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Abstract

In 2012 Myanmar's government and the Karen National Union (KNU), the country's oldest rebel group, signed a historic ceasefire agreement, which held the promise for the peaceful resolution of decades-long ethnic conflict. To many, this seemed to be the direct outcome of wider political transition in Myanmar. By zooming into the KNU, this article proposes an alternative explanation for the Karen ceasefire. Based on extensive field research and an emerging literature on armed group fragmentation, it demonstrates that the group's rapprochement with the government was driven by internal power struggles between two rival factions within the KNU. At the core of these contestations lay shifting internal power relations, which were largely driven by military pressures and geopolitical transformations in the Myanmar-Thai borderlands and fragmented the movement along geographic lines. These internal contestations point to significant limitations and shortcomings of Myanmar's peace process more generally.

Keywords: Non-State Armed Groups, Insurgency, Borderlands, Myanmar, Karen National Union

Introduction

On 12 January 2012, Myanmar's oldest ethnic armed groups, the Karen National Union (KNU) signed a ceasefire agreement with Naypyidaw. The truce received much international praise, not least because the KNU was the only sizeable rebel movement which continued to battle Myanmar's government during the 1990s and 2000s, when most other ethnic armed groups entered bilateral ceasefire agreements. Since 2012 observers could, however, follow the rapidly "growing friendship between Naypyidaw and the KNU" as the country's erstwhile least compromising rebel group became one of its main peace advocates.¹ Against this puzzling background, this article asks: Why did the KNU sign a ceasefire in 2012?

In light of Myanmar's wider political transition from authoritarian military rule to semi-democratic civilian government, the changing strategy of KNU leaders has often been understood as the direct result of wider political change.² Karen rebel leaders are, thus,

assumed to have negotiated a ceasefire once their political environment presented them with an opportunity to do so. While this explanation seems intuitive, it cannot account for the concurrent breakdown of ceasefires in other parts of Myanmar, most importantly in Kachin and Shan States, where conflict has since escalated to a scale unseen since the 1980s.³ It also fails to explain the mounting tensions within the KNU that have threatened to split the movement between a pro-ceasefire leadership and a less compromising internal opposition at several occasions since the 2012 ceasefire.⁴

This article proposes an alternative explanation for the shifting strategy of the KNU. Based on extensive field research and an emergent literature on armed group fragmentation, it demonstrates that the group's rapprochement with the government was foremost driven by internal power struggles between two rival factions within the KNU. At the core of these contestations lay shifting internal power relations that were largely driven by military and economic change in the Myanmar-Thai borderlands. These had divergent impacts on the movement, weakening some of its regional brigades more than others, not least by dis-embedding the insurgency from local communities in some areas in particular. Understanding the ways in which these fractures developed into competing internal factions is key for explaining the KNU's changing strategy. In addition, this analysis points to significant limitations and shortcomings of the Karen ceasefire agreement and Myanmar's peace process more generally. To build this argument the article first introduces its conceptual framework, which is built on an emergent body of literature that looks to processes of fragmentation and contestation within rebel groups to explain their strategies vis-à-vis the state. Based on this, the article shows how changing military and geopolitical pressures in the Thai-Myanmar borderlands have fragmented the Karen insurgency along individual brigades and shifted the movement's internal power balance. It will then trace how organisational fragmentation has translated into factional rivalries within the movement, giving rise to a leadership that has driven the rapprochement with the government and an internal opposition, which stands opposed the movement's new conciliatory line.

Conceptual Framework

The difficulties in explaining the diverging strategies of Myanmar's ethnic armed groups based on the country's changing political landscape do not only reflect our limited knowledge on one of the world's longest ongoing civil wars. They also point to a more general, theoretical

shortcoming within Conflict and Peace Studies: non-state armed groups are often conceptualised as monolithic actors. As per Charles Tilly, “coherent, durable, self-propelling social units—monads—occupy a great deal of political theory but none of political reality.”⁵

Stathis Kalyvas has also pointed out that political scientists and students of International Relations “often conceptualize non-state political factions involved in civil wars as monolithic actors akin to states writ small.”⁶ By so doing, it is assumed that rebel movements act per a unified strategic rationale aimed at maximising their perceived utility vis-à-vis the state. This conceptualisation has become particularly common in aggregate large-n studies on conflict causes and dynamics as it enables scholars to model collective behaviour of armed groups in theoretically parsimonious ways on the basis of quantitative data.⁷ The same understanding, however, also underpins some of the most prominent arguments in the field of Conflict Resolution as, for instance Zartman’s Mutually Hurting Stalemate, which defines a situation as “ripe” for mediation at the point that all warring factions perceive the continuation of violence detrimental to their own unified interests.⁸ While such models make sense on paper, they often struggle to account for the empirically observable conduct of rebel groups. Many non-state armed groups, indeed, behave in ways that seem suboptimal when measured against their assumed strategic objectives with regards to their external environments.⁹

Considering this criticism, this article looks to an emerging strand of literature in Conflict and Peace Studies that highlights the importance of dynamics internal to non-state armed groups for explaining their strategies.¹⁰ The core finding of this literature is that non-state armed groups are heterogeneous movements that are often internally fragmented, typically into rival factions. Individual rebel leaders hence do not only contest the incumbent state, but they also struggle against each other for leadership of their respective movements.¹¹ Internal contestation and fragmentation can undermine a group’s capacity for collective action, redirect violence away from outside adversaries to inside competitors, and eventually lead to attrition and organisational demise.¹² It can also drive the strategies of armed groups in ways that are not consistent with the interests of the collective as a whole, but benefit particular interests within the movement.¹³

Wendy Pearlman’s work on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for instance, shows that from a collective bargaining perspective, the divergent strategies pursued by Fatah and

Hamas - the former favouring negotiations and the latter spoiling negotiations - were detrimental for the Palestinian cause vis-à-vis Israel. Yet, both factions' leaderships behaved in line with their own particular interests with regards to their rivalry for Palestinian leadership. While Fatah aimed at developing and mobilising new sources of legitimacy and power as Israel's negotiation partner in Oslo, Hamas sought the same goal, albeit by boycotting the talks.¹⁴ Negotiation or spoiling strategies which seem suboptimal from an external utility perspective, can be rational for forwarding internal power interests.¹⁵ In a similar vein, Cunningham et al. argue that individual rebel factions struggle for leadership against each other simultaneously to their battle against the state. While insurgents engage in the first competition of this "dual contest" to increase their own faction's political power and material gains, they contend in the latter to gain benefits for the movement as a whole.¹⁶ In other words, the strategies pursued by individual rebel factions might often seem to be at odds with their preferences in the movement's wider struggle with the state. Yet, they can be perfectly consistent with their internal struggle for power. Based on this understanding this article will analyse how processes of organisational fragmentation internal contestations between rival factions have driven Karen leaders to sign the 2012 ceasefire with the government.

Shifting Power in Changing Borderlands

The KNU is Myanmar's oldest ethnic insurgency movement, which had posed a viable threat to the country's rulers with more than 10,000 well-trained rebel soldiers for many decades since Myanmar's independence. During its heyday the movement ruled over vast parts of eastern Myanmar, spanning from Shan State in the north all the way to the Tenasserim Region in the south, which it administered as a quasi-state, known as *Kawthoolei* (cf. map 1). While the KNU still operates across the whole of Karen State with approximately 5,000 soldiers today,¹⁷ the power relations between Myanmar's insurgent borderlands and the state have shifted in favour of the latter since the Cold War due to changing geopolitics and counterinsurgency strategies. In the case of the KNU, the insurgents were particularly hard hit from two parallel developments:

(1) Militarily, the KNU lost ground to the *Tatmadaw's* counterinsurgency and rival non-state armed groups that emerged from increased fragmentation of the main movement.

(2) Geopolitically, the changing bilateral relations between Thailand and Myanmar brought powerful, outside economic interests from Thailand and Myanmar to the former periphery.

These pressures have not only tilted the power balance in favour for Myanmar's government. They have also shifted power relations within the movement, which led to the significant fragmentation within the KNU and subsequent contestation between rival factions, holding diverging ideas about the ceasefire negotiations with Myanmar's government. That said, fragmentation is no new phenomenon in the Karen insurgency, which has always been a heterogenous movement, comprised of members from different political, religious geographic, economic and educational backgrounds.¹⁸ In addition to diverse identities, the heterogeneous nature of the KNU stems from its organisational make-up, which is divided in seven geographic districts,¹⁹ each of which is under control of a KNLA Brigade: Thaton District (Brigade 1), Toungoo District (Brigade 2), Nyaunglebin District (Brigade 3), Mergui-Tavoy District (Brigade 4), Papun District (Brigade 5), Duplaya District (Brigade 6), and Pa'an District (Brigade 7)(cf. map 1).²⁰

Map 1 KNU Administrative Districts and Brigades.²¹

Power imbalances between the movement's brigades and their administered areas have also existed since the movement's inception, particularly in terms of troop strength and prosperity. While finance flows and mobilisation processes within the KNU are centralised on paper, each brigade recruits and finances itself in practice. For this reason, Brigades 6 and 7 emerged as the strongest forces of the movement during the heydays of the Karen revolution in the 1970s and 1980s when they controlled the main smuggling routes to Thailand. In comparison, the much smaller Brigades 1 and 2 in Nyaunglebin and Toungoo have long been the struggling to make ends meet.²²

For understanding the movement's current fragmented situation, including the origins of its rival factions that hold different opinions in regards to the 2012 ceasefire, it is crucial to explain how the military and geopolitical changes at the Thai-Myanmar border throughout the 1990s and 2000s have impacted differently on this multifaceted power landscape within

the KNU. Most importantly was the shifting internal power balance from central to northern units of the KNLA, particularly to *Mutraw's* Brigade 5. Various KNU members, elite and grassroots, have explained to me that this is where the different stances regarding the ceasefire have emerged from. One leader from the central KNU district of Duplaya - controlled by the movement's struggling Brigade 6 - has put it this way: "The Burman [the government] activity is different from places to places. And so we have to make different moves as well. So we also have different opinions in different brigades."²³ This section will, therefore, trace how changing military and geopolitical dynamics have impacted differently on the movement's different brigade territories.

Military Challenges

The KNU had been hard-pressed by *Tatmadaw* offensives since the 1980s and has suffered particularly since the breakdown of ceasefire negotiations in 1994, at a time when most other ethnic rebel groups signed truces with the government. According to the official version of long-term KNU leader David Taw, this was despite the recognition of a "younger, middle-level section of the KNU leadership [...] that the burden of the conflict had become unbearable for the Karen population in the conflict area."²⁴ Many KNU members at the time wished to conclude a ceasefire along similar lines of other ethnic armies in Myanmar's northern borderlands to China. These agreements granted territorial pockets as well as the rights to do business and economic development to armed groups while excluding political dialogues on the underlying causes of conflict, such as federal reforms. However, following several rounds of negotiation this was rejected by the KNU leadership owing to pressure from its allied National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), a formerly powerful exiled NLD grouping that emerged after the violent crackdown of the 1988 pro-democracy demonstrations. It asked the KNU not to sign a ceasefire in order to not undermine its own "efforts at the UN to win decisive international action against the SLORC."²⁵ Similar alliance pressures from the Myanmar democratic diaspora movement again prevented the conclusion of a ceasefire in 1997 and in 2005.²⁶

The decision to continue fighting came with heavy costs for the KNU as the *Tatmadaw* made large and rapid advances in eastern Myanmar. This was mainly because the ceasefires

with most northern armed groups freed the *Tatmadaw* from fighting on multiple fronts allowing it to concentrate its new firepower on eastern Myanmar, particularly its “arch-enemy” the KNU. Myanmar’s generals also invested heavily in the modernisation and enlargement of their armed forces by way of large-scale recruiting and the purchase and production of modern weaponry with help from China. By the mid-1990 Myanmar’s armed forces expanded to over 400,000 soldiers from only 180,000 soldiers in 1988.²⁷ In addition, erupting internal tensions within the Karen movement played into the hand of the state’s counterinsurgency campaigns.

Just after the break-down of the 1994 ceasefire negotiations, the KNU experienced a mutiny from which it never fully recovered. The upheaval was, however, not instigated by the pro-ceasefire faction but by Buddhist elements of the KNU, who felt discriminated against by the movement’s Christian-dominated leadership. In December 1994 Sgt.-Major Kyaw Than defected and founded the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). He quickly gathered approximately 3,000 disillusioned soldiers from the KNLA and the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO), a KNU affiliated village defence militia, which originally had constituted the KNU’s main armed wing. The DKBA was soon courted by the *Tatmadaw* with logistical and military support and started to fight alongside its former foe against its ethnic brethren and former comrades. The intelligence and manpower provided by DKBA defectors was instrumental for the counterinsurgency to finally overrun the Mannerplaw headquarter of the KNU in 1995, which marked a crucial turning point in the history of the KNU.²⁸

The joint military and DKBA offensives of the mid 1990s concentrated on central Karen State and dealt a serious blow to the once mighty KNLA “mother brigade”: Brigade 7 that used to form the military and logistical backbone of the movement.²⁹ Located in Pa’an district, Brigade 7 used to preside over the KNU headquarters at Mannerplaw as well as the area’s main trade and smuggling routes, including the strategic border crossing between Myawaddy and Mae Sot in Thailand. The loss of territory to the *Tatmadaw* and the DKBA also meant a major loss of revenue for the KNU in general and its Brigade 7 in particular, with many lucrative smuggle gates at the border falling into the hands of the DKBA. After years of further group fragmentation, Pa’an District today is contested by even more armed actors. In 2007, the so-called KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KPC) splinter group emerged as a 500 men strong government-supported militia after the then Brigade 7 commander Maj.-Gen. Htein Maung

negotiated an individual ceasefire with the SPDC. In addition to military pressure in the area, personal motivations were said to have played a role in bringing about this move as he and his companion, Pastor Timothy, saw their political influence within the KNU decline after their patron and long-term KNU strongmen Gen. Bo Mya died in 2006. The individual ceasefire provided the splinter group with government aid, a small pocket of territory and business opportunities.³⁰ Complicating the situation in Pa'an even further, the 5th Brigade of the DKBA then split from its main organisation after rejecting to follow its transformation into a formal *Tatmadaw* controlled government militia, a so-called Border Guard Force (BGF).³¹

The following maps illustrate the different military situations of the movement's northern and central brigades in 2012. Map 2 depicts central Karen State's Pa'an, where the KNLA's 7th Brigade, marked in blue, has been pushed back considerably by the *Tatmadaw* and the DKBA. Map 3 represents northern Karen State's Mutraw, where the KNLA's 5th Brigade, again marked in blue, has maintained relatively strong territorial control and the *Tatmadaw* only maintains outposts along the few existing roads.

Central Karen / Kayin State

Map 2 Territory in which KNU/KNLA Brigade 7 operates, Pa'an District. Source:
<http://www.theborderconsortium.org/media/58089/12-11-central-karen-state.pdf>

Northern Karen / Kayin Areas

Map 3 Territory in which KNU/KNLA Brigade 5 operates, Mutraw District. Source: <http://www.theborderconsortium.org/media/58095/12-11-northern-karen-areas.pdf>

Geopolitical Transformations

In addition to these military dynamics that have demoted the formerly uncontested rulers of *Kawthoolei* to being one armed actor among many, the changing geopolitics and border economies along the Thai-Myanmar border at the end of the Cold War weakened the KNU even more. These impacts were again particularly severe in central and southern brigade territories, which shifted the internal power balance within the movement towards further towards its northern units.

For many years Thailand used the KNU as a convenient proxy force against the CPB and drug-traffickers from the Golden Triangle, including the infamous “narco-army” of legendary Shan State drug kingpin Chang Shi-Fu alias Khun Sa, dubbed the “Opium King of the Golden Triangle.”³² This changed in the early-1990s when Thailand embarked on a “constructive engagement policy” with Myanmar to promote bilateral trade and investment in order to develop its underdeveloped and landlocked western provinces. Initially Thai businesses were investing into Myanmar’s timber sector after the Thai government implemented a logging ban in Thailand following multiple floods that were caused by heavy deforestation³³. Since then Thai logging companies decimated the dense forests of Karen State to an unprecedented extent. Cash-strapped and not able to oppose the economic interests of their erstwhile benefactors, the KNU quickly became part of this destructive industry by way of receiving compensation from logging companies and by granting their own logging concessions.³⁴ At the same time, Thai companies have also started to mine for tin, wolfram, and lead in Karen State.³⁵ The Thai government, moreover, set out to tap into its neighbour’s energy resources, including hydropower and natural gas.³⁶ As a result the Thai establishment soon lost interest in supporting the Karen insurgency as a strategic buffer force and began to consider the movement as a “nuisance impeding investment in the borderlands.”³⁷ While the Thai security establishment has not cut its ties with the KNU entirely and individuals continue to turn a blind eye to its transborder operations, the insurgents nevertheless had to give way to Thai economic interests.³⁸

In southern Karen State, these new geopolitical realities enabled the joint exploitation of natural gas in the Gulf of Martaban in the late 1990s. A consortium between French Total, US American UNOCAL, Thai PTT-EP and Myanmar MOGE started to transport 15 to 20 per cent of Thailand's natural gas needs via a 63km long onshore pipeline through southern Karen State to the Tai border.³⁹ This area, locally known as Mergui-Tavoy District, used to be the stronghold of the KNLA's 4th Brigade. In 1997 and 1998 the Karen insurgents came under heavy pressure by both the *Tatmadaw* as well as its former allies in the Thai security establishment to allow construction of the pipeline. Heavily outnumbered and careful not to displease the Thais, local rebel leaders negotiated their strategic withdrawal into demarcated areas with *Tatmadaw* front-line commanders. Disregarding this informal deal, a *Tatmadaw* offensive of 21,000 army soldiers advanced well beyond the pipeline's corridor and drove the KNU further into the jungle.⁴⁰ The demise of Brigade 4 was accelerated by its inability to protect local communities from wide-spread forced displacement and other well-documented human rights abuses at the hands of the advancing government troops, such as forced labour and confinement.⁴¹

Liberalising trade policies in Myanmar exerted further pressure on the Karen insurgency. Like other rebel armies in Myanmar's borderlands, the movement relied on incomes from taxing an extensive smuggling industry for many decades. During the self-isolationism under Ne Win's "Burmese Way to Socialism" the immense shortage of everyday goods - from medicine to petrol and textiles - had to be smuggled into the country. Raw products, such as teak, rice, cattle and opium were used to pay for these imports in return. The annual volume of border trade in 1988 was estimated at US\$3 billion, equivalent to 40 percent of the country's then gross national product.⁴² By taxing 5-10 per cent levies on smuggle operators, the black-market trade used to be the "armed opposition's lifeblood" for many years.⁴³ According to KNU officials themselves, the Karen insurgency earned up 500 million Myanmar Kyat per year - at the time £50 million at the official exchange rate - in the mid-1980s by controlling smuggling gates.⁴⁴ Most of the movement's revenues were generated by its Brigades 6 and 7, which were strategically located along the main trade routes from Mae Sot to Myawaddy. This revenue base eroded with the successive liberalisation of formal border trade between Myanmar and Thailand since 1988. According to Thai traders that have operated across the border for many years, the loss of these

revenues is ultimately what heralded the demise of the Karen insurgency. While these economic developments undermined the power of the KNU in general, they had particularly disastrous impacts on its central Brigades 6 and 7, who had already suffered from territorial loss due to joint *Tatmadaw*/DKBA offensives.

The military challenges and geopolitical transformations at the Thai-Myanmar border since the mid-1990s severely weakened the power of the KNU. At the time of writing the overall movement is only a shadow of its once mighty self. To understand the trajectory and conduct of the movement - including its 2012 ceasefire with the government and the emerging internal opposition against it – it is important to trace how these developments translated into different factions with divergent outlooks with regards to the movement's strategy. As the southern and central brigades, the KNU's traditional power base, were particularly hard-hit by military and geopolitical pressures, the northern Brigade 5, emerged as the movement's new stronghold as its military strength and authority among local communities remained least challenged during the developments of the 1990s.

Internal Power Struggles and the Karen Ceasefire

The shifting power relations within the KNU factionalised the movement along different geographic regions, whose increasingly parochial brigades have faced starkly diverging realities since the 1990s. These diverging impacts have also dis-embedded the insurgency from local communities in some areas more than others.⁴⁵ To be sure, power and wealth disparities always existed between the seven KNLA brigades and the territory they ruled over was never homogenous in terms of their physical and human geography. Despite this heterogeneity and decentralised organisation, the KNU was a relatively coherent movement prior to the fall of its headquarters at Mannerplaw in 1995. While local units wielded considerable autonomy over day-to-day administrative and military operations, the movement's central command used to be the undisputed decision-making organ responsible for the movement's overall political direction. On paper this still holds true today. The KNU District Chairmen and the KNLA Brigade Generals are jointly responsible for the movement's administrative and military operations in their region. Each administrative KNU department, e.g. the Education or Forestry Department, also has a regional branch.⁴⁶

The KNU central command was however always depended on resources from district level administrators and brigade generals who traditionally generated funds from taxing smuggling operators, mining and logging businesses in their territory and the local population. While there was never a set quota of revenue sharing, wealthier brigades, such as Brigade 7 or 6, traditionally surrendered up to 40 percent of their incomes to support the central revenue department, which then allocated these funds to its central command structure as well as to support regional operations, where deemed necessary.⁴⁷ Together with the District Chairmen and Brigade Commanders and their deputies, the central KNU department heads form the central committee of the KNU. In theory, this is the main decision-making organ of a quasi-one-party state, which elects the movement's top five leaders every four years, who are then represented in the KNU executive committee.⁴⁸ In practice, individual strongmen have long dominated both committees. In fact, long-term leader Gen. Bo Mya permitted little dissent with no congress elections being held between 1974 and 1991.⁴⁹

Notwithstanding the decentralised mobilisation and funding structures of the KNU, political decision-making of the KNU has therefore been relatively centralised for many years. Until the early 1990s, the Karen insurgency, indeed, managed to maintain a cohesive organisation despite internal heterogeneity and power imbalances. The military and geopolitical developments since, have, however, impacted these power disparities in a way that fragmented and decentralised the movement considerably. Severe military defeats sent large contingents of the KNU fleeing to Thailand. Many rebels found refuge in the ever-growing camps along the border together with tens of thousands of civilian refugees. The lower rebel ranks increasingly blended in with other refugees in what was to become permanent forest settlements along the Thai border. The organisation's top leaders mostly settled down in urban centres along the Thai-Myanmar border, particularly in and around the border town of Mae Sot. This detached many KNU leaders from the everyday realities of their organisation's grassroots in the refugee camps as well as those left fighting in the Karen forests. A KNU officer, who grew up in Mae La refugee camp expressed this by stating that, the "Burmese government should be thankful to the Thai government for welcoming us [the KNU] in Thailand, because now we are too busy going shopping and to the cinema. This distracts us from fighting."⁵⁰ Geographic fragmentation also created an ever-growing cleavage between the individual brigades and districts that have since largely been left to fend

for themselves.⁵¹ This led to an increasingly parochial outlook of different organisational parts, factionalising the movement along geographic lines.

Southern and central Brigades, including Brigade 7, have been challenged significantly by the military and geopolitical pressures explained above. They lost large swathes of territory, military strength, and were dis-embedded from local communities. The northern units of the KNU, Brigade 5 in particular, remain relatively isolated from the outside world and emerged as the last stronghold of the Karen insurgency. In contrast to their central and southern comrades, northern KNU units have maintained comparatively strong control of territory, over which they continue to rule as a quasi-government, delivering social services and security in return for taxes and recruits, and in effect maintain reciprocal exchange relations to local communities.⁵² Their different situations gave rise to two internal factions with divergent positions in the movement's ceasefire with Myanmar's government.

This was illustrated at a KNU central committee meeting in December 2013 in the organisation's new headquarters at Law Khee Lar. At a large clearing in the forests near the Moei River, the movement's leadership, including the group's top five leaders, the various district leaders and administrative department heads, gathered to discuss post-ceasefire developments. The discussions at the gathering were fierce from the onset and it was obvious that there were two rivalling factions. One side welcomed the ceasefire, articulated trust in Thein Sein's new semi-civilian government, and wanted to speed up the peace process. This pro-ceasefire faction surrounded KNU Chairman Gen. Mutu Say Poe, formerly commander of Brigade 6, KNU General-Secretary Padoh⁵³ Kwe Htoo Win, formerly district chairman of Brigade 4's Mergui-Tavoy district, and the KNLA's Chief of Staff Gen. Saw Jonny, who used to command Brigade 7. Their main supporters were leaders from central and southern brigade areas, particularly from the areas of Brigades 6 and 7.

Padoh Kwe Htoo Win, who became KNU General Secretary in December 2012, is one of the most pragmatic figures in the KNU and has been a driving force behind the Karen ceasefire. He studied Economics at Rangoon University before "going underground" with the KNU in the mid-1970s, where he rose to be District Chairman in the KNU area of Mergui-Tavoy and assumed responsibility for negotiating the retreat of the KNLA's 4th Brigade in the late 1990s when the *Tatmadaw* advanced along the corridor of the Yadana gas pipeline, transporting offshore-gas from the Adaman sea to Thailand. While explaining the shifting

geopolitics of the border, he highlighted the changing interests of Thailand in particular. According to him, the KNU had become too weak to continue its armed struggle and needed to give into the powerful economic interests of Thailand and Myanmar in areas historically claimed by the KNU. Therefore, the revolutionaries would be required to learn how to do business in order to participate in the region's expanding resource economy in a way that best benefits the Karen people. In his words:

“We are trained to fight, we are not trained to do business. That has been a problem for a long time here. [...] From the KNU, we are now forming an economic committee to find opportunities to train our people to get knowledge on how to do business. We invited some economic experts to train our people. So some people blame us and say: “Hey, you revolutionary, you should not do any business!” But we have to do that. You see, when they want to build a road, we cannot stop them. The problem is not only the Myanmar government. We are reliant on the Thai side. The problem started from the Thai side, the Thai companies supported by their government. Both governments understand that they can benefit from each other here, so they make development projects like the Italian-Thai [planned deep-sea port close to Dawei, affecting the KNLA 4th brigade area in southern Karen State]. We cannot stop them. We could disturb them to delay the project but we cannot stop them. But we are reliant on the Thai side [...]. The Thai government will only do what's best for their people. So we also have to find a way that benefits our people. You see we are not the decision-makers here. The bigger countries are playing the tune. We have to dance to it.”⁵⁴

His faction, including Gen. Mutu Say Poe, and the group's late foreign minister Saw David Taw, has, therefore, pushed for a ceasefire with Naypyidaw since the mid-2000s. This was already outlined in a report for Conciliation Resources in 2005 by Saw David Taw,⁵⁵ who was described to me as the original “mastermind behind the ceasefire.”⁵⁶ While this group has officially directed the KNU's strategy and behaviour since 2012, it is pitched against a powerful internal opposition that objects to the conditions and conduct of the ceasefire, which they felt was slipping beyond their control. The latter consists of central KNU leaders, including Vice-Chairperson Naw Zipporah Sein, Joint-General Secretary Padoh Thawthi Bwe, most administrative department heads, and many leaders from the northern brigade areas. This warier faction has the backing of the 5th Brigade, whose previous long-term commander Lt.-Gen. Baw Kyaw Heh has become the KNLA's Vice-Chief of Staff.

One senior leader of this faction, who preferred not to be identified, made very clear that he and many other KNU leaders were concerned about the ceasefire because they

perceived the focus to rest on business and economic development while there had not yet been any significant discussions on how to solve the political issues underlying the conflict, including constitutional amendments with regards to minority rights and power sharing.⁵⁷ His worries were aggravated by the fact that a Yangon-based crony company investing in infrastructure and resource exploitation across Karen State under the auspices of a retired *Tatmadaw* Major – the Princess Dawei Company - funded the ceasefire negotiations and follow-up meetings. This KNU leader put it as follows:

“The government at the beginning pushed and pressured us. [...] Because in the first meeting and the second meeting, when we started, the business people paid for all the transport and paid everything for us. [...] So we feel that the Burmese government, when they start the ceasefire, they just want to have a ceasefire and then say it is peace in order to do business and development. But we are worried that it will only remain a business agenda, because the government said: ‘We cannot talk about the politics. It is hard to do because we need to talk about that in the parliament. But business, we can give you right now, the economics we can give you right now. And we can sign right now.’ But we said: ‘No, no, we don't want to do it like that. We have to work on the political first and the business will come later.’ [...] So our policy should be something more like self-determination, how we want to do the business, sharing the revenues. But now I think that the [Executive] Committee members, they are pleasing the government and will provide what kind of business they ask for. They established a business committee at the 15th Congress. But most of these committee members, they work with the Burmese government closely.”⁵⁸

In contrast to the new incumbent leadership under Gen. Mutu Say Poe, the KNU opposition leader had wanted the KNU to only sign a preliminary ceasefire in 2012. In fact, on 12 January 2012, after the Myanmar government announced that a KNU delegation had signed the historic agreement in Hpa'an, the previous leadership, which he was part of, refuted that the KNU had even agreed to a truce. According to him, this was because the ceasefire delegation, led by General Mutu Say Poe - who at the time served as the KNLA's chief of staff – had only been sent to Yangon to discuss controversial points in the negotiations with the U Thein Sein government but was not supposed to sign an agreement. After the dust settled it became clear that the delegation had overstepped its authority and signed the ceasefire accord without consent from the KNU Executive Committee. The top leadership at the time, headed by Naw Zipporah Sein and David Tharckabaw, however, quickly backpedalled and accepted the accord for the sake of unity in a movement that had

experienced disastrous splits in the past. The demoted KNU leader also highlighted that he was careful not to displease the international community, particularly Western observers, who overwhelmingly praised the agreement.⁵⁹

During the following months negotiations intensified between Gen. Mutu Say Poe's delegation and the government's peace initiative headed by Railway Minister U Aung Min. These meetings were, however, marked by the striking absence of the movement's then-top leadership, including Naw Zipporah Sein, Padoh David Tharckabaw, and the movement's Chief of Staff and former leader of the strong northern Brigade 5, Lt.-Gen. Baw Kyaw Heh, all of whom refused to take part. Indeed, a significant rift was looming between them and the ceasefire delegation, which according to the previous incumbent leadership continued to overstep its authority. One KNU leader complained about their "activities like organising working groups, informing the government about our discussions and setting up a liaison office without letting the headquarter know," stating that "their way was not proper according to the rules and regulations of our organisation."⁶⁰ On 2 October 2012 these tensions escalated, leading the executive committee to dismiss Gen. Mutu, Gen. Saw Johnny, and David Taw for "repeated violations of KNU rules and regulations."⁶¹ Yet, three weeks later, a KNU central committee meeting reinstated the sacked leaders for the "sake of unity", stating that.⁶²

Briefly afterwards, in December 2012, Gen. Mutu Say Poe and his faction managed to take power at the KNU's 15th Congress, a general leadership meeting comprising of all regional and central KNU and KNLA leaders that is supposed to elect the movement's Executive Committee every four years. The congress was to decide between the leadership headed by Naw Zipporah Sein and the new one led by Gen. Mutu Say Poe. Held at a time of severe internal tensions, the meeting was mired in controversies from the outset. Both factions insisted that it takes place in their own stronghold. Zipporah Sein's faction wanted it to be organised in 5th Brigade territory of Mutraw, whereas Gen. Mutu Say Poe's group preferred the venue to be in 7th Brigade territory of Hpa'an. The latter prevailed and 171 KNU representatives, thus, met in the 7th Brigade headquarters of Lay Wah between 26 November and 26 December 2012 to discuss and vote for the new leadership. The first round of voting ended so close that none of the candidates reached the necessary 51 per cent, in effect necessitating a new vote, out of which Gen. Mutu Say Poe emerged victorious. Despite this

formal victory of the pro-ceasefire faction in this internal contestation, the internal opposition of the KNU has grown since.⁶³

Outlook: An uncertain future

Conscious about the detrimental impacts of past internal divides, leaders of all sides within the KNU assert the need for unity. Despite this, the movement has further fragmented and the internal resistance to the incumbent leadership and its conciliatory ceasefire policies towards the government has grown. This surfaced most poignantly in mid-2014 when the incumbent leadership surrounding KNU Chairman General Mutu attempted to leave the ethnic armed group alliance organisation United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC). The alliance was originally founded in 2011 jointly by the KNU and five other ethnic armed groups as a means of promoting the unity of ethnic armed groups at a time when the reescalation of conflict between various ethnic armies and the government in northern Myanmar was looming already.⁶⁴ Since then, the new KNU leadership has grown increasingly uncomfortable with their movement's membership in the alliance, which they perceived as putting constraints on their bilateral negotiations with Naypyidaw. Their attempt to leave the organisation, however, led to stark disagreements with the internal KNU opposition.⁶⁵ The latter, whom this decision reportedly caught by surprise, pressured the incumbent leaders to remain within the UNFC, fearing that the departure from the other ethnic organisations would speed up the rapprochement with between the KNU and Naypyidaw even more.⁶⁶

In October 2014, they took an initiative of their own in an attempt to join forces with similarly disillusioned factions from other Karen armed groups. Gen. Baw Kyaw Heh and the Commander of the KNDO Col. Ner Dah Mya met with representatives of the DKBA and the KPC and signed an agreement that founded a new armed group, the Kawthoolei Armed Forces (KAF) on paper⁶⁷. This time it was the incumbent KNU leadership, which was caught off-guard and renounced the creation of the KAF, worried that this would de-facto split the majority of its armed wing from its control. The two factions renegotiated both of these disagreements in an emergency meeting in October 2014⁶⁸. The meeting ended with a compromise declaration, stating that "reunification of the Karen armed organizations under the political leadership of the KNU or the formation of Kawthoolei Armed Forces (KAF) is accepted, in

principle” but also decided that the “temporary suspension of [UNFC] membership will be sustained.”⁶⁹

While the KAF remains existent only on paper, the KNU’s two rival factions have continued to drift further apart. This became obvious during the negotiations for the so-called National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), which the KNU ended up signing as the only sizeable ethnic insurgency, in October 2015. KNU General Secretary Kwe Htoo Win and Chairman Gen. Mutu Say Poe were among the main advocates of the agreement. Addressing the public after President U Thein Sein as the second keynote speaker at the ceasefire summit, Gen. Mutu Say Poe declared that the “NCA is a new page in history [...]. More than just a ceasefire agreement, the NCA is the first step on the important road towards the establishment of a federal and democratic Union.”⁷⁰ A few days before, an alternative summit took place in Panghsang, the mountain headquarters of the powerful United Wa State Army (UWSA) at the Chinese border. The meeting featured representatives of ten ethnic armed groups that objected the NCA and met to coordinate their strategies.⁷¹ In addition to these non-signatories, some of whom remained locked in fierce battles with the *Tatmadaw*, KNU internal opposition leaders Naw Zipporah Sein and David Tharckabaw also attended the meeting. Instead of joining as representatives of the KNU, they were present on behalf of the KNDO. Interviewed at the meeting, David Tharckabaw publicly denounced the current leadership of the KNU and declared that his faction is looking for closer ties to the non-signatory ethnic armed groups:

“The KNDO and the KNU have the same fundamental standpoint, but some leaders did not walk on the right path. Our right stance is that we need to work and cooperate with our alliance of ethnic armed forces. Then our alliance will fight for equal rights and the right to govern ourselves with self-determination for our ethnic region. Our KNDO stance is that if we do not have our allied force, we need to form it. In the case that we need to lead our alliance, we need to prepare for that. This is our stance. We do not want to lose our path, which is why we will continue to work with our alliance of ethnic armed forces.”⁷²

At the time of writing, it is impossible to predict the future of the KNU and the prospects of Myanmar’s fragile peace process. The internal tensions within the Karen insurgency, however, point to the potential of a future organisational split or internal power transition, which could jeopardise the group’s ceasefire as well as nationwide peace negotiations. Whether the ceasefire will hold depends on several factors. The most important

one will be whether or not genuine grievances among the movement's grassroots as well as claims to power of the internal opposition can be accommodated within the current ceasefire framework and ongoing peace process.

6 Conclusion

This article has analysed why the KNU signed a ceasefire in 2012 and has since come to be one of the main advocates for peace in Myanmar. In contrast to accounts that infer this change in strategy from the country's wider political transition, this article showed how processes of internal fragmentation and contestation developed a momentum of their own. It demonstrated that the Karen ceasefire resulted from leadership contestation within the KNU after power relations inside the movement had shifted considerably due to military challenges and geopolitical transformations at the Thai-Myanmar border. Importantly, these external pressures impacted central and southern rebel units more severely than the ones in the remote northern mountains of Karen State. This has effectively shifted the KNU's internal power balance from its traditional backbone in central Karen State to the north and has, in turn, given rise to two competing factions in the KNU leadership and their diverging strategies towards the state. The rapprochement with the government was led by central brigade leaders who sought to compensate for their declining power and authority, while leaders affiliated to northern units opposed the organisation's new conciliatory line.

The article also highlighted the need to address these internal fissure for any meaningful rapprochement between the KNU and the government to continue. In its current form, Myanmar's peace process is ill-suited to accommodate such intricate dynamics. This said, ignoring the grievances, concerns and power interests among dissenting parts of the Karen movement is unlikely to yield peace and stability in the country's war-torn eastern borderlands. In fact, it seems probable that this would lead to either a split of the movement or the coming into power of less accommodating leaders in the KNU. The escalation of large-scale armed conflict between various ethnic armies and the government in Myanmar's borderlands to China should serve as a potent incentive to address these issues. At the heart of the renewed civil war in the country's north was the breakdown of a 17-year ceasefire between the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the government in 2011. As shown

elsewhere, the breakdown of the Kachin ceasefire was indeed driven by dynamics similar to the ones analysed here. They also included a power struggle between a conciliatory leadership and an internal opposition. The latter successfully remobilised the insurgency upon the growing resentments among its rank and file against a ceasefire that benefitted some elites but did not address the political demands of the movement.⁷³

Beyond the case of Myanmar, the findings highlighted the need to further our knowledge of dynamics internal to non-state armed groups for developing a better understanding of their strategies. By showing how the geopolitics of borderlands impact on such local power struggles and the ways in which these drive wider dynamics of conflict and conciliation in turn, the article also demonstrated the importance of analysing the interplay between different levels of analysis for understanding civil war. Tracing these processes on the basis of extensive field research has thus contributed to the literature on armed conflict in general and the emerging literature on non-state armed groups in particular with important empirical evidence. In doing so, the article responded to the increasing call for more primary source data in Conflict and Security Studies and International Relations.

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¹ Yan Naing, "The Growing Friendship Between Naypyidaw and the KNU," *The Irrawaddy*, June 6, 2014, accessed June 18, 2014, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/multimedia-burma/growing-friendship-naypyidaw-knu.html>.

² See for instance International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative," International Crisis Group, accessed July 21, 2014, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/burma-myanmar/214%20Myanmar%20-%20A%20New%20Peace%20Initiative.pdf>; Jason Burke, "Burma signs ceasefire with Karen rebels in step towards ending isolation," *The Guardian*, December 2, 2012, accessed August 3, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/12/burma-ceasefire-karen-rebels-isolation>; Seth Mydans, "Burmese Government and Ethnic Rebel Group Sign Cease-Fire," *The New York Times*, December 2, 2012, accessed July 5, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/13/world/asia/myanmar-signs-truce-with-ethnic-rebel-group.html?_r=0. When applauding the release of political prisoners in an official statement that heralded the restoration of full diplomatic ties between the United States and Myanmar, U.S. President Barack Obama mentioned the "important ceasefire agreement" as yet another mile stone on the country's windy road to democracy and peace Barack Obama, "Statement by the President on the Release of Burmese Political Prisoners," news release, January 13, 2012, accessed May 7, 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/13/statement-president-release-burmese-political-prisoners>.

³ David Brenner, "Ashes of co-optation: from armed group fragmentation to the rebuilding of popular insurgency in Myanmar," *Conflict, Security & Development* 15, no. 4 (2015).

⁴ Yan Naing, "The Balkanization of Karen State," *The Irrawaddy*, May 10, 2012, accessed June 16, 2014, http://www.irrawaddy.org/z_border/the-balkanization-of-karen-state.html; David Brenner, "Battlefield to Marketplace and Back: Peace in Burma is hampered by an economic logic of limited utility," *Himal Southasian* 27, no. 3 (2014), accessed August 9, 2015, <http://himalmag.com/burma-ceasefire-capitalism/>; Mikael Gravers, "The Karen and the Ceasefire Negotiations: Mistrust, Internal Segmentation, and Clinging to Arms," in *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar: The Kachin Ceasefire 1994-2011*, ed. Mandy Sadan (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2016).

⁵ Charles Tilly, *Explaining social processes* (Boulder CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), p. 69.

⁶ Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Foreword: Internal Conflict and Political Violence: New Developments in Research," in *Rethinking violence: States and non-state actors in conflict*, ed. Erica Chenoweth and Adria Lawrence, Belfer Center studies in international security, edited by Adria Lawrence (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2010), xii.

⁷ See for instance Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On economic causes of civil war," *Oxford Economic Papers* 50, no. 4 (1998), doi:10.1093/oep/50.4.563; David E. Cunningham, Kristian S. Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, "It takes two: A dyadic analysis of civil war duration and outcome," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2009.

⁸ See I. William Zartman, *Ripe for resolution: Conflict and intervention in Africa*, Updated ed., Council on Foreign Relations books (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); for a good critique see Wendy Pearlman, "Spoiling inside and out: internal political contestation and the Middle East peace process," *International Security* 33, no. 3 (2009).

⁹ Pearlman; Kathleen G. Cunningham, Kristin M. Bakke, and Lee J. M. Seymour, "Shirts Today, Skins Tomorrow Dual Contests and the Effects of Fragmentation in Self-Determination Disputes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (2012).

¹⁰ Pearlman, "Spoiling inside and out"; Cunningham, Bakke and Seymour, "Shirts Today, Skins Tomorrow"; Benedetta Berti, *Armed political organizations: From conflict to integration* (JHU Press, 2013); Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014).

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¹² Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion*; Kristin M. Bakke, Kathleen G. Cunningham, and Lee J. M. Seymour, "A plague of initials: Fragmentation, cohesion, and infighting in civil wars," *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 02 (2012).

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¹⁴ Pearlman, "Spoiling inside and out".

¹⁵ Pearlman, "Spoiling inside and out".

¹⁶ Cunningham, Bakke and Seymour, "Shirts Today, Skins Tomorrow", p. 69.

¹⁷ See <http://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/component/content/article/57-stakeholders/161-knu>

¹⁸ In fact, the ethnic category Karen is inherently fluid and incorporates different linguistic and cultural heritages. Most important are the distinctions between Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen as well as hill Karen in the rugged forests of eastern Myanmar and so-called "Delta Karen" from central Myanmar. The former speak three different Karen languages, the latter often only speak Myanmar. Instrumental for generating a relatively

coherent sense of identity, cohesive organisational structures, and unifying the “liberated territories” of Kawthoolei over the past decades was the colonial state, missionaries, and the emerging insurgent political culture under an ethno-national agenda that was forwarded by Karen elites. Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the politics of ethnicity*, 2nd ed. (Dhaka: University Press, 1999), pp. 390–91.

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²⁰ South, *Ethnic politics in Burma: States of conflict*, p.55.

²¹ Ashley South, “Burma’s Longest War: Anatomy of the Karen Conflict,” Transnational Institute, accessed January 22, 2013, <http://www.tni.org/sites/www.tni.org/files/download/Burma's%20Longest%20War.pdf>, p.9.

²² Smith, *Burma*, p.395.

²³ Interview with KNU leader from Duplaya, Law Khee Lar, 4 December 2013.

²⁴ David Taw, “Strategic considerations for the Karen National Union,” in *Choosing to engage: Armed groups and peace processes*, ed. Robert Ricigliano, Accord 16 (2005), accessed October 1, 2016, http://www.c-r.org/downloads/Accord16_9Choosintoengage_2005_ENG.pdf, p.41.

²⁵ David Taw, “Strategic considerations for the Karen National Union,” p.42.

²⁶ South, “Burma’s Longest War”, pp.16–17.

²⁷ Mary P. Callahan, *Political authority in Burma's ethnic minority states: devolution, occupation and coexistence*, Policy Papers 31 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007), p.36.

²⁸ South, “Burma’s Longest War”, pp. 18–20.

²⁹ South, *Ethnic politics in Burma*, p. 55.

³⁰ Paul Core, “Burma/Myanmar: Challenges of a Ceasefire Accord in Karen State,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 28, no. 3 (2009), pp. 98–99.

³¹ Please note that there are also currently two DKBA movements. The DKBA originally renamed from Democratic Karen Buddhist Army into Democratic Karen Benevolent Army in 2010, when part of the movement turned into a BGF. In January 2016 units from the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army split from the movement after it signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement with Myanmar’s government and formed a small group named after the movement’s original name Democratic Karen Buddhist Army. Cf. Myanmar Peace Monitor, “DKBA-5: Democratic Karen Benevolent Army,” accessed October 1, 2016, <http://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/background/ethnic-grievances/159-dkba-5>; Karen Human Rights Group, “Recent fighting between newly-reformed DKBA and joint forces of BGF and Tatmadaw soldiers led more than six thousand Karen villagers to flee in Hpa-an District, September 2016,” accessed February 20, 2017, <http://khrhg.org/2016/12/16-7-nb1/recent-fighting-between-newly-reformed-dkba-and-joint-forces-bgf-and-tatmadaw>

³² For more information on Khun Sa and the drug trade in the Golden Triangle see Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, *Opium: uncovering the politics of the poppy* (Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 23–36.

³³ South, *Ethnic politics in Burma*, pp. 73–74.

³⁴ According to Smith, the KNU received 5,000 baht per ton of teak Smith (see note 18 above), 409.

³⁵ See South, *Ethnic politics in Burma* (see note 19 above), 75. Mining and logging are still the most profitable businesses in Karen State today. In addition to teak, wolfram, tin, and lead, other minerals in Karen State include gold, antimony, tungsten, and zinc Adam Smith International, “Institutional Regulatory Assessment of the Extractive Industries in Myanmar,” accessed October 14, 2015, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2015/05/14/090224b082e8301f/1_0/Rendored/PDF/Main0report.pdf, p. 68. The 2012 ceasefire with the KNU, has more, sparked increased agro-business investment, including rubber and palm oil plantations Global Witness, “What Future for Rubber Production in Myanmar?,” accessed January 19, 2016, https://www.globalwitness.org/documents/10527/what_future_english_version_april_2014_0.pdf, p. 3.

³⁶ South, “Burma’s Longest War”, p. 21.

³⁷ South, “Burma’s Longest War”, p. 20.

³⁸ Conversation with KNU officer, Thai-Myanmar border, 19 October 2013.

³⁹ Åshild Kolås, “Burma in the Balance: The Geopolitics of Gas,” *Strategic Analysis* 31, no. 4 (2007), p. 628.

⁴⁰ Interview with Karen activist, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 30 October 2015.

⁴¹ International NGOs documented the severe human rights abuses accompanying the construction of the pipeline and filed lawsuits against Total and US-based Unocal in Europe and the US for “complicity in crimes against humanity.” Åshild Kolås, “Burma in the Balance,” p. 630.

⁴² Smith, *Burma*, p. 25.

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- ⁴³ Smith, *Burma*, p. 99.
- ⁴⁴ Smith, *Burma*, p. 283.
- ⁴⁵ David Brenner, *Insurgency as a Social Process: Authority and Armed Groups in Myanmar's Changing Borderlands*, PhD thesis (The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2016), pp.139-150.
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- ⁴⁷ Interview with KNU leader from Duplaya, Law Khee Lar, 4 December 2013.
- ⁴⁸ Interview with KNU leader from Duplaya, Law Khee Lar, 4 December 2013.
- ⁴⁹ Smith, *Burma*, pp. 390–92
- ⁵⁰ Conversation with KNU officer, Mutraw, 20 October 2013.
- ⁵¹ This impression emerged from interviews with differently situated KNU leaders from different KNU Districts in Law Khee Lar, 5-6 December 2013.
- ⁵² Brenner, *Insurgency as a Social Process*, pp.139-150.
- ⁵³ Padoh is Sgaw Karen for elder. KNU leaders who lack other civilian or administrative titles are usually given this prefix.
- ⁵⁴ Interview with KNU General Secretary Padoh Kwee Htoo Win, Law Khee Lar, 4 December 2013.
- ⁵⁵ David Taw, "Strategic considerations for the Karen National Union."
- ⁵⁶ Interview with KNU leader, Mae Sot, 8 November 2013.
- ⁵⁷ Interview with KNU leader, Mae Pa, 25 October 2013.
- ⁵⁸ Interview with KNU leader, Mae Pa, 25 October 2013.
- ⁵⁹ Interview with KNU leader, Mae Pa, 25 October 2013.
- ⁶⁰ Interview with KNU leader, Mae Pa, 25 October 2013.
- ⁶¹ Radio Free Asia, "Three Karen Officials Removed," *Radio Free Asia*, April 10, 2012, accessed January 19, 2016, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/karen-10042012152054.html>
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- ⁶⁵ Lwin Ei Ei Toe, "Will Karen National Union stay in UNFC?," *Myanmar Times*, August 9, 2014, accessed January 19, 2016, <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/in-depth/11574-will-karen-national-union-stay-in-unfc.html>
- ⁶⁶ Karen News, "KNU Decision to Withdraw from UNFC Undemocratic Claims Karen Women's Organisation," *Karen News*, March 10, 2014, accessed January 19, 2016, <http://karennews.org/2014/10/knu-decision-to-withdraw-from-unfc-undemocratic-claims-karen-womens-organisation.html/>
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- ⁶⁸ Lwin Ei Ei Toe, "KNU to meet amid split fears," October 17, 2014, accessed January 19, 2016, <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/11982-knu-calls-urgent-meeting-for-reunification.html>
- ⁶⁹ Karen National Union Supreme Headquarters, Central Standing Committee after 15th KNU Congress third Emergency Meeting Statement, 29 October 2014. Obtained by the author.
- ⁷⁰ Mutu Say Poe, "KNU Chairman Speech At The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signing Ceremony," news release, October 15, 2015, accessed July 5, 2016, <http://www.knuhq.org/knu-chairman-speech-at-the-nationwide-ceasefire-agreement-signing-ceremony/>
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