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# **Why Do Some Insurgent Groups Agree to Ceasefires While Others Do Not?**

## **A Within-Case Analysis of Burma/Myanmar, 1948-2011**

**Alexander Dukalskis**

University College Dublin  
alexander.dukalskis@ucd.ie

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### **Abstract:**

This article uses Burma/Myanmar from 1948 to 2011 as a within-case analysis to explore why some armed insurgent groups agree to ceasefires while others do not. Analyzing 33 armed groups it finds that longer-lived groups were less likely to agree to ceasefires with the military government between 1989 and 2011. The article uses this within-case variation to understand what characteristics would make an insurgent group more or less likely to agree to a ceasefire. The article identifies four armed groups for more in-depth qualitative analysis to understand the roles of the administration of territory, ideology, and legacies of distrust with the state as drivers of the decision to agree to or reject a ceasefire.

### **Running head:**

Ceasefires in Burma/Myanmar

Between independence from Britain in 1948 and a tentative transition to a less militaristic regime in 2011, the central government of Burma/Myanmar had to contend with dozens of armed insurgent groups. Over time new groups formed, old ones were defeated or gave up, and existing ones changed demands, allied with each other, splintered from parent insurgencies or changed form. During this period the central government presented itself to the armed insurgents in at least four different forms: a weak parliamentary regime (1948-1958), a military ‘caretaker’ government (1958-1960), a socialist-military regime (1962-1988) and a military junta (1988-2011). Non-violent democracy movements with roots in urban centers and sympathetic allies in the Buddhist monasteries further complicated the politics of insurgency in Myanmar.<sup>1</sup> One regularity in Burmese politics since independence, however, has been the desire of the central government to settle armed disputes once and for all.<sup>2</sup> Successive governments attempted various combinations of defeating rebels militarily, arriving at peace agreements, co-opting insurgents into the government or pushing armed actors into the territory of neighboring states.

This regularity continues today. Myanmar has significantly liberalized since 2011 when a more pluralistic regime took power after nearly 50 years of outright authoritarian rule.<sup>3</sup> As of this writing it has agreed to ceasefires with a number of important insurgent groups and continues to negotiate more substantive political settlements with them. The prior military regime, known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and later re-branded as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), took power in 1988 and made public its goal to arrive at ceasefire arrangements with all armed groups fighting on the territory of Burma. The SLORC/SPDC was successful in securing ceasefire arrangements with twenty different armed groups between 1988 and 2011. The ceasefires were not comprehensive peace agreements and did not normally address underlying political grievances. Outcomes ranged from occupation of insurgent areas by the military to de facto autonomy to resigned cooperation on the part of the insurgents, all while military actors and allies continued to exploit the

rich natural resources to be found in the militarized areas.<sup>4</sup> Despite the SLORC/SPDC's success in agreeing to twenty ceasefires between 1988 and 2011, at least thirteen armed factions continued to challenge central authority by force throughout the junta's tenure. Herein lies significant empirical variation as well as this article's central research question: why did some groups sign ceasefires with Burma/Myanmar's SLORC/SPDC while others did not?

Cross-national literature on civil wars suggests that parties in longer-running conflicts should be more likely to arrive at a negotiated settlement. Data compiled on 33 armed groups, however, demonstrates that in the case of Burma/Myanmar longer-lived insurgent groups were less likely to sign ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC. Given that all of these insurgent groups faced the same central government, this variation provides the context for a useful within-case study that allows for an examination of hypotheses related to the characteristics of the armed groups themselves. In other words, the characteristics of the state are held constant throughout this period since all groups would have had to agree to ceasefires with the same state actors. Variation in these ceasefire outcomes is therefore likely to be explained by variation in the characteristics of the armed groups facing the state.

This article therefore explores three main hypotheses and finds evidence that all three help explain the curious empirical finding that longer-lived insurgent groups in Myanmar were more hesitant to sign ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC. First, the longer a group has been fighting, the more resources and effort it has likely put into building up and administering territory it controls. A long-standing group should be less willing to put the infrastructure and governing arrangements it has established at risk by signing a ceasefire with an untrustworthy state. Second, the more that a group is driven by political aspirations or a well-developed ideology as opposed to material gains or a shallower set of demands, the more likely it is hold out longer for a politically comprehensive agreement instead of a more superficial military ceasefire. On this account, materially-driven factions within larger ideological groups may split from their parent organizations in order to pursue ceasefires, thus allowing

them to consolidate any immediate material gains potentially at the expense of broader political goals. Third, groups that have been fighting a central government for longer are more likely to have built up a long history of disappointments, failed agreements, and legacies of distrust with the central government than younger groups. This should make such groups less willing to show faith in the government by signing a ceasefire. In sum, the longer an armed conflict runs the more exacerbated these causal factors are likely to become and the more difficult a ceasefire is to conclude.

This article will proceed in four stages. First, it will briefly review a selection of cross-national literature on armed conflict in order to provide a theoretical foundation for hypotheses and to situate the dynamics of Myanmar within a broader conceptual context. Second, the article will provide and analyze descriptive statistics on 33 armed groups in Burma, 20 of which signed ceasefires and 13 of which did not agree to ceasefires during the period under study. Third, it will analyze four different armed groups in order to more deeply understand the associations demonstrated in the descriptive statistics. This section will first provide brief historical background of armed conflict in Myanmar that will explain the ‘state’ side of the insurgent-state dyad. This section will then explain the criteria used for selecting the four groups for further examination before exploring each group with regard to the aforementioned hypotheses. The groups examined are the Karen National Union, the United Wa State Army, the Shan State Army-South, and the Kachin Independence Organization. Fourth, the article will conclude with a brief summary and remarks about the implications of its findings.

### **Theoretical Overview: Why Sign a Ceasefire?**

Scholarship on civil wars and armed conflict provides a theoretical context in which to examine variation in the agreement of ceasefires in Myanmar, while the complexity and variation within this case allows for testing and refinement of existing theory. While much of the literature seems to assume that one state fights only one armed group at a time, and few studies exist on why some groups within

the same context sign ceasefires while others do not, it is still possible to use insights from the theoretical and quantitative literature on civil wars to derive hypotheses. This section will draw insights from literatures on peace agreements and conflict duration in order to situate insurgencies in Burma within broader cross-national patterns.

The conventional wisdom suggests that parties in longer-running conflicts should be more willing to reach a negotiated settlement. Using hazard models, Collier et al. find that after seven years of conflict the chances of peace per year increase, thus suggesting that longer-running conflicts should be more likely to see a ceasefire.<sup>5</sup> They attribute this to a “more realistic assessment of military prospects.” This logic is broadly consistent with the “war weariness” hypothesis that groups fighting long wars will eventually understand that their prospects of outright victory are low and will settle for peace even without achieving their goals in full. Doyle and Sambanis find evidence that while peacebuilding in more hostile conditions will be more difficult, “long wars may be more likely to bring the parties to the negotiation table to sign a treaty because of the reduced uncertainty about the prospects of a military victory.”<sup>6</sup> Fortna also finds some support for the war weariness hypothesis in her analysis of peacekeeping.<sup>7</sup> The logic of these findings is broadly consistent with Zartman’s notion of the “mutually hurting stalemate”: when groups are “locked in a conflict from which they can not escalate to victory and this deadlock is painful to both of them” they seek a way out.<sup>8</sup>

Curiously, as will be established in greater detail below, the opposite seems to have been the case in Myanmar under the SLORC/SPDC. Groups that fought the central government longer seemed less willing to sign ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC. Understanding why this is the case is conceptually different from the focus of work on civil wars that attributes variation in conflict duration and termination to the character of the state or territory.<sup>9</sup> Studies that examine state infrastructural power in Burma or the expansion of the weak, ethno-nationalist Burmese state have difficulty explaining why some armed groups chose to rebel while others chose to acquiesce vis a vis the same

state.<sup>10</sup> In a within-case research design, factors such as state strength, geographical characteristics, ethnolinguistic fractionalization, and regime type are largely held constant. Comparing several armed groups within a single state and during a period in which only authoritarian regimes ruled suggests that characteristics of the armed groups themselves must account for variation in outcomes.<sup>11</sup>

Literature on the duration of civil wars provides insights into which types of groups fight long wars, and by extension which groups are more or less likely to stop fighting. Fearon finds that ‘sons of soil’ wars, which involve conflicts over land between a peripheral ethnic minority and a state-supported dominant ethnic group, are long-lived. Fearon attributes this tendency to commitment problems because of the government’s fluctuating capabilities: when the government is weak it may agree to cede territory or power to rebels, but when it is strong again it can simply overturn the agreement.<sup>12</sup> While the SLORC/SPDC hardly made a reliable negotiating partner, all armed groups in Myanmar had to deal with it which means that state-level commitment problems do not adequately explain why some groups agreed to ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC while others could not reach agreements with the very same regime. Arguments correlating state capacity with peace settlements face the same problem in a within-case research design: all armed groups are fighting the same state, meaning that state capacity does not vary across observations.<sup>13</sup> However extending Fearon’s logic, one can derive a hypothesis if it is assumed that all groups are skeptical of a SLORC/SPDC commitment: groups that have been fighting longer are more likely to control territories and to have sunk more human and financial resources into the areas they control. This should make them less willing to risk their achievements by agreeing to a relatively shallow ceasefire with an untrustworthy counterpart.

Fearon also finds that wars in which rebel groups have access to contraband last longer.<sup>14</sup> Collier and his co-authors complicate the logic by finding evidence for a ‘rebellion-as-business’ theory of armed conflict. On this account, rebel groups selling contraband may have incentives to continue fighting if they are making more money than they would in peace time.<sup>15</sup> This logic suggests that if

armed groups could make more money under ceasefire conditions than they could under conditions of active conflict, then they would be compelled to come to terms with the central government. This is a plausible scenario in Myanmar as the SLORC/SPDC has a history of tolerating, if not actively supporting, opium and illicit logging and rubber trades.<sup>16</sup> If groups relying on contraband, however, were more interested in securing a political arrangement than profits, then they would be more likely to continue fighting. Of course even an ideologically-motivated group reliant on contraband may see its best option as agreeing to a ceasefire in order to use contraband profits to administer the areas under its control at the time of the ceasefire. This is less likely in Myanmar, however, because the ceasefires do not settle political issues; they are simply military ceasefires. A highly ideological group would be more likely to use contraband profits in order to continue fighting to increase pressure for a political settlement rather than settle for a more superficial arrangement. Indeed incorporating the ideological beliefs of armed groups into analysis can help explicate their goals, highlight the ways in which they maintain cohesion, and make sense of strategies that seem puzzling from purely instrumental perspectives.<sup>17</sup> These considerations suggest that in Myanmar access to contraband funds can be a force for shortening or lengthening a conflict, depending on the characteristics of the group. This permits a second hypothesis: groups with more well-defined political ideologies are less likely to sign ceasefires while groups more interested in consolidating profits from contraband are more likely to sign ceasefires.

A common explanation for why peace agreements are difficult to achieve revolves around credible commitments. The logic is simple and intuitive: it is difficult for warring parties to come to terms with each other because it is difficult to credibly commit to upholding those terms. Both sides have incentives to cheat. Walter argues that third-party enforcement can help mitigate these concerns, while Fortna argues that peacekeepers can provide valuable information to both parties to a conflict, thus increasing the possibility for credible commitments.<sup>18</sup> Hoddie and Hartzel argue that the process of

actually implementing a peace process can increase the credibility of commitments.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately the possibility of third parties monitoring ceasefires is unlikely in Burma, while the promise of ceasefires – simply not firing on one another – offers little in the way of signaling credibility. Furthermore, the SLORC/SPDCs record of brutality and corruption was unlikely to convince long-standing enemies of its benign intentions. Using credible commitments logic, one can arrive at a third and final hypothesis: groups that have been fighting longer are more likely to have built up a history of disappointments, failed agreements and resentment that will impede a ceasefire agreement.

### **Descriptive Overview: Which Groups Signed Ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC?**

In order to explore why longer-lived groups were less likely to sign ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC, it first needs to be established that it is indeed the case that older groups were on average more reluctant to make such agreements. To do so data is reported on 33 armed groups in Burma that fought the government at any time since 1948 and that either were in rebellion or agreed to ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC between 1989 and 2011. The year 1948 was chosen because this is when Burma achieved independence and 1989 was chosen because this is the first full year that the SLORC held power in the central government and began its quest to sign ceasefires with all armed groups on its territory. The definition of ‘ceasefire’ used is “an agreement between all of the main actors in a conflict that terminates military operation. In contrast to peace agreements...ceasefires do not deal with the incompatibility but codify a mutual cessation of hostilities”<sup>20</sup>

*Table 1* lists the 20 major armed groups that agreed to ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC. Using academic, non-government organization, and journalistic sources, the table lists the dates that the group was formed as well as the date that the group agreed to its ceasefire. Every case has been cross-referenced with multiple sources.<sup>21</sup> Even so, challenging coding choices presented themselves, which is unsurprising given the extreme complexity of armed conflict in Burma/Myanmar.

The case of the Communist Party of Burma Arakan (CPBA) is difficult because it is debatable when it formed as a distinct group. In 1989 the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), which formed in 1948, split into numerous subgroups after several mutinies of ethnic groups unhappy with Burman control of the organization. This resulted in several new ethnically-based armed groups in 1989 such as the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army Kokang, the National Democratic Alliance Army of Eastern Shan State and the United Wa State Army. The CPBA, however, was a branch of the parent CPB that retained its ideology and continued fighting under the flag of communism. It is thus unclear whether the CPBA should be coded as forming in 1989 because it was no longer under the parent CPB organization even though it retained its ideology and aims or in 1948 because it maintained the same ideology throughout the mutinies even though it was different organizationally. The table below has erred on the side of biasing the results against the claim that longer-lived armed groups were less likely to sign ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC by coding the CPBA as beginning in 1948. The table also reports how the figures would change if the CPBA were coded as forming in 1989. Furthermore, the table reports how the results would change if the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), which agreed to a ceasefire with the SLORC/SPDC in 1995 that lasted only three months, is included. More about the KNPP will be said when describing non-ceasefire groups.

*Table 1* reveals that the mean age for a group when it agreed to a ceasefire was 15 years, 4 months if the CPBA is coded as beginning in 1948 in order to bias results against the finding that longer-lived groups were less likely to agree to ceasefires. If one takes the later formation date of 1989 to account for the CPBA being a different organization, the mean duration of ceasefire groups drops to 13 years, 3 months. The median duration with the earlier start date is 13 years, 6 months, while if one uses the later formation date for the CPBA, the median is 9 years, 10 months. Including the KNPP as a ceasefire group because its brief 1995 ceasefire agreement pushes average durations upwards given that the KNPP formed in 1955 and is thus a relatively long-lived group.

**Table 1: Ceasefire Groups**

Group Name	Group Formation	Ceasefire Date	# of Months Fighting	# of Months if CPBA 1989
Communist Party of Burma (Arakan)	1948 (or 1989)	1997	600	108
New Democratic Army – Kachin	1968	December 1989	252	252
Kachin Independence Organization	1961	February 1994	397	397
Palaung State Liberation Army	1966	April 1991	304	304
Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (Kokang)	March 1989	April 1989	1	1
Kachin Defense Army	1990	January 1991	12	12
United Wa State Army	April 1989	May 1989	1	1
National Democratic Alliance Army (eastern Shan state)	March 1989	June 1989	3	3
Shan State Army	1964	September 1989	309	309
Shan State National Army	1995	1995	12	12
Pao National Organization	1966	April 1991	304	304
Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organization	1966	October 1994	310	310
Mong Tai Army	April 1985	January 1996	128	128
Kayan National Guard	1989	February 1992	37	37
Karenni National Democratic Party (Dragon Group)	November 1996	November 1996	1	1
Kayan New Land Party	1964	July 1994	366	366
Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front	1978	May 1994	196	196
Democratic Karen Buddhist Army	December 1994	1995	1	1
New Mon State Party	July 1958	June 1995	438	438
Mon Peace Group Chaungchi Region	1997	1997	1	1
			<b>Mean Duration</b>	<b>Mean Duration</b>
			15 years, 4 months	13 years, 3 months
			<b>Median Duration</b>	<b>Median Duration</b>
			13 years, 6 months	9 years, 10 months
			<b>With KNPP 1995</b>	<b>With KNPP 1995</b>
			16 years, 6 months	14 years, 6 months
			16 years, 4 months	10 years, 8 months

*Table 2* shows information for 13 major armed groups that did not sign ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC. Like with ceasefire groups, the table lists the formation date of each organization. Since they did not agree to ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC, there is no date to report. Again, there is some ambiguity about when groups began. Some groups, such as the Arakan Liberation Party, formed earlier (1967) but became militarily significant later (1981). To account for this uncertainty, the table includes calculations for both possible formation dates. Since there was a spate of ceasefires in 1994-1997, the table also includes calculations if the data are right-censored at 1998 to account for how long the groups had been fighting after the last major cluster of ceasefires. Again, this is done for both possible formation dates.

The results in *Table 2* indicate that in each calculation, the average length of fighting time for non-ceasefire groups is longer than for ceasefire groups. As mentioned previously there is some question about how to code the KNPP. If the KNPP is included as a non-ceasefire group and coded as

beginning in 1955 then mean age for groups that did not agree to ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC was either 27 years, 3 months or 30 years, 5 months depending on choices about when to code the formation of groups with ambiguous origins. Right-censoring the data by 13 years to gauge how old groups were at the last major round of ceasefires in the mid-1990s and using later formation dates to bias results against the finding that long-lived groups were less likely to agree to ceasefires still shows that non-ceasefire groups were slightly older on average than ceasefire groups.<sup>22</sup> Only by skewing the data against the conclusion that older groups were less likely to sign ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC *as much as possible* by using earlier formation dates for ceasefire groups, later formation dates for non-ceasefire groups, including the KNPP as a ceasefire group in 1995, re-including the KNPP as a non-ceasefire group forming in 1995, and right-censoring the non-ceasefire data at 1998 is one able to find that ceasefire groups are longer-lived on average than non-ceasefire groups.

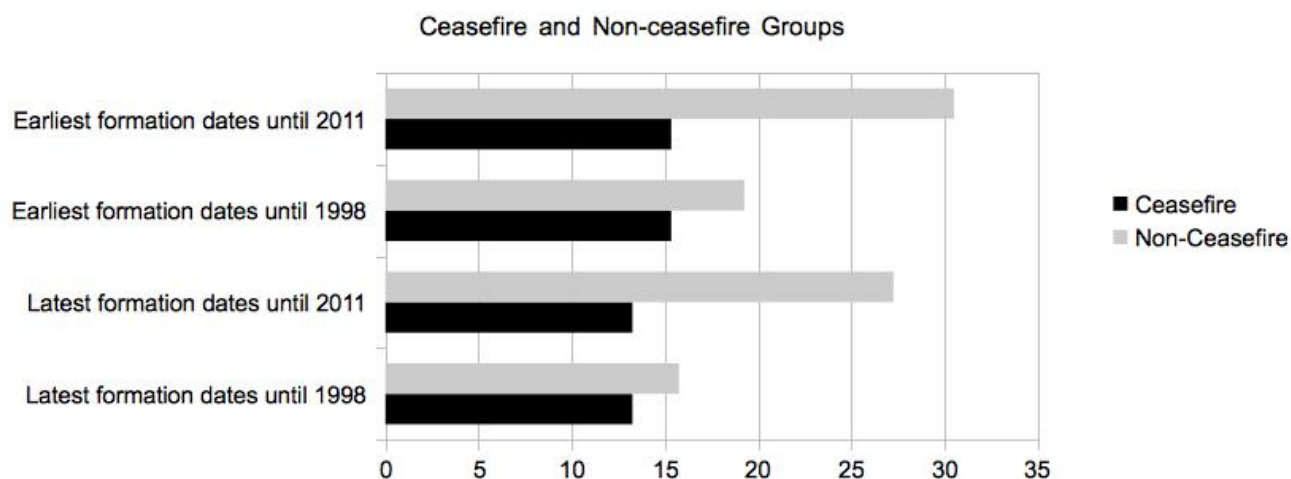
**Table 2 – Non-Ceasefire Groups**

Group Name	Group Formation	# of Months Fighting Until 2011	Until 2011 Using Earlier Formation Dates	Until 1998	Until 1998 Using Earlier Formation Dates
Karen National Union	1948	756	756	600	600
Arakan Liberation Party	1981 (or 1967)	360	528	204	372
Chin National Front	1988	276	276	120	120
Hongsawatoi Restoration Party	2001	120	120		
Karenni National Progressive Party	1955	672	672	516	516
Lahu Democratic Front	1985 (or 1972)	312	468	156	312
Mergui-Tavoy United Front	1989	264	264	108	108
National Socialist Council of Nagaland	1988	276	276	120	120
National United Party Arakan	1994 (or 1988)	204	276	48	132
Rohingya Solidarity Organization	1991 (or 1983)	240	336	84	180
Shan State Army-South	1995	192	192	36	36
Wa National Organization	1976	420	420	276	276
Arakan Rohingya National Organization	1998	156	156	1	1
		<b>Mean Duration</b>	<b>Mean Duration</b>	<b>Mean Duration</b>	<b>Mean Duration</b>
		27 years, 3 months	30 years, 5 months	15 years, 9 months	19 years, 3 months
		<b>Median Duration</b>	<b>Median Duration</b>	<b>Median Duration</b>	<b>Median Duration</b>
		23 years	23 years	10 years	13 years
		<b>No KNNP</b>	<b>No KNNP</b>	<b>No KNNP</b>	<b>No KNNP</b>
		24 years, 10 months	28 years, 3 months	13 years, 3 months	17 years, 1 month
		22 years, 6 months	23 years	10 years	11 years
		<b>KNNP Starting 1995</b>	<b>KNNP Starting 1995</b>	<b>KNNP Starting 1995</b>	<b>KNNP Starting 1995</b>
		24 years, 2 months	27 years, 4 months	13 years, 6 months	17 years
		22 years	23 years	10 years	13 years

Nevertheless, this extreme skewing of the data is not justified and a more reasonable interpretation of the data shows that on balance groups which did not sign ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC were significantly older than groups which did sign ceasefires. It is most reasonable to

code the KNPP as a non-ceasefire group because the brief cessation of hostilities in 1995 was so temporary that it is not seen as significant except as a broken promise.<sup>23</sup> Given that the group and the SLORC/SPDC resumed hostilities after only an ephemeral blip, this analysis treats the KNPP as a non-ceasefire group.<sup>24</sup> It is also not reasonable to right-censor the data in 1998 given that the SLORC/SPDC continued to pursue ceasefires after this date but was unable to have as much success as before 1998. Nevertheless, regardless of whether one uses earlier or later formation dates for all groups in question or whether one stops the data in 1998 or 2011, non-ceasefire groups were on average longer-lived than ceasefire groups. *Figure 1* illustrates this graphically

**Figure 1: Mean Durations of Conflict in Years**



### **Explaining the Empirical Record: Why Did Groups Sign (or Not Sign) Ceasefires?**

In order to understand why groups that had been fighting longer were more resistant to ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC, it is necessary to analyze such groups qualitatively since there are not enough observations or data for advanced quantitative analysis. This section examines four armed groups by tracing their relevant histories in order to explore the validity of the three hypotheses enumerated above. George and Bennett’s method of “structured, focused comparison” is used, which

they understand to be “‘structured’ in that the researcher writes general questions that reflect the research objective and that these questions are asked of each case under study to guide and standardize data collection, thereby making systematic comparison and cumulation of the findings of the cases possible. The method is ‘focused’ in that it deals only with certain aspects of the historical cases examined.”<sup>25</sup> The goal of such a study is to “explain an observable variation in the dependent variable.”<sup>26</sup> In this case, the dependent variable is the likelihood of signing a ceasefire while the “general questions” are the three hypotheses posed in question form:

- 1) Have groups that have been fighting longer sunk administrative and infrastructure costs into their territories and political organizations than make them less willing to sign ceasefires?
- 2) Do groups with more well-defined political ideologies avoid ceasefires that do not settle political issues? Are groups more interested in obtaining profits from contraband than in political settlements more likely to sign ceasefires?
- 3) Have groups that have been fighting longer built up more of a history of mistrust and failed agreements than their younger counterparts?

In order to answer these questions, four different groups with an array of characteristics were chosen. Specifically, a young ceasefire group (United Wa State Army), a relatively young non-ceasefire group (Shan State Army South), an old ceasefire group (Kachin Independence Organization), and an old non-ceasefire group (Karen National Union) were chosen. *Table 3* details the cases. Cases were chosen to secure variation on key variables such as ethnic composition, geographical area of hostilities, and dates at which the group was founded and/or signed a ceasefire. Variation on these dimensions helps to test whether the identified hypotheses hold across different types of groups. This section examines each case in turn, but first a brief historical background of armed conflict in Burma/Myanmar will be provided to situate the forthcoming analysis and to explain the state side of the ceasefire dyad.

**Table 3: Case Selection**

	<b>Ceasefire Group</b>	<b>Non-Ceasefire Group</b>
<b>“Young”</b>	United Wa State Army (UWSA) Founded: April 19, 1989 Ceasefire: May 18, 1989	Shan State Army South (SSAS) Founded: 1995
<b>“Old”</b>	Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) Founded: February 5, 1961 Ceasefire: February, 1994	Karen National Union (KNU) Founded: 1948

*Context: Armed Conflict in Burma/Myanmar*

Political power in pre-colonial Burma only extended as far as the technology of the central court or state would allow. Inhospitable geography and limited means of the early modern state in Burma ensured that “as distance from the capital and from the Irrawaddy [River] grew, so did any pretense at day-to-day administration.”<sup>27</sup> Throughout history court, state, and imperial power has been concentrated in valleys where sedentary agriculture was more manageable. Scott argues that over the centuries hill peoples in the area of ‘Zomia,’ which includes much of modern Burma and overlaps significantly with areas where armed conflicts have occurred in the past 65 years, cultivated agricultural and social practices designed to purposely evade state power.<sup>28</sup> On this account “the history of hill peoples is best understood as a history not of archaic remnants but of ‘runaways’ from state-making processes in the lowlands: a largely ‘maroon’ society, providing that we take a very long historical view.”<sup>29</sup> The colonial British dealt with this reality by dividing the territory into ‘Ministerial Burma,’ which corresponded largely to the valleys and plains, and ‘Frontier Areas,’ which corresponded largely to Scott’s ‘refuge zones’ of state escape and are characterized by inhospitable mountainous terrain.

As of independence in 1948 some areas of Burma had therefore never been under firm control

of a central state and many groups resisted Rangoon's attempts to subordinate them under a national union.<sup>30</sup> In a move that complicated the subsequent transition to independence, the British promised certain groups autonomy in a post-independence Burma if they fought with the British against the Japanese in World War II.<sup>31</sup> Although it is debatable to what extent these promises were genuine or even authorized, at least some groups took the prospect of secession and independence to heart.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the Panglong Agreement of 12 February 1947 between leaders of various Shan, Kachin and Chin groups and Burmese independence leader Aung Sang stipulated some degree of autonomy for ethnic groups.<sup>33</sup> During the transition to independence and its immediate aftermath, the central government was in real danger of collapsing under the weight of powerful armed forces such as the Communist Party of Burma and the Karen National Union.<sup>34</sup> Thus the first period of independence from 1948-1962 was one of confusion and widespread armed conflict as Burma attempted to forge a modern state within artificial borders drawn by a colonial regime that stoked nationalist sentiment upon its departure.

On 2 March 1962, General Ne Win overthrew the weak parliamentary regime of U Nu, dismissed the 1947 constitution, and ruled a military-dominated socialist regime until 1988. While national strikes in 1973 and protests surrounding the treatment of former UN Secretary General U Thant's body after it was returned to the government in 1974 both threatened the central government, the Ne Win regime was heavily repressive and sought to eliminate political activity.<sup>35</sup> In 1963/4 and again in 1980/1 peace talks between the regime and various armed groups were held only to collapse with both sides accusing the other of being disingenuous. Armed groups demanded political concessions while the army demanded surrender, leading the factions to talk past one another.

Massive nation-wide protests in 1988 following decades of economic mismanagement and political repression threatened to bring down the military regime of Ne Win.<sup>36</sup> On 23 July 1988, Ne Win stepped down as chairman of the Burmese Socialist Program Party (BPSS), the party-organ

running the state, after which anti-government demonstrations, particularly on 8 August 1988 intensified across the nation. On 18 September 1988 the military, led by General Saw Muang took over the reins of government and set up the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), promising to restore order and hold multi-party elections amid this transition.<sup>37</sup> In March 1989, the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) was hit by a series of mutinies by ethnic groups unhappy with Burman dominance in the leadership. The result was a series of new insurgent groups, including the USWA, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army [Kokang] and the National Democratic Alliance Army [Eastern Shan State]. Throughout 1989 the SLORC held ceasefire talks with these groups.<sup>38</sup> Under the guidance of ceasefire architect SLORC Secretary 1 Khin Nyunt, it succeeded to a significant degree. Between March 1989 and the end of 1997, the SLORC agreed to ceasefires with at least 17 different armed groups. The ceasefires differed in their specific terms, but generally did not include political solutions as the SLORC maintained that it was not a political organization, meaning that ethnic groups would have to settle their differences within the framework of the ongoing constitutional convention.<sup>39</sup> In November 1997 the SLORC re-branded itself as the State Peace and Development Council but continued its policy of seeking ceasefires until its ultimate replacement by a more pluralistic regime in 2011.

The outcomes of the various ceasefires varied, based largely on the strength of the group when it agreed to the ceasefire. Callahan divides the situation of ethnic groups into three broad categories. First, some groups, such as the USWA and its 20,000 soldiers, achieved a degree of autonomy and “near devolution of power” though signing ceasefires. After 1989, troops from the central government had to request permission from the UWSA before entering its territory, although subsequent and sporadic army attacks in more recent years suggested potential flux.<sup>40</sup> Second, some groups, such as the Karen National Union continued to resist. Ongoing conflict resulted in complex networks of power and frequent occurrences of ‘dual administration’ with armed groups and the government both claiming

authority. Third, some groups have agreed to ceasefires out of resignation and ceded their territories to occupation by the SLORC/SPDC. These groups saw their best option for obtaining some level of security and development as accepting economic aid in exchange for putting down their arms and allowing the SLORC/SPDC to dictate economic and political life on its own terms.<sup>41</sup>

With this background established, this section now moves on to examine four select armed groups to understand why they chose to sign ceasefires and why there is an association between the length of time a group had been under arms and its propensity to sign a ceasefire with the SLORC/SPDC. It will begin with two ceasefire groups: the relatively ‘young’ UWSA and the relatively ‘old’ Kachin Independence Organization. The section will then turn to the relatively ‘young’ Shan State Army-South and the ‘old’ KNU to examine non-ceasefire groups. Within each section appropriate background information will be provided followed by an examination of the case in relation to the three structured, focused questions elaborated, namely those pertaining to sunk administrative costs, well-defined political ideologies and histories of mistrust.

#### *A “Young” Ceasefire Group: the United Wa State Army (UWSA)*

The USWA and the people it governs are located on the border between China and Myanmar east of Mandalay and due north of the Thai city of Chiang Mai. In Scott’s terms, over the centuries the Wa people have developed a litany of state-repelling features that have enabled them to evade subjugation from central rule. Physical mobility, flexible subsistence patterns, and distance from state centers in terms of ‘friction-of-terrain remoteness’ all allow groups such as the Wa to increase their chances of repelling state control.<sup>42</sup> In modern times the Wa were not directly governed by the British during colonization or the Japanese during occupation and have contested or evaded the Burmese state since 1948. During the Frontier Areas Committee of Inquiry in 1947 designed to map a future for Burma’s various ethnic groups, when asked about what sorts of governance and services the Wa would

like after the British vacated Burmese space, one Wa chief replied “we have not thought about that because we are wild people.”<sup>43</sup> Another Wa leader maintained that “as for the future, we would like to remain as in the past, that is to be independent of other people.”<sup>44</sup>

After Burmese independence in 1948 many in the Wa Hills came under the control of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and its army. Indeed many of the rank-and-file soldiers of the CPB operating in the area until 1989 were Wa, while the leadership of the CPB was largely Burman. In 1974 the Wa National Organization took up arms against the central government but was not aligned with the CPB.<sup>45</sup> In the Spring of 1989, the CPB began to disintegrate under the combined pressures of military failure, a deterioration of relations with the Chinese Communist Party – its main patron for decades – and resentment of ethnic inequality within the party.<sup>46</sup> On 16 April 1989, Wa troops took over CPB headquarters in Panghsang, arrested CPB leaders, burned documents and photos from the CPB, and took control of the CPB’s considerable arms stockpile.<sup>47</sup> The United Wa State Party and its armed wing, the UWSA, were formed 3 days later. The National Democratic Front (NDF), an alliance of armed groups fighting the central government, attempted to woo the UWSA to its side, but Secretary 1 of the SLORC Khin Nyunt, was able to secure a ceasefire with the UWSA on 18 May 1989.<sup>48</sup> In 1990, the UWSA partnered with the SLORC to carry out offensives against the Mong Tai Army (MTA), presumably with the tacit agreement that the UWSA could keep whatever territory was won from the MTA.<sup>49</sup> Since 1989, the UWSA has administered its territory with relative independence from the central government: SLORC/SPDC troops had to obtain permission to enter UWSA territory, while the UWSP set up bureaus pertaining to forestry, health, political affairs, agriculture and a variety of other domains.<sup>50</sup>

Conditions for the USWA in 1989, however, were different from their present context. Having formed only a month before signing a cease-fire, the UWSA was a nascent entity at the time. Examining conditions in 1989, therefore, is more relevant to analyze than the administrative structures

and infrastructure subsequently developed by the USWA. First, the lack of sunk administrative and infrastructure costs for the USWA in 1989 meant that the group had little to lose from a ceasefire that allowed it to retain its arms. While it is true that many of the UWSA soldiers had been fighting with the CPB before the mutiny and subsequent ceasefire, the CPB put little effort into developing either physical infrastructure or administrative capacity in Wa areas. The CPB was controlled by Burmans and made only token efforts to develop Wa areas, preferring instead to use the hills as a strategic space from which to reach central Burma.<sup>51</sup> Had the USWA controlled its territory free from the CPB control since 1948, it may have been less inclined to agree to a ceasefire in 1989 but being that it was administratively young it had not yet had time to devote resources and time to developing areas under its control.

Second, the UWSA, while demanding autonomy from central control, did not have a well-developed political ideology or vision for governance.<sup>52</sup> With its “ethno-nationalist” agenda the UWSA did not have a list of political demands that it wanted to see at the national level. It put few demands on Myanmar’s central government except the request to be left alone. Putting a more modern gloss on comments made to the Frontier Areas Commission of Inquiry in 1947, UWSP Chairman Bao You Chang in 2002 said: “Wa State is an indivisible part of the Union of Myanmar. As a minority autonomous region, we only ask the government to grant us more power in self-administration.”<sup>53</sup> A relatively ‘thin’ ideology of this sort makes it easier for a group to sign a ceasefire for pragmatic reasons even if it does not address deeper political issues. Had the UWSA had more elaborate political demands in 1989, the SLORC would have eschewed discussion on such matters and a ceasefire would have been much more difficult to conclude.

Third, the UWSA, while certainly exhibiting distrust of any central government in Burma – including pre-colonial kingdoms, the British, the parliamentary and socialist regimes, and the SLORC/SPDC – also made its distrust of the CPB manifest by breaking away. Furthermore the UWSA

in 1989 did not put great effort into cultivating relationships with other armed groups in Burma, nor did it do so later. By 1989 members of the future UWSA had built up a decades-long legacy of distrust with the mainly Burman CPB as opposed to only the central government. Distrust of the CPB was manifest in a radio broadcast made by mutineers from the former CPB headquarters on 28 April 1989 that referred to the Communist insurgency as a “sham revolt” that failed to “analyze local and foreign conditions” and thereby “cheated the people of the Wa region,” a people with a tradition of “never kowtow[ing] before an aggressor army whether it be local or foreign.”<sup>54</sup> The Wa’s decades-long dealings with the CPB filled a reservoir of distrust with the communists on which Khin Nyunt may have been able to capitalize soon after the mutiny. The fact that Wa distrust in April 1989 was aimed mainly at the CPB and not the central government helped facilitate the ceasefire. Had the UWSA been directly fighting the SLORC or the socialist regime for those decades, a ceasefire with that group may well have been more difficult.

*An “Old” Ceasefire Group: the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)*

Operating primarily in the north of Myanmar between China and India, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) went into open revolt against the Burmese central government in on 5 February 1961. In February 1994, the KIO suspended its 33-year insurgency by agreeing to a ceasefire with the SLORC. Hostilities with the military resumed in 2011-2012 under Myanmar’s new government, but these developments are not included in this analysis even though the resumption of violence is consistent with the general thrust of this article that longer-lived groups in Myanmar are more likely to continue fighting. Nevertheless the ceasefire proved surprisingly robust and it is certainly curious why such a long-standing armed group would suddenly suspend its fight in 1994, but a closer look reveals that the KIO never had a strong, coherent ideology to sustain it in the face of an increasingly hopeless insurgency. Furthermore KIO’s territory was scattered in a manner that rendered

it difficult to build a network of infrastructure without crossing government territory. Finally it seems that the KIO may have had to subsume its distrust of the government to military exigencies given that it was badly outgunned by the SLORC/SPDC.

On 12 February 1947, Kachin, Chin and Shan leaders signed the Panglong Agreement, which articulated steps to achieve a political solution to Burma's diversity. One such provision was an endorsement of the formation of a Kachin State, the details of which were to be determined by the Constituent Assembly.<sup>55</sup> Kachin leaders stuck to the agreement for over a decade until several factors made rebellion a more attractive alternative. First, by the early 1960s it was becoming apparent that the Burmese state was centralizing and adopting policies preferential to the Burman ethnic majority. Second, Kachin leaders felt that the state's infrastructure, some of which was built under British rule, was falling into disrepair under the Rangoon government. Third, in early 1960, China and Burma finalized border demarcation negotiations that included land swaps that saw three Kachin villages given to China which stoked rumors that the central government of Burma had given vast tracts of Kachin land to China. Finally, U Nu's public promises in 1960 to make Buddhism the state religion did not sit well with the mostly Christian Kachins.<sup>56</sup> On 5 February 1961, the Kachin Independence Army, with training from British and American personnel, was set up under the command of Zau Seng with the goal of achieving Kachin independence.<sup>57</sup> In 1992 and 1993, in the face of increasing military pressure and deteriorating external support, the KIO negotiated with the SLORC with the hopes of reaching agreement on a ceasefire. In February 1994, the KIO concluded its ceasefire with the government, which was unusual because it was only ceasefire to have been physically written and signed. This suggests that the the size of the KIO and the length of time that it has been fighting led to the government treating it differently from other insurgent groups. Given its 33 years of insurgency, however, why did the KIO sign a ceasefire?

First, it is not immediately obvious how much the KIO directly administered the territory it

militarily controlled. Historically Kachin areas were governed in a decentralized manner on a village-by-village basis, meaning that if the KIO sought autonomy it is unclear how much it would actually administer.<sup>58</sup> The perception that infrastructure in the Kachin state was falling into disrepair from 1948-1961 suggests that centralized Kachin organizations saw it as the responsibility of the central government to contribute to development. Further, the KIO's hopes that a ceasefire would be accompanied by development aid suggest that it struggled to maintain the territories that it controlled, which were non-contiguous and therefore difficult to administer effectively.<sup>59</sup> The ceasefire agreement, in addition to other measures, stipulated that development projects should be funded by the government.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, it seems that the KIO's cost-benefit analysis led it to believe that it could increase its military strength after signing a ceasefire as its troop strength grew from between 4,000 to 7,000 at the time of the ceasefire to over 15,000 in 2005.<sup>61</sup>

Second, the KIO never had a consistent, coherent political ideology to help guide it through military vicissitudes. Indeed from 1948-1960 Kachin leaders adhered to the Panglong Agreement.<sup>62</sup> With the KIO's formation in 1961, the goal became an independent republic of Kachinland.<sup>63</sup> Attempted peace talks between the KIO and the socialist government in 1963 broke down over the KIO's demand of an independent Kachin state.<sup>64</sup> From 1968 to 1976 the KIO was staunchly anti-communist, allying itself with the Chinese nationalist KMT, and fighting the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in addition to the central government.<sup>65</sup> In 1976, however, two of the three founding brothers of the organization were assassinated due to dissatisfaction with their lifestyles and the KIO shifted to a pro-communist stance and allied itself with the CPB and China in exchange for arms.<sup>66</sup> In characteristically Maoist language the CPB and KIO released a joint communique lamenting "imperialism, feudalism-landlordism and bureaucrat capitalism."<sup>67</sup> During the early 1990s the KIO fell out with the National Democratic Front (NDF), a grouping of ethnic insurgent organizations, when it negotiated with the SLORC despite an NDF agreement to only negotiate with the government

collectively.<sup>68</sup> These shifting responses to military and contextual exigencies point to the KIO's "political pragmatism" and its history of being "staunchly nationalist rather than ideologically dogmatic."<sup>69</sup> Such "dramatic policy shifts" indicate that the ideology of the KIO was not well-defined and thus made it easier for the SLORC and KIO to negotiate a ceasefire without stipulating a final political settlement.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the business interests that elite Kachins were able to secure in the post-ceasefire era suggests that economic self-interest may have played a role in ending hostilities.<sup>71</sup> A more well-developed ideology to boost morale and guide strategy may have limited the KIO's ability to agree to a ceasefire.

Third, the KIO leadership did not seem to have internalized the same amount of distrust and resentment of the central government as its "old" counterpart, the Karen National Union (KNU). Although peace talks between the KIO and the government failed in 1963 and 1980, the KIO seemed to have negotiated in good faith with Khin Nyunt from 1992 to 94. The KIO and other ethnic cease-fire parties took their demands to the National Convention – tasked with writing a constitution – after the SLORC had suggested such a venue as the appropriate place to settle political disputes. In a heavily circumscribed process the constitution was drafted with little serious effort to accommodate ideas that ran contrary to SLORC/SPDC interests.<sup>72</sup> Had the KIO been a non-ceasefire group, such repression by the SPDC may have reified and further legitimized armed resistance, thus lengthening the time the organization had fought and rendering a ceasefire more difficult to conclude, but the 1994 ceasefire, although tenuous, mostly held throughout the SLORC/SPDC period.

*A "Young" Non-Ceasefire Group: the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S)*

Although there is significantly less information available about the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) than other, more long-standing insurgent groups in Burma, it is still worth asking why it did not agree to a cease-fire with the SLORC/SPDC. The SSA-S emerged in 1995 out of the remnants of

Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army (MTA), which formed in 1985. In return for attacking Shan rebels, Khun Sa – originally called Chang Chifu – was allowed to deal in opium and heroin and soon became prominent in the trade. After losing battles to the KMT and later being arrested by the Burmese government, Khun Sa was released and re-established his army in northern Thailand. His army continued its insurgency and illicit activity until January 1996 when it surrendered to the SLORC despite being one of the largest insurgencies in the country at 10,000 troops.<sup>73</sup>

MTA Colonel Yawd Serk broke off from the MTA with 500 to 1,000 soldiers to continue the insurgency under the name Shan State Army-South.<sup>74</sup> The SSA-S carried out raids in the southern Shan State and was linked with other organs of Shan nationalism, including other Shan ceasefire groups, the Shan National League for Democracy, and civil society groups based in Thailand.<sup>75</sup> During the SLORC/SPDC period the SSA-S had an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 soldiers and two small base areas on the border with Thailand, although it could only travel between the bases through Thai territory. By the twilight of the SLORC/SPDC the SSA-S had grown in strength, retaining over 7,000 soldiers and controlling five bases along the border with Thailand as of 2009, the largest of which, Loi Tai Leng, had a population of about 13,000 inhabitants.<sup>76</sup> Loi Tai Leng is a modest settlement with basic buildings, but it had some administrative facilities, including a training center for recruits to the SSA-S cause and a school.<sup>77</sup> Even so, the base areas were not contiguous, and to enter Loi Tai Leng one had to do so via Thailand.<sup>78</sup> Thus while the SSA-S did not have a large amount of administered territory to risk in a potential ceasefire, it was growing in strength as a group which may have made it more hesitant to sign a ceasefire despite its relative youth.

It seems unlikely that a well-developed ideology held the SSA-S from agreeing to a ceasefire with the SLORC/SPDC. The group did not have a 'thick' ideology beyond Shan nationalism, but during the SLORC/SPDC period Yawd Serk did argue that Shan State should be independent from Myanmar. The extent to which this goal guided SSA-S activities and negotiations is unclear given the

tiny amount of territory under its control along with the fact that from 2011 onward the group backed down from demanding independence, settling instead for talks about autonomy.<sup>79</sup> Yet it also appears unlikely that contraband was the main motivating factor behind the perpetuation of the SSA-S insurgency because of Myanmar's drastic reduction in opium cultivation in terms of both area and tonnage during the early years of the group's existence.<sup>80</sup> It seems improbable that during this decline in production and political toleration for opium on the part of both the SLORC/SPDC and Thai governments an insurgent group with the main aim of profiting from such contraband would survive in the way the SSA-S did. Indeed, Yawd Serk has been publicly critical of Khun Sa's business activities, which the former saw as coming at the expense of improvement for ordinary Shan people.<sup>81</sup>

Some evidence suggests that the SSA-S may have wanted a ceasefire as Yawd Serk apparently attempted to open talks with the SLORC/SPDC only to be rebuffed by the government, which argued that the SSA-S was a part of the already-surrendered MTA. While the SSA-S was free to lay down its weapons, it would not achieve the political legitimacy of a ceasefire group in the eyes of the SPDC.<sup>82</sup> Even though the SSA-S was a relatively young group, tactics like this by the SLORC/SPDC surely undermined trust between the two parties. Nevertheless, the fact that the SSA-S apparently wished for a ceasefire would be consistent with the thrust of this article that shorter-lived armed groups would be more likely to sign ceasefires. Indeed, trust may have been a key factor because soon after the post-SLORC/SPDC government came to power in 2011, the SSA-S and the new government agreed to a ceasefire. Yawd Serk retired in February of 2014 and talks between the SSA-S and the new government are ongoing, but had the SLORC/SPDC continued to rule it seems likely that the SSA-S would have been more likely to continue to resist a ceasefire had it developed a political ideology, administered more territory over a longer period of time, and continued to build resentment and mistrust of the SLORC/SPDC over time.

*An “Old” Non-Ceasefire Group: the Karen National Union (KNU)*

The Karen National Union (KNU) is one of the oldest and most well-known armed groups in Burma. Formed in July 1947, the KNU boycotted Burma’s founding elections and armed itself with the aim of achieving a separate state. A once powerful military force – indeed in early 1949 the KNU occupied Insein, an area on the outskirts of Rangoon and later controlled significant portions of territory along the border with Thailand – the KNU was significantly weakened by decades of counterinsurgency efforts and internal splits.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, the KNU did not sign a ceasefire with the SLORC/SPDC and only engaged in successful talks with the new government.

During British rule Karen were disproportionately represented in the armed forces due to the colonial policy of restricting Burmese enrollment. In 1931, despite comprising only 9.3% of the general population, Karen accounted for 37.7% of the army. In 1935, the colonial administration lifted restrictions on Burmans, but by 1941 Karen still comprised over 35% of the army.<sup>84</sup> This policy, combined with the British use of single-race units, meant that many Karen were able to retain weapons through World War II and after independence. During World War II, the Karen fought alongside the British believing they would be rewarded with their own state after independence. The Karen, however, received little for their effort during the war and found themselves the victims of atrocities committed by the mainly Burman, Japanese-backed Burma Independence Army (BIA).<sup>85</sup> From 1949 to the early 1980s, the KNU military had roughly 10,000 regular militants and represented a formidable opponent for the central government.<sup>86</sup>

The KNU’s territory after the 1940s was largely concentrated along the border with Thailand east of Rangoon, although in more recent years – and especially since 1984 – military offensives pushed insurgents and civilian Karens into refugee areas across the border. In the brutal counterinsurgency that the central government wrought upon Karen areas, zones that the SLORC/SPDC controlled were called – despite forced labor and military intimidation – ‘peace

villages,' while Karen areas beyond the control of the SPDC were called 'hiding villages.'<sup>87</sup> These spatial designations are indicative of how the KNU insurgency shifted in the face of overwhelming military power from more conventional methods to hit-and-run style tactics while struggling to protect and administer the pockets of territory that it still controlled.<sup>88</sup>

Given this desperate state of affairs, why did the KNU not conduct a ceasefire with the SLORC/SPDC? First, since the KNU had been fighting for over 60 years, one would expect it to have sunk a huge amount of effort and resources into administering its territories and building the political organizations necessary to sustain itself. Indeed, before 1995, the KNU had 15 different political departments, often with local village branches, and "had established hospitals, clinics, high schools, and hundreds of village schools in the areas it controlled."<sup>89</sup> The KNU maintained a drug-free policy and supported itself through household levies and a system of taxation on black-market goods passing over the border between Thailand and KNU-controlled areas.<sup>90</sup> In theory, household taxes should breed a sense of responsibility on the part of the KNU toward the 'citizens' it taxes. Although this claim has not been empirically tested, it is clear that the KNU continued to provide some basic administration in the areas it still controlled, including support for schools and medicine through mobile clinics and backpacking medical teams.<sup>91</sup>

The more significant factor holding the KNU back from agreeing to a ceasefire, however, was likely its political ideology. While there were certainly a multiplicity of views about how a Karen political community should look – including what counts as the 'Karen' people – the KNU espoused a relatively well-developed nationalist ideology infused with separatism, or more recently, nation-wide federalism with autonomy guarantees.<sup>92</sup> In 1992 the SLORC offered bilateral ceasefire talks with the KNU but were rejected on the grounds that the SLORC must negotiate a nationwide ceasefire and political settlement with all armed groups in the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB).<sup>93</sup> In 1995, the SLORC and KNU entered ceasefire talks only to have them break down when the central government

would not discuss political solutions to Karen issues.<sup>94</sup> Rejecting government demands for a non-political ceasefire, the KNU argued that “something in the form of a political agreement was needed on the table – not only as a guarantee of reform, but also to justify the sacrifices of the many who had died.”<sup>95</sup> Indeed the four guiding principles of the KNU had built-in barriers to a ceasefire: surrender is out of the question; the recognition of the Karen State must be completed; the KNU shall retain its arms; the Karen shall decide their own political destiny.<sup>96</sup>

The legacy of KNU rebellion over time allowed an ideology to emerge that made the possibility of a non-political ceasefire more difficult. In 1928 Karen jurist Dr. San C. Po, for example, provided a treatise that argued for a Karen state.<sup>97</sup> Decades of political debate within the KNU led to the adoption of long-term political objectives that place significant demands on any Burmese central government that could not be achieved with a mere ceasefire. Included in these are rights of self-determination, a just territorial arrangement, the establishment of a democratic federal union and basic rights for all groups in Burma.<sup>98</sup> The KNU elaborated on more specific tactics to achieve these goals, including targeted sanctions on the regime and humanitarian assistance, in its submission to the United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs on 21 October 2009.<sup>99</sup> Consider the KNU in comparison to the USWA: while the former had well-articulated demands that would require political negotiations, the latter had a reasonable chance of achieving its objective – simply to be left alone – by agreeing to a ceasefire with the SLORC/SPDC.<sup>100</sup>

Finally, the 60 years of fighting with the central government contributed to a legacy of distrust between the KNU and SLORC/SPDC that would render a ceasefire difficult. Legacies from before the formation of the KNU, including the BIA massacres of Karen villages in 1942-3, continued to contribute to KNU resentment. Attempted peace talks in 1963 fed skepticism of the military as the KNU perceived that Ne Win offered talks simply to exploit internal KNU divisions.<sup>101</sup> More recently, soon after the 2004 purging of General Khin Nyunt, a major architect of the SLORC/SPDC’s

ceasefires, the military launched offensives against areas controlled by the KNU.<sup>102</sup> The longer the rebellion continued the more chances the KNU had to accumulate levels of distrust and resentment that would render an unmediated ceasefire more difficult to agree upon and credibly implement.

## **Conclusion**

This article explored insurgency in Burma/Myanmar on two levels. First, it examined 33 armed groups – 20 of which signed ceasefires and 13 of which continued to fight – to establish an overarching empirical picture. It found that groups in Burma that were longer-lived were less likely to sign ceasefires with the SLORC/SPDC. Second, since this pattern runs contrary to some findings in the literature on armed conflict, and since much of this literature focuses on characteristics of the state – an analytically static variable in a within-case research design – the article then analyzed four different armed groups to understand what compelled them to either agree to or avoid a ceasefire. It found evidence in the cases of the United Wa State Army, the Karen National Union, the Kachin Independence Organization and the Shan State Army-South that the administration of territory, ideology and legacies of distrust were important factors that shaped the contours of each organization's ability to arrive at a ceasefire with the regime.

It therefore seems worthwhile to pay more attention to how the length of time that an insurgency fights exacerbates factors that are related to the probability that it will agree to a ceasefire or a peace deal. Within-case studies are an excellent strategy to arrive at reliable answers to this research question because the characteristics of the state are held constant in ways that are difficult to replicate in cross-national analysis. A better understanding of the relationships between the length of an insurgency and its propensity for a ceasefire or peace deal would certainly assist mediators and peacemakers in designing better strategies to help cease hostilities and to help the civilians whose concerns are often squeezed out by the need to accommodate armed groups. Furthermore,

understanding what factors influence the strategies of multiple armed groups fighting within a single state territory could increase knowledge of insurgency dynamics not only in Burma, but also in contexts as varied as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Colombia.

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- 1 The two most authoritative books on the subject are both products of decades of first-hand experience and journalistic reporting. See Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London: Zed Books, 1993); and Bertil Litner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency Since 1948* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1994).
  - 2 Indeed the central government's 1949 "Peace Within One Year" plan illustrates both the desire of Burmese governments to settle disputes and the difficulty in doing so. See Litner, *Burma in Revolt*, pp. 79-100.
  - 3 On Myanmar's post-2011 politics, see Ian Holliday, "Myanmar in 2012: Toward a Normal State," *Asian Survey* 53(1) (2013), pp. 93-100; Morten B. Pedersen, "The Politics of Burma's 'Democratic' Transition: Prospects for Change and Options for Democrats," *Critical Asian Studies* 43(1) (2011), pp. 49-68; and Roger Lee Huang, "Re-thinking Myanmar's Political Regime: Military Rule in Myanmar and Implications for Current Reforms," *Contemporary Politics* 19(3) (2013), pp. 247-261.
  - 4 On the politics in ceasefire zones, see Mary P. Callahan *Political Autonomy in Burma's Ethnic Minority States: Devolution, Occupation, and Coexistence*. Policy Studies 31 Southeast Asia (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2007); on the role of natural resources, see Kevin Woods, "Ceasefire Capitalism: Military-Private Partnerships, Resources Concessions and Military-State Building in the Burma-China Borderlands," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38(4) (2011), pp. 747-770.
  - 5 Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Mans Soderbom, "On the Duration of Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 41(3) (2004), pp. 253-273.
  - 6 Michael W. Doyle & Nicholas Sambanis, *Making War & Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
  - 7 Virginia Page Fortna, "Does Peacekeeping Keep Peace? International Intervention and the Duration of Peace after Civil War," *International Studies Quarterly* 48(2) (2004), pp. 269-292.
  - 8 See, for example, William I. Zartman, "The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments," in *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Peace Processes and Post-War Reconstruction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, John Darby & Roger MacGinty, eds. (New York: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 22-35.
  - 9 Most of the cross-national statistical studies cited throughout this article attribute variation in armed conflict to state-level variables. For an exemplary qualitative example, see Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); for a review and application of the cross-national civil war literature to Central America and an argument that attributes the onset of violence to regime characteristics, see Fabrice Lehoucq, *The Politics of Modern Central America: Civil War, Democratization, and Underdevelopment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
  - 10 For an argument about state infrastructural power in Burma, see Matthew Lange and Hrag Balian, "Containing Conflict or Instigating Unrest? A Test of the Effects of State Infrastructural Power on Civil Violence," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 43, No. 3-4 (2008), pp. 314-333; on the Burmese ethno-nationalist state, see David Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 33-65.
  - 11 For a similar research approach, see Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).
  - 12 James Fearon, "Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer than Others?" *Journal of Peace Research* 41(3) (2004) pp. 275-301.
  - 13 Karl DeRouen Jr., Mark J. Ferguson, Samuel Norton, Young Hwan Park, Jenna Lea & Ashley Streat-Bartlett, "Civil War Peace Agreement Implementation and State Capacity," *Journal of Peace Research* 47(3) (2010), pp. 333-346.
  - 14 Fearon, "Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer than Others?" See also Michael L. Ross, "What Do We Know About Natural Resources and Civil War?" *Journal of Peace Research*, 41(3) (2004), pp. 337-356.
  - 15 Collier, et al., "On the Duration of Civil War."
  - 16 Woods, "Ceasefire Capitalism."
  - 17 Francisco Gutierrez Sanin & Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Ideology in Civil War: Instrumental Adaptation and Beyond,"

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- Journal of Peace Research* 51(2) (2014), pp. 213-226.
- 18 Barbara Walter, "Designing Transitions from Civil War," *International Security*, 24(1) (1999), pp. 127-155; Virginia Page Fortna, "Interstate Peacekeeping: Causal Mechanisms and Empirical Effects," *World Politics* 56(4) (2004), see pp. 481-490.
  - 19 Matthew Hoddie and Caroline Hartzell, "Civil War Settlements and the Implementation of Military Power-Sharing Agreements," *Journal of Peace Research* 40(3) (2003), pp. 303-320.
  - 20 Joakim Kreutz, "How and When Armed Conflicts End: Introducing the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 47(2) (2010), pp. 243-250.
  - 21 Much of the coding for group formation relied on Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, and Litner, *Burma in Revolt*. For more up-to-date information and cross-referencing, I looked to Callahan, *Political Autonomy in Burma's Ethnic Minority States*; Martin Smith, *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma*. Policy Studies 36 Southeast Asia (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2007); Zaw Oo and Win Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*. Policy Studies 39 Southeast Asia (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2007); Tom Kramer, *Neither War nor Peace: The Future of the Cease-Fire Agreements in Burma*, (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, July 2009); Morten B. Pedersen, "Burma's Ethnic Minorities," *Critical Asian Studies* 40(1) (2008), pp. 45-66; as well as various web sources.
  - 22 This ought to help address the objection that longer-running insurgencies are by definition less likely to agree to ceasefires since they continue to fight. Right-censoring the data at a point during which all groups had the opportunity to agree to ceasefires shows that even if one does not count the subsequent months during which non-ceasefire groups continued to fight, older groups were still less prone to signing ceasefires.
  - 23 See Kramer, *Neither War nor Peace*.
  - 24 The KNPP ceasefire lasted only 3 months. A cessation of fighting for 6 months has been used in previous studies as a reasonable window to code that hostilities stopped for a significant period. See Patrick M. Regan, "Conditions of Successful Third-Party Intervention in Intrastate Conflicts", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 40(2) (1996), pp. 336-359.
  - 25 Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), pg. 67.
  - 26 Ibid., pg. 77.
  - 27 Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pg. 75.
  - 28 James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
  - 29 Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, pg. 24.
  - 30 For analysis of the build-up to independence, see Andrew Selth, "Race and Resistance in Burma: 1942-1948," *Modern Asian Studies* 20(3) (1986), pp. 483-507. Burma/Myanmar has an extremely diverse population of currently about 53 million people, with roughly 65% being Burman, 8-10% Shan, 7% Karen, and dozens of other groups and hundreds of sub-groups.
  - 31 Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), see pp. 78-82.
  - 32 Ardeth Maung Thawngmung, *The Karen Revolution in Burma: Diverse Voices, Uncertain Ends*. Policy Studies 45 Southeast Asia (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2008), see pp. 5-6.
  - 33 Litner, *Burma in Revolt*, pg. 339. Aung Sang was assassinated less than six months later.
  - 34 Litner, *Burma in Revolt*, pp. 1-78.
  - 35 Vincent Boudreau. *Resisting Dictatorship: Repression and Protest in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), see pp. 84-102 and 190-214.
  - 36 For analysis of the protests, see Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
  - 37 Alexander Dukalskis, "Stateness Problems or Regime Unification? Explaining Obstacles to Democratization in Burma/Myanmar," *Democratization* 16(5) (2009), pp. 945-968. See also Kyaw Yin Hlaing, "Power and Factional Struggles in Post-Independence Burmese Governments," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 39(1) (2008), pp. 149-77; Derek Tonkin, "The 1990 Elections in Myanmar: Broken Promises or a Failure of Communication?" *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29(1) (2007), pp. 33-54.
  - 38 Litner, *Burma in Revolt*.
  - 39 Oo & Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*. On the constitution-drafting procedure generally, see Janelle M Diller, "The National Convention: An Impediment to the Restoration of Democracy," in *Burma: The Challenge of Change in a Divided Society*, ed. Peter Carey (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 27-54. For a more recent analysis, see Human Rights Watch. 'Vote to Nowhere: The May 2008 Constitutional Referendum in Burma', May 2008. On the KIO and other ethnic party demands, see Oo & Min, *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*, pp. 51-54.

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- 40 See, for example, *New York Times*, “A Rebel Stronghold in Myanmar on Alert”, 5 November 2009.
- 41 Callahan, *Political Autonomy in Burma’s Ethnic Minority States*.
- 42 Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, pg. 279.
- 43 Quoted in Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pg. 84.
- 44 Quoted in Tom Kramer, *The United Wa State Party: Narco-Army or Ethnic Nationalist Party?* Policy Studies 38 Southeast Asia (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2007).
- 45 Litner, *Burma in Revolt*, pg. 435.
- 46 See Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pp. 374-383.
- 47 Kramer, *The United Wa State Party*, pp. 16-19.
- 48 Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pg. 381.
- 49 Kramer, *The United Wa State Party*, pg. 22.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 37.
- 51 Kramer, *The United Wa State Party*, pg. 16.
- 52 Kramer, *The United Wa State Party*.
- 53 Quoted in Kramer, *The United Wa State Party*, pg. 16. Original statement from “Key Words in Mutual Answers for UN Delegation in Visiting Wa State”, Bao You Chang, Chairman of Wa State Government, 6 March 2002.
- 54 Quoted in Litner, *Burma in Revolt*, pg. 296.
- 55 Full text of the agreement available at: [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs/panglong\\_agreement.htm](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs/panglong_agreement.htm)
- 56 On the reasons for the formation of the KIO, see Litner, *Burma in Revolt*, pp. 163-164 and Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pg. 192.
- 57 Litner, *Burma in Revolt*, pg. 164. British and American influence was important as indicated by the fact that English was the operating language of the KIO until 1979.
- 58 Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, pg. 212.
- 59 Oo & Min, *Assessing Burma’s Ceasefire Accords*, pg. 25.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 39-40. This increase in troop strength, however, has come with increasing SLORC/SPDC military capacity in Kachin areas.
- 62 Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pg. 191.
- 63 Litner, *Burma in Revolt*, pg. 164.
- 64 Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pg. 208.
- 65 Litner, *Burma in Revolt*, pg. 190.
- 66 Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pp. 329-332.
- 67 Litner, *Burma in Revolt*, pg. 234.
- 68 Oo & Win, *Assessing Burma’s Ceasefire Accords*, pg. 19-20. There seems to have been some miscommunication between the KIO and the NDF during 1993 as the KIO attempted to get the SLORC to work on a compromise deal that would have included other groups.
- 69 Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pg. 332.
- 70 On policy shifts, see Kramer, *Neither War nor Peace.*, pg. 10.
- 71 Oo & Min, *Assessing Burma’s Ceasefire Accords*, pg. 29.
- 72 On the constitution-drafting procedure generally, see *supra* note 37.
- 73 This supports the argument about relatively young groups being more prone to ceasefire because of a lack of well-defined ideology, scant investment in infrastructure and less of a legacy of distrust than their older counterparts. The MTA was mainly focused on profit from the drug trade as opposed to securing political demands or developing an autonomous area.
- 74 Human Rights Watch, “My Gun Was as Tall As Me: Child Soldiers in Burma,” October 2002, pp. 117-120.
- 75 Pedersen, “Burma’s Ethnic Minorities,” pp. 47-48.
- 76 Paul Keenan, “Burma’s Ethnic Ceasefire Agreements,” *Burma Centre for Ethnic Studies*, Briefing Paper No. 1 (January 2012); Shan Herald, “Shan Army Set to Cast a Wide Net,” 8 June 2009, available at: [http://www.shanland.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2607:shan-army-set-to-cast-a-wide-net&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266](http://www.shanland.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2607:shan-army-set-to-cast-a-wide-net&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266) (accessed 19 April 2015). The increase in troop strength occurred alongside an increase in the Myanmar military’s capabilities.
- 77 Global Times, “A Visit to the Headquarter of Myanmar’s Shan State Army-South (SSA-S),” 6 January 2014, available at: <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2014/01/06/the-global-times-a-visit-at-the-headquarter-of-myanmar%E2%80%99s-shan-state-army-south-ssa-s/> (accessed 19 April 2015).
- 78 Global Times, “A Visit to the Headquarter of Myanmar’s Shan State Army-South (SSA-S).”

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- 79 Global Times, "A Visit to the Headquarter of Myanmar's Shan State Army-South (SSA-S)"; Keenan, "Burma's Ethnic Ceasefire Agreements."
- 80 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2009*. Full report available at <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/WDR-2009.html>
- 81 Global Times, "A Visit to the Headquarter of Myanmar's Shan State Army-South (SSA-S)."
- 82 Kramer, *Neither War nor Peace*, pg. 13.
- 83 For details on the KNU's formation and control of Insein, see Litner, *Burma in Revolt*, pp. 9-17.
- 84 Callahan, *Making Enemies*, pp. 34-42.
- 85 Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pp. 62-64.
- 86 Thawngmung, *The Karen Revolution in Burma*, pg. 27. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pg. 207, claims that at the time of the 1963 peace talks between the government and armed groups, the the KNU was the largest insurgent group in Burma.
- 87 Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, pp. 179-182.
- 88 Thawngmung, *The Karen Revolution in Burma*, pg. 33.
- 89 Ibid., pg. 26. The KNU political departments included finance, agriculture, defense, justice, information, transport and communications, administration, forestry, mining, health, and education.
- 90 Ibid., pg. 27.
- 91 Ibid., pg. 33.
- 92 Ashley South, "Karen Nationalist Communities: The 'Problem' of Diversity," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29(1) (2007), pp. 55-76.
- 93 Thawngmung, *The Karen Revolution in Burma*, pg. 29. The Democratic Alliance of Burma was an alliance of armed groups.
- 94 Thawngmung, *The Karen Revolution in Burma*, pg. 30.
- 95 Martin Smith, "Burma: The Karen Conflict," in *Encyclopedia of Modern Ethnic Conflicts*, ed. Joseph R. Rudolf, Jr., (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003), pp. 9-26.
- 96 See the KNU's objectives on its website <http://karennationalunion.net/index.php/burma/about-the-knu/objectives>. (accessed 19 April 2015).
- 97 See South, "Karen Nationalist Communities," pp. 60-62 for an analysis of the KNU's "militant ethno-nationalism".
- 98 Ibid.
- 99 Text of submission available at <http://karennationalunion.net./index.php/burma/news-and-reports/news-stories/submission-to-us-house-of-representatives>
- 100 See Kramer, *The United Wa State Party*, pg. 12. One KNU leader observes: "We want to make a cease-fire, with real peace, real justice, and real equal rights. But they always want the KNU to surrender, and will not accept the real federal union and democracy."
- 101 Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pg. 207.
- 102 Thawngmung, *The Karen Revolution in Burma*, pp. 31-32.