greater isolation allowed proliferation of rudimentary services provided by KNU departments and associated civil society. Now these areas could become the most neglected.

Further, direct competition is being fomented as the Government has begun offering higher salaries to local teachers and medics who have been trained and supported over decades by KNU-linked community based organisations (CBOs).²²⁹ According to a senior teacher trainer from a local CBO, extreme poverty is the primary cause as people need the extra money, even if they would rather remain working for the locally system with local curriculum and local language. Nevertheless, he saw their advances as a threat, stating, 'Even during wartime, we did many things for our community. They never cared about us before, only about themselves. If we let them do this now, they will destroy our culture.'²³⁰ A teacher from Thandaunggyi Township felt such support was disingenuous, claiming 'They just want to treat us as babies.'²³¹ Somewhat alarmingly, in one displaced community currently supported by local relief CBOs, new NGOs serving 'Bamar interests' were considered the third highest security threat currently faced, above the growth of business, landmines, and lack of livelihoods among others.²³² Supposed corruption, and general mal-intent were stated as the main reasons.

²²⁴ JICA, 'Grant Agreement for...', 22/03/13, http://www.jica.go.jp/english/news/press/2012/130322_01.html

²²⁵ KHRG (2007) p.27

²²⁶ Interviews with civil society activists and volunteers in Hpa-an, July 2013

²²⁷ For example, see 16 attacks on healthcare and education facilities in 2010-2011: 'Attacks on Health and Education', KHRG, 06/12/13, <http://www.khrg.org/khrg2011/khrg1105.html>

²²⁸ PRM 1, see Appendix 5 and PRM 2, see Appendix 6; Interview with NGO worker in Hpa'an

²²⁹ Interviews with 3 teachers, and 2 NGO workers in Kayin State, June-July 2013

²³⁰ Teacher trainer, PRM 6

²³¹ Teacher, PRM 2, see Appendix 6

²³² PRM 2 - UNDISCLOSED KNU/KNLA TERRITORY, JUNE 2013

The harshest criticism came from the most isolated KNU-dominated areas, where alternative, though basic services are in place. In other regions, improved services have been dearly sought after, and where provided much more welcome, but not without complications. According to one civil society leader in Hpa'an, 'we are seeing little genuine support from INGOs. They are concerned primarily with the completion of their projects rather than if they have had a real humanitarian impact.'²³³ According to a non-local Myanmar national working for an INGO in Kayin State, 'the people in most areas are scared the government will attack again, and are cautious of all NGO projects, but don't want to [aggravate the authorities] so just tell us to do whatever we have been told to do by the authorities'.²³⁴ A local working for a different INGO admitted that foreign leaders see this stage as mostly about building trust with the government so are paying little attention to what 'people really need', and more to government requirements.²³⁵

INGOs are certainly in a difficult position. Working under official MoUs they are required to submit detailed proposals and ensure everything goes through licit channels in the eyes of the government. The MPC has facilitated this considerably as a conduit for such support to local organisations, and has encouragingly acknowledged the need for previously illicit actors to become licit. One MPC representative stated, 'in many cases, medics [operating under the KNU] are better than even the doctors in our cities,' and pointed primarily to logistical and bureaucratic hurdles that needed to be overcome. However, some local activists suspect the MPC of aiming to position itself as the funnel for all humanitarian support, to keep it close to the state and associated with the government, so any support coming from the government is likely to be met with continued suspicion by KNU leaders in the most isolated areas.²³⁶ Restrictions and micro-management enforced by local Chief Ministers represent further obstacles, especially in Kayin State, where Minister Zaw Min has become known to NGOs to 'act like the king' and be extremely restrictive to organisations proposing to work in KNU areas.²³⁷ In order to build responsive institutions, the UNDP emphasises working explicitly with traditional authorities and purposefully integrating local stakeholders into a coherent strategy.²³⁸

²³³ Interview with civil society leader, Hpa'an, July 2013

²³⁴ Interview with Myanmar national INGO worker, Yangon, July 2013

²³⁵ Interview with local Karen INGO worker, July 2013x

²³⁶ Interview with Karen peace activist, Thailand, July 2013

²³⁷ Interviews with local Karen INGO worker, Myanmar national NGO worker, local Karen managerial NGO worker, July 2013

²³⁸ UNDP (2012), p.47

5. Conclusion

International peacebuilding is influenced by a number of international and local objectives. The broad aims of many donor countries and policymakers are closely related to their economic and security agendas, both of which depend on a more stable global environment, defined by capable states integrated into the international community. These priorities, alongside the imperative of ensuring local security, have often minimalised the aims of peacebuilding to focus on the drawdown of conflict, with a few improvements in governance tagged on. This supports détente strategies of state actors, to encourage tensions to slowly dissolve over time, as the statebuilding process takes place.

The KNU peace process shows signs of being stagnated and drawn out without dealing promptly with the underlying antagonisms between armed actors. Therefore, progress depends on what takes place within the space provided by a fragile ceasefire, to improve the political and security order. Due to a lack of urgency on the security front, and the softer nature of present international strategic interests, there appears to be room for a more sophisticated approach to peacebuilding than is typical. This should work from the base up to facilitate the forming of a social contract between the government, aggrieved elites and the much neglected conflict-affected populations, in order to provide a lasting solution beyond today's generation of leaders. The upcoming JPNA provides a critical opportunity for peacebuilding to be developed from early on around this broader aim.

An analysis of the 'systemic determinants' of the KNU conflict brought forward some crucial contextual factors that must be properly understood and respected by intervening actors. These revolved around the perceived illegitimacy of the state in conflict-affected areas, and its engrained role as a symbol of oppression. Also, the complexity of the political environment is critical to understand, eroding any notions that a political vacuum has been created due to conflict and the lack of state authority. Rather, the KNU and other EAGs have – legitimately or illegitimately – become the primary local authorities, and main providers of services. To try and bypass these existing systems would be unwise if not impossible. In fostering a social contract, UNDP has noted the importance of working integrating and enhancing traditional systems of governance and authority to ensure the legitimacy and sustainability of programmes.

Exploration of 'Proximate Determinants' then showed that overt and covert forms of conflict and insecurity continue to plague the Karen areas of the Southeast on a range of issues, and that populations continue to live in a state of fear. It also showed that the common "go to" peacebuilding areas of development and provision of services, are at the heart of the conflict, and if not administered carefully could exacerbate tensions significantly. This requires extreme sensitivity to the various systems of power as well as existing community support structures. If overlooked, there are risks not only of peacebuilding failing to get society behind the peace process, but also of tensions with the KNU/KNLA being pushed to the max and obstructing further progress towards peace.

The primary responsibility for change surrounding the key drivers of conflict and insecurity lies with the state, more than other conflict actors. While this could appear biased, such an asymmetrical focus is necessary given the current deficiency of state legitimacy in the target region, and the extent which the Tatmadaw's approach to COIN is responsible for the area's abject insecurity. While statebuilding and institution strengthening are typically prioritised when addressing structural factors in conflict-torn countries, this is extremely risky unless there is a bedrock of trust.²³⁹ Here, the emphasis must be placed on sequencing to ensure that support that promotes the state's agenda or aims to legitimise it, is not provided without considerable trust-building having taken place. For example, where the construction of

²³⁹ OECD (2008), p.30

roads is seen primarily as a threat, related to decades of local experience protection and guarantees must be provided to communities first.

Supporting the state to reach out and provide a 'peace dividend' to society by way of improved social services is commonly presented by peacebuilding theorists as one way to build this confidence.²⁴⁰ But even this is highly risky to long-term stability unless it is able to tackle the actual determinants of the state's perceived illegitimacy. This indicates that while peacebuilding actors understandably have to work closely with the state, increased internal and external pressure on these principal spoiler issues is also necessary for peacebuilding to be effective. This might require greater attention to civil society programmes providing coping mechanisms and local protection strategies as well as those aiming to open up channels for advocacy and lobbying from below. At the state level, this could also require the taking of a firm approach with government parties requesting more money for peacebuilding and other development programmes. Newly formed defence relationships with the West may open channels to probe these issues over time.

Thus far, while some peacebuilders have engaged directly with EAGs and civil society in KNU areas, even they have steered clear of the most sensitive issues. Meanwhile the majority have worked primarily to support the aims government and even the military. This hesitance to push the boundaries appears largely attached to the view that President Thein Sein is struggling to control the military and that progress in all other areas of engagement is dependent on sensitivity towards his struggle to manage 'hardliners' within the military elite.²⁴¹ While this is an understandable challenge, without significant improvements with regards to these primary local security concerns, the chances of providing a much emphasised 'peace dividend', seems somewhat elusive. It also brings into question persistent references in peacebuilding rhetoric to the importance of the 'fostering respect for human rights'.²⁴²

Perhaps most worryingly it indicates a severe risk that the Bamar military elite will continue to dedicate its own resources to strengthening its grip on power, while international aid provides a veneer of peace and token improvements in arbitrary areas of governance. This has largely been the case in nearby Cambodia where billions of USD dedicated to international peacebuilding efforts have helped to keep armed conflict at a minimum but have allowed Hun Sen to consolidate his grip on power, 'paralyse' democratic government and civil society and remain in office for 28 years.²⁴³

A 'social contract' approach to peacebuilding should be engaged by all international actors in coordination. Much guidance can be taken from the UNDP model outlined in UNDP (2012), while more intricate guidance has been provided above. In summary, interventions should work to support top-down and bottom-up efforts to improve relations between the state, society and rivaling elites and to promote their integration into a more secure political and security and environment with clear agreements on power-sharing and authority. The legitimate use of force must ultimately be ceded to a legitimate and capable authority, while guarantees must be provided for the security and prosperity of all populations. This will depend on the empowerment of all marginalised parties and considerable concessions by all centres of power, particularly the state. Despite the political obstacles, if international actors fail to address the sensitive political and security issues driving conflict and insecurity, all other peacebuilding efforts risk being severely undermined.

²⁴⁰ UNPBSO (2012), p.2

²⁴¹ For commentary on this viewpoint, see: 'Tensions between Myanmar's Hardliners and Liberals', 13/02/13 http://www.asiasentinel.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4226&Itemid=370

²⁴² For example from the European Council, 'Council conclusions on the...', European Council, 22 July 2013, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/138272.pdf

²⁴³ Richmond and Franks (2011), pp. 24-27

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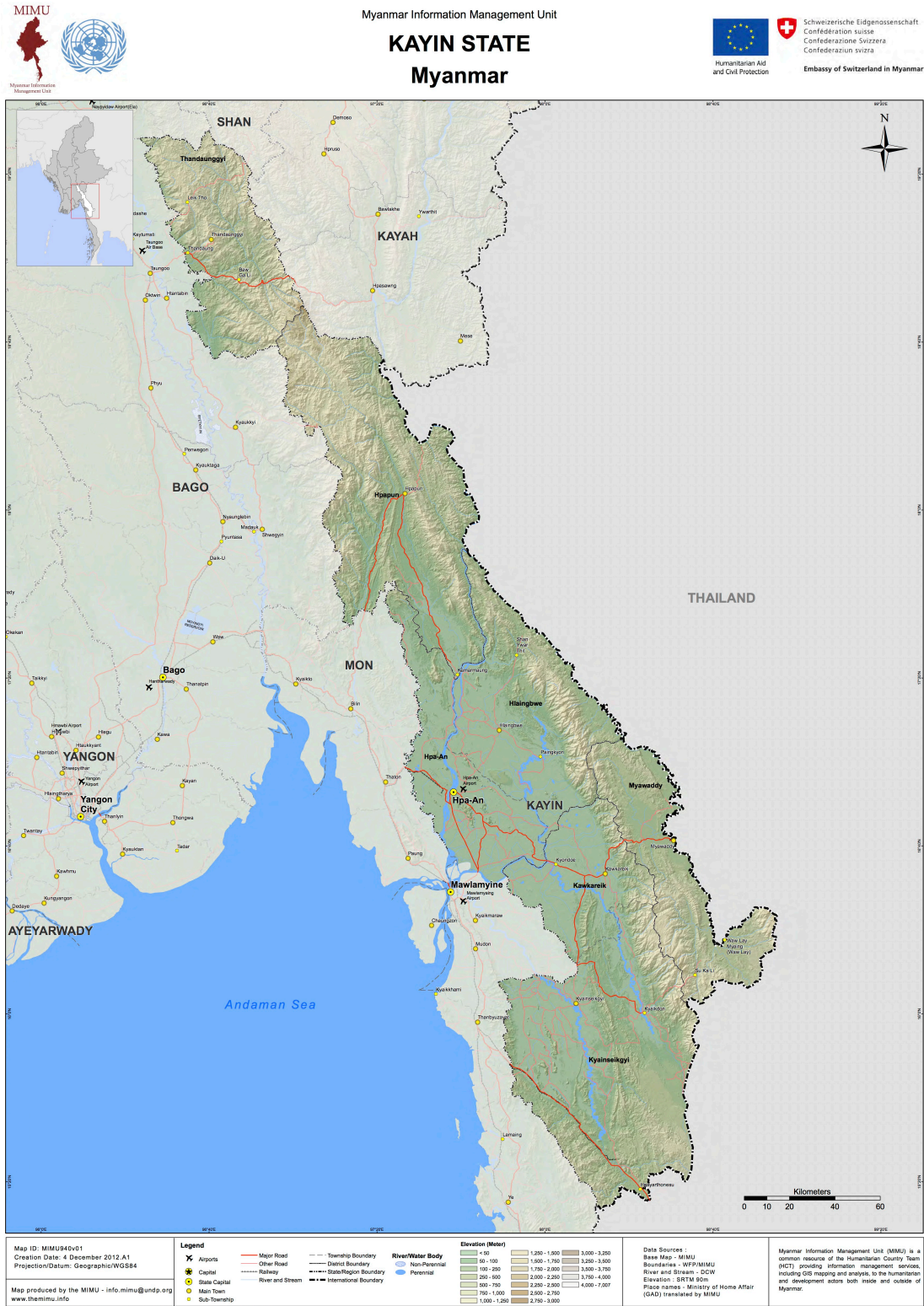
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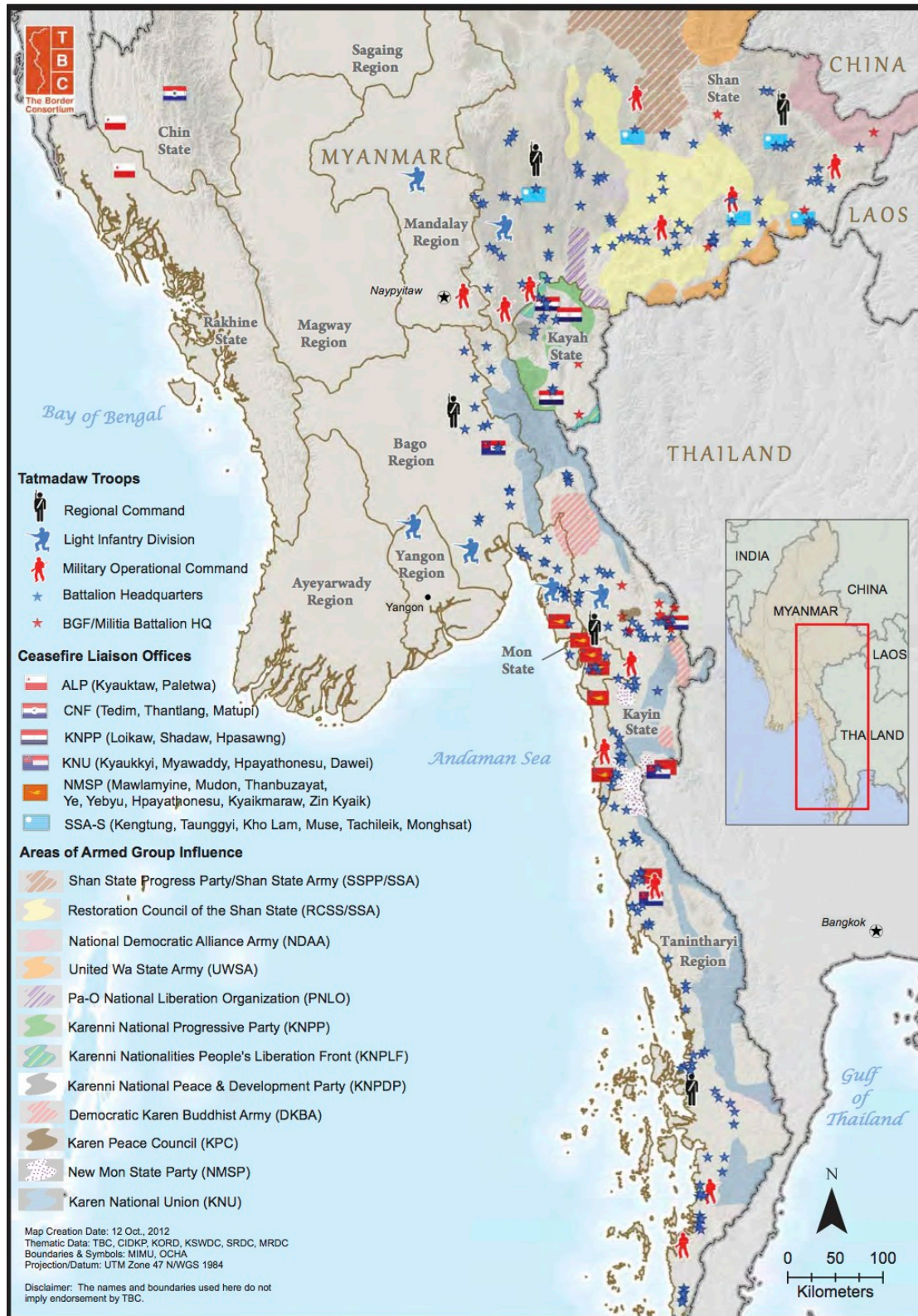
Appendices

Appendix 1: Map: Kayin State (and surrounding area) with official Township names (courtesy of Myanmar Information Management Unit)



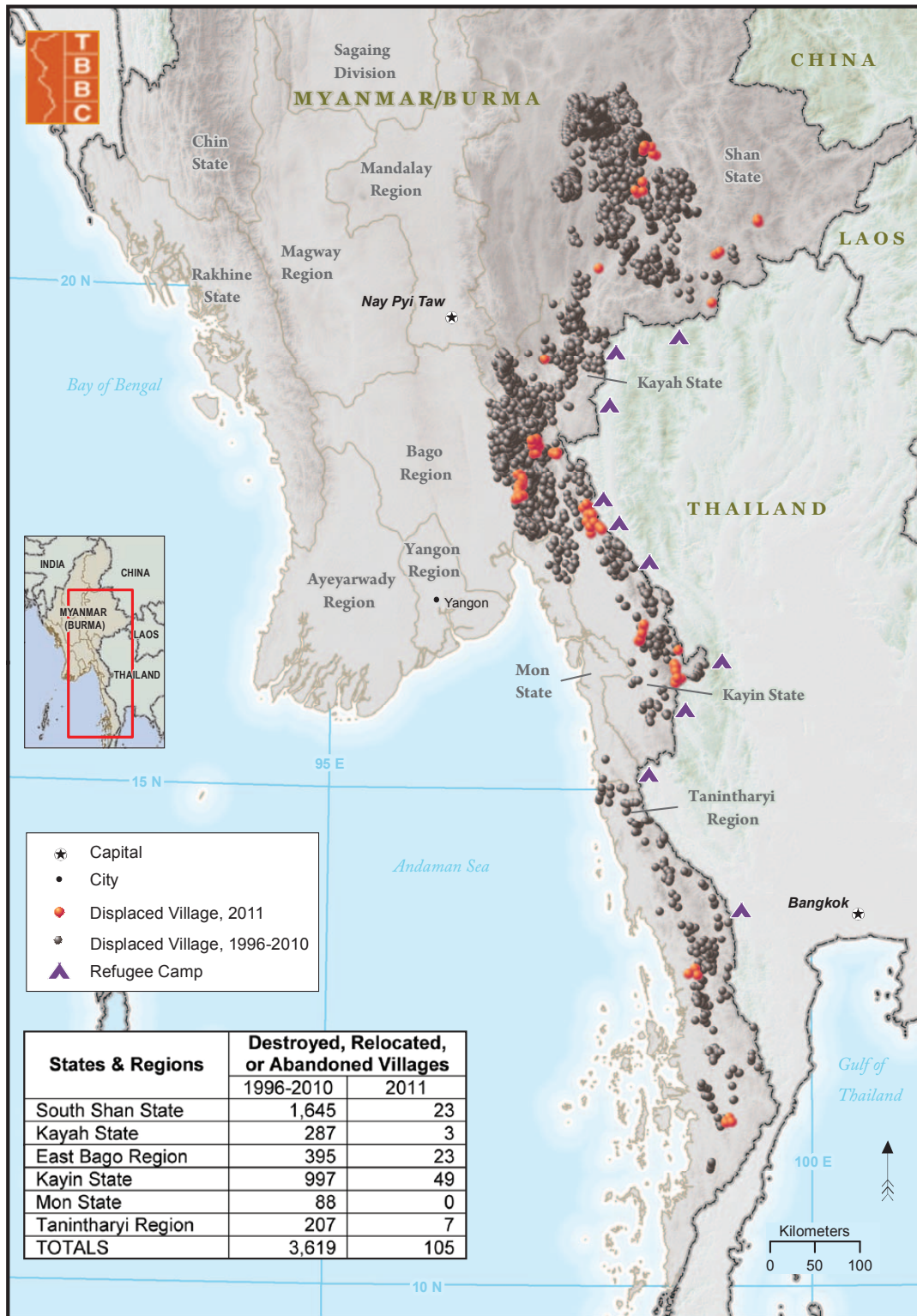
Appendix 2: Map: Contested Areas in South East Burma/Myanmar (courtesy of The Border Consortium)

Contested Areas in South East Burma/Myanmar



Appendix 3: Map: Displaced Villages in South East Burma / Myanmar 1996-2011 (courtesy of The Border Consortium)

Map 4 : Displaced Villages in South East Burma/Myanmar (1996-2011)



Appendix 4: Map: Large-scale development projects underway in Karen areas of the Southeast (courtesy of the Karen Human Rights Group)



Appendix 5: Participatory Ranking Methodology Session 1

Age range: Mid 20s - Mid 80s.

Gender breakdown: 5 Men and 2 Women.

Professions: Male teacher trainer, 2 young male teachers, 2 female teachers, elderly soldier

From locations: Thandauggyi Township, Hlaingbwe Township, Hpapun Township

Location profile: Heavily controlled by KNU/KNLA

What are the main threats to your safety and security where you live?

1. Land confiscation
2. Tatmadaw making strategic gains
3. Dam construction - displacement
4. Political changes taking place during the peace process are weakening our society so we will be less safe and less resilient to future problems.
5. Government offering higher salaries to teachers, and medics, and thus weakening our own structures and societies
6. Tatmadaw is building relations with the USA and the UK but is still friends with Russia and so on too.

Appendix 6: Participatory Ranking Methodology Session 2

Age range: Estimate 30-55

Gender breakdown: 5 Men and 3 Women.

Professions: All internally displaced people

From locations: Thandauggyi Township, Hlaingbwe Township, Hpapun Township, Kawkareik Township, Toungoo Township (Lived in PRM location for many years)

Location profile: Heavily controlled by KNU/KNLA

What are the main threats to your safety and security where you live?

1. **Tatmadaw shooting villagers, *joint with* Tatmadaw making strategic gains**
2. **No minority rights in law or in the constitution**
3. **International organisation funding depleted by corruption etc *joint with* NGO projects serve Bamar interests not ours (two issues ultimately considered to be the same thing)**
4. **Business growth will destroy our society and culture**
5. **Livestock, Gardens, Fields are destroyed at our homes (previous to ceasefire)**
6. **No Money or ways to make money**
7. **No guarantees that Burmese want genuine peace**
8. **Landmines and IEDs (mostly Tatmadaw but also KNU/KNLA's)**
9. **Shops are in the towns (very far from homes - if we go back).**

Appendix 7: Participatory Ranking Methodology Session 3

Age range: Estimate: mid 20s – mid 30s

Gender breakdown: 5 women

Professions: Farmers and housewives

From location: Undisclosed – ceasefire territory – mixed authority of Karen Border Guard Force and DKBA

What are the main threats to your safety and security where you live?

- 1. No electricity / Limited access to firewood due to confiscation of forests.**
- 2. Jobs/livelihoods**
- 3. BGF/drugs/gambling**
- 4. Lack of education**
- 5. Confiscation of forests (Bottom of list, as considered hopeless, as the businesses are 'too powerful')**