

Please note: This is a pre-publication draft and may contain some differences to the published version. For citation purposes, you should refer to Sadan, Mandy (2015) 'Myanmar: Ongoing conflict in Kachin State.' In: Singh, Daljit, (ed.), Southeast Asian Affairs 2015. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 246-259.

Ongoing Conflict in the Kachin State

Mandy Sadan

Background to the conflict

Even casual observers of the Myanmar political scene will be aware that one of the most difficult and enduring problems that continues to challenge the country's political transition is the need to find a resolution to the manifold conflicts that have taken place in the so-called 'ethnic' states.¹ One of the longest of these conflicts has been in the Kachin State, in the north of the country. The Kachin Independence Army was founded in 1961 and entered into armed conflict with the central military regime following General Ne Win's takeover of power in 1962. Although there were some attempts to broker ceasefires during the following decades, the fighting continued more or less without cessation until 1994, when an agreement to retain arms but refrain from violence was eventually signed. In June 2011, this ceasefire in turn collapsed after being in place for seventeen years and the conflict has since then remained stubbornly impervious to resolution. It is proving as difficult as ever it was in the past to find a way forward through negotiation, and the national peace process, centred upon the conclusion of a nationwide ceasefire with all principal ethnic armed groups as promoted by the national government, is floundering once more.²

It is a convention in almost any policy document or analysis of the Kachin conflict to begin with a longer history of the Kachin region, often invoking, too, a pseudo-anthropological interpretation of kinship and lineage as perennial markers of 'Kachin' identity and a means of explaining the nature of this enduring resistance. Typically, too, such analysis will describe the Kachin experience under colonial rule as a decisive factor in explaining the continuation of problems down to the present. This includes the political separation of the Frontier Areas from the rest, the military privileging of ethnic recruits into the colonial army and then the failure and ongoing symbolism of the Panglong Agreement of 1947.³ The agreement was signed by General Aung San and a number of elite representatives of 'ethnic minority' communities with the intention of facilitating the speedy withdrawal of British imperial power on the basis of a future commitment by the Burmese nationalist government to introducing a federal system.⁴ This over-arching historical narrative, which is used to explain the emergence and rationale of the Kachin conflict down to the present, is so well-rehearsed that it has become almost impossible to resist.

Yet there is a case for saying that the continued repetition of the same historical narrative to explain the Kachin conflict, and others, has served mainly to naturalise, even to normalise the prevalence of conflict in this region. As a result, more penetrating analysis of the present re-emergence of conflict in the Kachin region is often lacking because the causes are already felt to be known and understood. One outcome of this tendency to normalise conflict rather than subject its longevity and resilience to a careful critical questioning is that there is a tendency also to believe that it will only be fully resolved when there is capitulation of the weaker to the stronger political impetus, of the 'traditional' to the 'modern' – in this

Please note: This is a pre-publication draft and may contain some differences to the published version. For citation purposes, you should refer to Sadan, Mandy (2015) 'Myanmar: Ongoing conflict in Kachin State.' In: Singh, Daljit, (ed.), Southeast Asian Affairs 2015. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 246-259.

case, the innate drive of the unitary state must inevitably win out over that of the federal with its implicit attachments to perennial loyalties.⁵ The sense of frustration with 'the Kachin' is palpable among those Myanmar and foreign policy makers and observers who seem mainly to wish that they would stop fighting a battle that they are bound to lose and which they consider currently as producing a great impediment to political progress nationally. From the perspective of central government concerns, this seems to be a not unreasonable line of analysis. However, if we are to understand why in 2014 we are in many respects as far from an agreement to end the conflict than we were in 2013, closer attention needs to be paid to understanding a more contemporary history rather than relying on convention within a narrative about a more distant past. While this longer history is threaded through the present situation, not least in the symbolic justifications of resistance and in a prevailing social memory of injustices borne, developments since the signing of the ceasefire in 1994 also require our attention.⁶ These developments have created a newly politicised movement in urban areas of the Kachin region that have been vitally important in creating social support for the resumption of conflict, and which has gone a long way to reversing the decline of the KIA's and KIO's civil support base in the years between 1994 and 2008. These developments have brought in newly active nationalist inspired groups of young Kachin people, who have become energised in the cause of Kachin ethno-nationalism in a post-digital age. Understanding the dynamics of this rapidly changing Kachin society is as important for understanding the intransigent nature of the current conflict and the failure to bring resolution to it in 2014 as is that of the longer view.

The signing and breaking of ceasefires

The ceasefire between the KIA and the Tatmadaw in 1994 was one of many that were enabled from the late 1980s onwards between the Burma Army and the country's many non-national armed groups.⁷ The changing geo-politics of the region at this time helped the Myanmar military government to reposition itself favourably in relation to these developments. These changes in the wider political arena also made the conclusion of ceasefire agreements a more attractive proposition to many non-national armed groups than it had been previously. Two external factors were particularly important in this respect, and both seemed to weaken the position of 'ethnic' armed groups to resist pressures to conclude ceasefires.⁸ The first of these was the collapse of the Communist bloc, which saw also the collapse of the Communist Party of Burma or CPB. The CPB had long played a critical role in many of the conflict zones, especially along the eastern and north eastern borders of the country. The second factor was the changed orientation of Thailand and China in particular to negotiating with the Myanmar regime. Both nations increasingly sought to engage directly with the Myanmar government to build political relations and to facilitate access to natural resources within the country. Previously, their concerns had been more with local security control in border areas, which had been effected through relying on ethnic nationality and opposition groups in the borderlands to contain local conflict zones. Most non-national armed groups agreed to ceasefires following these changes, relinquishing some territory while keeping other areas ostensibly under their control. This was the pattern that also influenced the KIA in 1994 to conclude a ceasefire agreement. However, because the early ceasefires were arranged without clear agreements about how to implement a proper process of political reform beyond the cessation of violence, they amounted mainly just to the absence of fighting and not the establishment of genuine peace in many cases. The promise that political

Please note: This is a pre-publication draft and may contain some differences to the published version. For citation purposes, you should refer to Sadan, Mandy (2015) 'Myanmar: Ongoing conflict in Kachin State.' In: Singh, Daljit, (ed.), Southeast Asian Affairs 2015. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 246-259.

discussions would follow in due course was taken largely in good faith and on the back of the weakened position of many groups to insist on this later process, as noted.⁹

Yet this notwithstanding, many ceasefire groups, including the KIA/KIO, for their part agreed to halt armed conflict whilst having a range of objectives in mind of their own should the hoped for political progress not materialise, which was for many a highly probably outcome. For the KIA/KIO, the ceasefire also represented an opportunity to regroup after so many decades of conflict and to reconnect with the civilian populations from which they had become increasingly isolated. The nature of these conflicts, which saw the troops of non-national armed groups ensconced in the hills and mountains away from the towns, meant that armed groups had become increasingly isolated over time from the civil and especially urban constituencies from whom they needed to draw support. Following the ceasefire, the KIO leadership hoped that they would be able to reconnect with Kachin people in areas from which the KIO and KIA had been excluded for many years. These concerns about rebuilding the social, political and economic base of their movement also influenced their desire to conclude a ceasefire for some of the Kachin politico-military elites responsible for making the critical decision.¹⁰

The Kachin ceasefire was considered at the time something of a coup for the national military regime. It was hoped that the Kachin agreement would become an example for how armed militias could be brought back within the national fold and 'tamed' towards a common political purpose of national unitary government. From the outset, therefore, the intentions and perspectives of what the ceasefire might bring for both sides were at best uncertain and taken on trust and at worst, potentially highly contradictory between the various signatories. The key issue, however, was that the agreements were made without any clear political framework for developing lines of further communication around substantive issues of political grievance.

The local developments leading to the collapse of the ceasefire in June 2011 have been fairly well documented.¹¹ The breakdown centred upon government attacks upon KIA troops close to the Ta-pein hydropower plant and subsequent retaliations by the KIA, with progressive escalation of attacks on both sides through the summer of 2011. However, the lead time to the breakdown was much longer than this local problem in June 2011 suggests. Indeed, the fact that the conflict was sparked in territory adjacent to a Chinese-owned hydro-power plant also reflects that developments during the ceasefire had created a range of new issues in the region that influenced local perceptions of the ceasefire and its outcomes.¹² The response to these, not least of which was a perception of the progressive exclusion of local to foreign economic interests in the exploitation of the region's natural resources, continued to undermine the notion that the ceasefire and current processes of political reform were capable of delivering substantive, positive economic and political change.

By 2011, the Myanmar state was probably stronger than it had ever been due to the economic gains it had made through oil and gas and other natural resource exploitation.¹³ It was also bolstered by increasing engagement with the international community following the re-emergence of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi into national political life. Initially, all opposition forces raised questions about the future direction of political progress, given the continued strengthening of Myanmar armed forces and the extension of state and military influence in the Kachin region and elsewhere. When combined with the limited capacity of the political reforms to remove the dominance of the military, there was some credence to the accusation

Please note: This is a pre-publication draft and may contain some differences to the published version. For citation purposes, you should refer to Sadan, Mandy (2015) 'Myanmar: Ongoing conflict in Kachin State.' In: Singh, Daljit, (ed.), Southeast Asian Affairs 2015. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 246-259.

that foreign governments had perhaps responded too enthusiastically to what were, in essence, quite limited signs of real change. The lack of attention to ethnic nationality concerns by these foreign powers, at least initially, may even inadvertently have weakened the capacity of ethnic interest groups to have their concerns addressed. Not least of these concerns was whether the constitutional mechanisms in place to defend against future institutional violence were genuine and viable. While even Burmese opposition politicians raised concerns about many problematic features embedded in the constitutional proposals, a primary concern especially for non-Burman political interest groups, who felt that control over their economic resource base was slipping out of their hands, was intense uncertainty about how much reform would be allowed by a government and political system that continued to be dominated by the Myanmar armed forces.

The inevitable conclusion many drew from this situation was that the new arrangements being proposed for a national ceasefire and the reconfiguration of large non-national armies as small Border Guard Forces were not focused enough towards 'genuine peace': they aimed mainly at the cessation of fighting rather than being directed towards substantive forward movement politically. By June 2011, therefore, the decision to continue with the escalation of conflict rather than withdraw and pursue its containment reflected very strongly that the cessation of fighting during the 1990s was now understood as being a juncture that had allowed the Myanmar Army to penetrate new areas that had previously resisted that penetration, while also enabling them to engage in the preferential exploitation of natural resources, which is often referred to as a process of 'ceasefire capitalism'.¹⁴

These developments, however, also created new forms of social opposition prior to June 2011. This is reflected across the country in protests objecting to hydroelectric dam projects, for example. Protests over copper mines and the Myitsone dam as seen in the years building up to the collapse of the ceasefire reflected underlying and significant processes of social transformation that were felt in urban areas of Kachin state as much as in central Myanmar.¹⁵ This has resulted in a newly politicised social domain within Kachin society in recent years, especially among urban youth and diaspora Kachin groups, that draws on new forms of communication and has sharpened expectations in relation to the nature of political progress that they are prepared to consider 'genuine'. These developments have created new challenges for elite leadership of the Kachin nationalist movement, too. They have also had to modify their modes of interaction with the political-civil constituency of modern, urban Kachin society to reflect this more broad ranging politicisation. In this respect, the desire to use the ceasefire of 1994 to build a strong civil political culture had clearly been realised, although perhaps not entirely in ways that were anticipated by the nationalist leadership who concluded the ceasefire in 1994.

The experience of the ceasefire 1994-2011, therefore, has many ways become a marker of the antithesis of real political progress, instead being taken now as an experience that highlights the limitations of engaging in such agreements unless the political terrain is made more stable. This has, again, progressively made a return to a ceasefire agreement harder to implement, even though 2013 seemed to suggest that there was forward movement in this regard.¹⁶ These newly politicised demographic groups were able to ally themselves increasingly to more focused demands from within the KIA/KIO leadership following 2011 that an end to the present conflict could not, this time, be a matter of hope over experience:

Please note: This is a pre-publication draft and may contain some differences to the published version. For citation purposes, you should refer to Sadan, Mandy (2015) 'Myanmar: Ongoing conflict in Kachin State.' In: Singh, Daljit, (ed.), Southeast Asian Affairs 2015. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 246-259.

agreements would have to be managed and responded to on a political level if 'genuine' peace was to be achieved. It is this internal dynamic within Kachin society that has also made the resolution of conflict throughout 2014 more difficult to facilitate given the way in which support for continuing the conflict has coalesced.¹⁷

Ending the year on a low note?

It would be preferable to begin a review of events relating to the ongoing conflict in the Kachin State during 2014 with a statement that some of the optimism that had been demonstrated at the end of 2013 had continued to bear fruit. Since the violence of June 2011, there had been numerous low level incidents but there were also repeated efforts to try to find a basis upon which substantive discussions could take place to halt the fighting. 2013 ended on a somewhat optimistic note in this respect and things boded well for events in 2014 to be more positive.

The tensions that were starting to build between those groups who were now engaged in recent ceasefire agreements and those who were not were one major issue of concern for KIA/KIO elites. 2013 ended with a significant meeting taking place in Laiza, the border town which some refer to as 'the real Kachin capital', between leaders of many ethnic armed groups facilitated by the KIA. The meeting hoped to develop a coherent multi-group strategy that would prevent too great a divide being created between current ceasefire and non-ceasefire groups. This reflected some challenge to the government's push towards a national ceasefire, which many observers now felt was to be an almost inevitable outcome of the current political trajectory. The light that the continuing conflict shone on government attitudes to genuine reform towards greater autonomy of 'ethnic' states within a unified Myanmar in many ways began to empower the KIA/KIO at this time, enabling them to progress their desire to build coalitions with other groups to counteract the fragmentation that the recent ceasefires and peace negotiations seemed to generate. The KIA/KIO has long been at the forefront of such strategies of multi-group co-operation,¹⁸ and it maps also onto internal models of allegiance building that have, overall, served the Kachin ethno-nationalist cause well.¹⁹ In October 2013, therefore, the 'ethnic' conference in Laiza saw a wide range of groups with ethnic nationality allegiances meet to discuss how to develop a more united strategy. The absence of such a strategy has long been the stumbling block of ethnic resistance, as well as being a cause of frustration for those who might wish to support them. Clarifying the diverse agendas and orientations of multiple groups locked in what might appear superficially to be highly local interests has been a persistent challenge. The 18 groups who attended preliminary discussions at Laiza also wanted to put forward an alternative to the national ceasefire proposals that had been promoted by the government and in different form by the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC)²⁰ and Working Group on Ethnic Coordination (WGEC) respectively. The alternative they tried to develop focused on the higher political objectives desired by these long-term resistance movements: the need for substantive political dialogue and changes to the constitution to ensure democratic governance, as well as respect for claims for greater autonomy and the higher values of human rights. Despite the fundamental and huge differences in the pathways to national ceasefire that these various documents proposed, the difficulty in the detail was considered by some observers, who longed for the blocks to a national ceasefire to be removed, as largely a circumstantial issue of lesser importance than the fact that some negotiations or discussions were being resumed. This is what made the development seem hopeful at the end of 2013.

Please note: This is a pre-publication draft and may contain some differences to the published version. For citation purposes, you should refer to Sadan, Mandy (2015) 'Myanmar: Ongoing conflict in Kachin State.' In: Singh, Daljit, (ed.), Southeast Asian Affairs 2015. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 246-259.

Following the ethnic conference, the government peace negotiating team met with the KIA/KIO. The delegation was led by U Aung Min and his expressed intention was to pursue a political process through an agreed framework. Monthly meetings were then held between a KIO Technical Advisory Team and government representatives to develop constructive lines of engagement. The United Nations Special Adviser on Myanmar, Vijay Nambiar also expressed his hope and expectation that a breakthrough might be found. In short, at the end of 2013 it was felt by many observers and analysts that a national ceasefire was still a viable outcome during the next few months and that resist or not, the Kachin politico-military elites would be drawn into this process almost as an inevitability.

Yet there was a counter-analysis to this optimism from the start. On the Kachin side, the Myitkyina meetings saw a massive local outpouring of support for the KIA leadership as they rode in convoy through the town to discuss the pathways to agreement.²¹ This local outpouring reflected the widespread anger at the displacement of many thousands of people to border refugee camps over the previous two years. The United Nations estimates that as many as 100,000 civilians have been displaced during this time.²² The local sense is that there is disinterest in this human suffering among all political groups in mainstream political life and a general unwillingness to engage substantially with the political issues of concern in this region. Increasingly this has included a sense of distrust of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi herself, further widening the gulf between the local and the national.²³ Yet the likelihood of success in the talks was diminished by the insistence by Lt Gen Myit Soe of the Ministry of Defence that ethnic groups would have to trust the government to act on their behalf. This has been the sticking point since the collapse of the quasi-federal state in Burma over decades: how can trust be built in the national political system when it seems to be enshrined in policies and practices determined to undermine the federal autonomy that so many see as a viable way ahead? Trust must surely be earned following so many years of mistrust is the not unreasonable retort; it is in this regard that the history of the recent ceasefire is so critical to understanding present difficulties. The Laiza agreement signed by seventeen of the eighteen ethnic armed group representatives present was a new testing ground for working out the orientation of political negotiations to follow in 2014. That it ultimately shone a light on the impossibility of moving forward negotiations along anything other than government-defined lines of least resistance led throughout 2014 to the gradual unravelling in this year of the national ceasefire accord as a whole.²⁴

The gulf between expectations that substantive talks about political change should form a basis for developing further talks has remained too difficult to bridge. Regrettably, therefore, as noted, 2014 has seen few positive developments towards ending the conflict in Kachin state. Indeed, in many respects, the two sides seem as far apart as ever. As 2014 has passed, the recurring violence between the KIA and the Tatmadaw has continued to influence perceptions that the desire of the civil-military Myanmar government to bring about true political transformation, which respected the interests of 'ethnic' communities, was less than genuine. Perhaps even more significantly, the ongoing antagonism created around the situation in the Kachin region seems now to be drawing into its orbit increasing numbers of representatives from other ethnic groups who were initially inclined favourably towards signing a national ceasefire agreement, making this cornerstone of the government's peace plan seem more out of reach than ever it was at the end of 2013. The recurrent, low-level violence that continued to surface in many parts of the country throughout the year, including increasingly a return to low-level violence in the northern Shan states, has had a corrosive

Please note: This is a pre-publication draft and may contain some differences to the published version. For citation purposes, you should refer to Sadan, Mandy (2015) 'Myanmar: Ongoing conflict in Kachin State.' In: Singh, Daljit, (ed.), Southeast Asian Affairs 2015. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 246-259.

effect upon attempts at trust-building.²⁵ In addition, the ongoing actions of radical Burmese Buddhist groups and anti-Islamic violence has sharpened the sense among many of the country's non-Burman communities that the same prejudices and chauvinism of Burmese nationalism that has long undermined attempts to have their grievances addressed at a national political level are simply being manifested in another way.²⁶ The gap between many of the ethnic constituencies and the government seems to widen as time goes by and in the absence of substantial progress around key political issues and the roller coaster continues. 2014, therefore, draws to a close on a sombre note that merely highlights the incredible difficulties that inhibit Myanmar as a whole moving towards a stable political future based on democratic institutions, which might be capable of resolving finally these entrenched hostilities.

The year in Kachin State has drawn to a close marked by events on November 19th, when shells were fired by the Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion 390 from their position on Hka Ya Bum, a mountain just outside Laiza. Hka Ya Bum has particular relevance in local expressions of Kachin nationalist anger at recent events as it was taken by the Tatmadaw following a series of unprecedented airstrikes around Laiza at the end of 2012 and continuing into 2013.²⁷ 105mm Howitzer shells landed on the parade ground of the Officer Training School of the Kachin Independence Army, which is located on Woi Chyai Bum, another mountain close to the border town. Initial reports following the shelling of the Officer Training School stated that twenty three young officer cadets had been killed, many of whom were not Kachin but came from a number of different ethnic armed groups, while a similar number had been wounded. Unsurprisingly, the attacks were immediately followed by claims and counter claims from both sides: it was an 'accident' said a Burma Army spokesman initially;²⁸ it was a deliberate provocation claimed the KIA; it was a 'warning shot' to force the KIA to cease from its attacks upon columns of the Burma Army patrolling nearby roads and routes.²⁹ One thing that seems to have been generally agreed, however, was that the shelling was yet another blow to trust-building and to the peace talks that had failed to attain force through forward movement as part of the country's reform programme following a year of skirmishes, attacks and low-level violence.³⁰

Yet shells continued to be fired from the Burma Army post over the following week, suggesting that 'accident' was certainly not a viable explanation of the initial action. Some of these shells landed perilously close to civilian areas and the tragic human settlements that have sprung up close to the border to house the many thousands of internally displaced people forced to flee their homes since the collapse of the ceasefire in June 2011. Indeed, incidents such as these have prompted even some of the most experienced, long-term analysts of the country's ethnic politics, who are often highly sceptical of conspiracy theorists and projections of grand schemes of targeted persecution, to suspect that the Kachin movement may justifiably see itself as being subject to a special form of discrimination and punishment as a means of forcing it finally to buckle and become compliant with government demands in the absence of openings for imposing a ceasefire. In this respect, the use of air strikes upon KIA strongholds and close to the civilian areas of Laiza, as noted, which was a previously unseen strategy in Tatmadaw engagements with ethnic armed groups seems to ring true.

For any outside observer who remains perplexed at the ongoing, apparently intransigent resistance of the KIO to acquiesce to pressures for a renewed ceasefire throughout 2014, the recent shelling of the Officer Training School raises more issues for

Please note: This is a pre-publication draft and may contain some differences to the published version. For citation purposes, you should refer to Sadan, Mandy (2015) 'Myanmar: Ongoing conflict in Kachin State.' In: Singh, Daljit, (ed.), Southeast Asian Affairs 2015. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 246-259.

consideration than just than simply that of the pointlessness of the bloodshed, therefore. While the creation of the Officer Training School reflected outwardly the ongoing, entrenched militarised ethno-nationalism that had marked the post-colonial history of the Kachin State, the creation of the Training School in 2007 also reflected other issues. It represented the integration of yet another generation of young Kachin men into the formal military structures of the movement and a specifically contingent set of concerns around the pressures being placed on the KIA at that moment to disband and form a Border Guard Force and for its political representatives to blend themselves into the backdrop of political reforms around the National Convention and the Constitution. In this sense, it represented yet another new phase of developments and not just the repetitive cycling of perennial, even archaic ones.³¹ While these new orientations inevitably drew strength from a narrative of the past, the officer cadets were clearly a new demographic group choosing to sign up to a variety of armed groups that were concurrently being pressured to disarm.

In April 2014 KIA Deputy Commander in Chief, General Gun Maw, visited the United States.³² Increasingly it seems clear that happens next to resolve the conflict in the region will be influenced significantly by international affairs, and most specifically by the degree to which China and the US use this region as a proxy or testing ground for their own regional rivalries.³³ This wider geo-political rivalry may have unforeseen consequences as it is played out. However, the Chinese influence may be the one factor capable of promoting a renewed ceasefire in the short term, as authorities in China, who have also worked hard at building strong relations with the Jingpo national minority elites on the China side of the border, seem to be more interested in a cessation of violence than either, apparently, the Myanmar Army or the KIO/KIA. However, the particular cross-border concerns with China and issues of resource extraction and economic development in the region create an overarching, highly complex geo-political situation that is generally unstable and unpredictable. It is undoubtedly difficult for the KIO to manage these broader influences in their own interests, whatever their capacity to generate linkages across borderlines. The relationship with and involvement of China, therefore, remain critical in this process. While the Chinese authorities do not actively support the KIO, neither do they entirely trust the Myanmar government, who many in China see as unreliable.³⁴ At the same time as top-level meetings between Burmese and Chinese officials have been taking place, therefore, increased unofficial engagements between the KIO and authorities in China have also been seen. The Kachin politico-military elites have tried to take advantage of this in producing a language of negotiation, emphasising longer term historical connections between the region and China, through the jade trade for example. Some Kachin elites have tried to emphasise their closer ethnic/historical ties to the Han as opposed to the Burmese in this respect, as a means of negotiating preferential or sympathetic relations with local authorities in Yunnan. However, negotiation meetings have been challenging as the Kachin have also found the Chinese to be overbearing; some Chinese negotiators find the Kachin elites politically shrewd but lacking insight or power to negotiate a better deal for themselves, making the relationship between the two unstable and fraught as the stakes become higher for both sides. Chinese perceptions of the Burmese state are also marked by suspicion and there is a fear of contemporary Myanmar being 'used' by the USA. It seems clear to many observers, too, that the Myanmar state itself is not ready for big Chinese investment and the overt extension of their economic and political ambitions through the Kachin region which, again, may result in unintended or unanticipated consequences of a renewed ceasefire without solid foundations for political

Please note: This is a pre-publication draft and may contain some differences to the published version. For citation purposes, you should refer to Sadan, Mandy (2015) 'Myanmar: Ongoing conflict in Kachin State.' In: Singh, Daljit, (ed.), Southeast Asian Affairs 2015. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 246-259.

progress. This is especially likely given the current emphasis on the cessation of fighting rather than substantive political forward movement. The lessons of the recent past are that this leads mainly to unfulfilled aspirations and an ever-sharpening sense of frustration with a possible descent to further forms of violence in the future. As the focus of attention at the end of 2014 now shifts to concerns about the general election in 2015, the terrain seems just as unstable.

¹ Martin T. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London: Zed Books, 1999). Ashley South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).

² <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/11219-the-nationwide-ceasefire-agreement-at-a-glance.html>

³ Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* gives the best overview of this period affecting ethnic politics down to the 1990s. For a detailed historical account that seeks to challenge some of the historical simplifications that prevails see also M Sadan, *Being and Becoming Kachin: Histories Beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma* (Oxford: The British Academy and Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁴ M. Walton, "Ethnicity, Conflict and History in Burma: The Myths of Panglong," *Asian Survey* 48, no. 6 (2008).

⁵ R. H. Taylor, "Perceptions of Ethnicity in the Politics of Burma," *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (1982).

⁶ See also <http://soasceasefireseminar.weebly.com/seminar-reportsummary.html>

⁷ Mary P. Callahan, *Political Authority in Burma's Ethnic Minority States: Devolution, Occupation and Coexistence* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center, 2007).

⁸ See Lee Jones 'Understanding Myanmar's Ceasefires: Geopolitics, Political Economy and Statebuilding' in Sadan, M (ed) *Kachin Ceasefire: Reflections on community, politics and social change in the Kachin region of Burma (Myanmar), 1994 to the present* (forthcoming 2015, NIAS Press)

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ See Martin Smith 'Reflections on the Kachin ceasefire: a cycle of hope and disappointment' in M. Sadan (ed), forthcoming 2015

¹¹ For a good survey of news coverage since the re-emergence of conflict in June 2011 see <http://www.networkmyanmar.org/index.php/kachin-state>

¹² K. Woods, "Community Forestry in Cease-Fire Zones in Kachin State, Northern Burma: Formalizing Collective Property in Contested Ethnic Areas" (paper presented at the CAPRI Workshop on Collective Action, Property Rights and Conflict in Natural Resources Management, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 2010). K. Woods, "Ceasefire Capitalism: Military-Private Partnerships, Resource Concessions and Military State Building in the Burma-China Borderlands," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 4 (2011).

¹³ Lee Jones in Sadan forthcoming 2015

¹⁴ Woods, "Ceasefire Capitalism: Military-Private Partnerships, Resource Concessions and Military State Building in the Burma-China Borderlands."

¹⁵ See also <http://soasceasefireseminar.weebly.com/seminar-reportsummary.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.networkmyanmar.org/index.php/kachin-state>

¹⁷ See also <http://soasceasefireseminar.weebly.com/seminar-reportsummary.html> and M. Sadan (ed) forthcoming 2015

¹⁸ Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*

¹⁹ Sadan, *Being and Becoming Kachin: Histories Beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma*.

²⁰ <http://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/stakeholders/unfc>. The KIO had been important in the early development of the UNFC and these divergences were now a consequence of divisions between those groups prepared to engage in ceasefires and those that were not

²¹ <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/thousands-greet-convoy-ethnic-leaders-myitkyina.html>

²² <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/attack-11192014161203.html>

²³ <http://www.kachinnews.com/news/2602-suu-kyi-claims-no-need-to-speak-out-on-kachin-conflict.html>

²⁴ <http://www.asiasentinel.com/politics/high-stakes-myanmar-peace-process/>

Please note: This is a pre-publication draft and may contain some differences to the published version. For citation purposes, you should refer to Sadan, Mandy (2015) 'Myanmar: Ongoing conflict in Kachin State.' In: Singh, Daljit, (ed.), Southeast Asian Affairs 2015. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 246-259.

²⁵ <http://www.shanhumanrights.org/>

²⁶ M. Walton, "The "Wages of Burman-Ness": Ethnicity and Burman Privilege in Contemporary Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, no. 1 (2013). See also the many useful articles in the international media written by Matthew Walton on this issue collated here: <http://oxford.academia.edu/MatthewWalton>

²⁷ <http://www.voanews.com/content/un-warns-burma-on-airstrikes-in-kachin/1576741.html>

²⁸ <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/burma-army-says-deadly-shelling-rebels-unintentional.html>

²⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/21/us-myanmar-kachin-idUSKCN0J50J920141121>

³⁰ http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/21/world/asia/peace-talks-in-myanmar-jeopardized-by-killing-of-rebels.html?emc=edit_tnt_20141120&nlid=21134157&tntemail0=y&_r=1

³¹ See Sadan (ed) forthcoming 2015

³² <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/gun-maw-04142014174506.html>

³³ See Lee Jones, op cit, forthcoming 2015 and Enze Han 'Changing Sino-Myanmar Relations and Its Implications for Ethnic Politics along the Border' in M. Sadan (ed) forthcoming 2015

³⁴ <http://soasceasefireseminar.weebly.com/seminar-reportsummary.html>