Militias in Myanmar

John Buchanan

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Acknowledgement

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Preface

Understanding the history and role of militias in Myanmar’s armed conflicts is a critical element in the country’s ongoing peace process, but the study of these groups has generally been neglected, relative to the analysis of the military (Tatmadaw) and ethnic armed groups. Militias take many different forms in Myanmar, varying in size, allegiances and modes of operation. Though estimates of their numbers vary, all indications are that militia groups are present throughout conflict-affected parts the country, and can be highly influential armed actors in their areas of operation.

In light of this situation, The Asia Foundation is pleased to present this research report on Myanmar’s militias. It provides the historical background and evolution of militias over time, offers a typology of the different types of militias operating in the country, and reflects on their contemporary role. Given the militias’ longstanding existence and their varied allegiances, how they will be taken into account in the peace process needs to be considered by both national and international actors working to support a durable peace in Myanmar. In concluding, the author also draws on examples of peacebuilding in other countries, to better illustrate some of the challenges that may arise in addressing the role of militias as the peace process moves forward. We hope that this report will provide a useful contribution to illuminate a lesser known but important piece of the complex conflict situation in Myanmar.

This research paper is authored by Mr. John Buchanan, an independent researcher and doctoral candidate at the University of Washington, who specializes in civil conflict, state formation, and the politics of Southeast Asia. The report was generously funded by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID). The opinions expressed in this report are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of DFID or The Asia Foundation.

Dr. Kim N. B. Ninh
Country Representative
The Asia Foundation
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## Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Arakan Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSDF</td>
<td>All Burma Students’ Democratic Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Arakan Liberation Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>Arakan National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BGF</td>
<td>Border Guard Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNI</td>
<td>Burma News International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNUP</td>
<td>Burma National United Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNF</td>
<td>Chin National Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPB</td>
<td>Communist Party of Burma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDR</td>
<td>Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDSI</td>
<td>Directorate of Defense Services Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DKBA (Buddhist)</td>
<td>Democratic Karen Buddhist Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DKBA (Kloh Htoo Baw)</td>
<td>Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (Kloh Htoo Baw)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAO</td>
<td>Ethnic Armed Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAF</td>
<td>Kawthoolei Armed Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KDA</td>
<td>Kachin Defense Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIO/KIA</td>
<td>Kachin Independence Organization/Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMT</td>
<td>Kuomintang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNDO</td>
<td>Karen National Defense Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNDP</td>
<td>Karenni National Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNG</td>
<td>Kayan National Guard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNLA</td>
<td>Karen National Liberation Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNLP</td>
<td>Kayan New Land Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNPDP</td>
<td>Karenni National Peace and Development Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNPLF</td>
<td>Karenni National People’s Liberation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNPP</td>
<td>Karenni National Progressive Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNSO</td>
<td>Karenni National Solidarity Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNU</td>
<td>Karen National Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPC</td>
<td>Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army–Peace Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPF</td>
<td>Karen Peace Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDF</td>
<td>Lahu Democratic Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHH</td>
<td><em>Mungshawa Hpyen Hpung</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIS</td>
<td>Military Intelligence Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNDDAA</td>
<td>Myanmar National Democracy Alliance Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTA</td>
<td>Mong Tai Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>National Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCA</td>
<td>Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDAA</td>
<td>National Democratic Alliance Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDA-K</td>
<td>New Democratic Army–Kachin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLD</td>
<td>National League for Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMSP</td>
<td>New Mon State Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSCN-K</td>
<td>National Socialist Council of Nagaland–Khaplang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMF</td>
<td>People’s Militia Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNDF</td>
<td>Pawngyawng National Defense Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNLO</td>
<td>Pa-O National Liberation Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNO</td>
<td>Pa-O National Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSLA</td>
<td>PaLaung State Liberation Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVO</td>
<td>People’s Volunteer Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCSS/SSA</td>
<td>Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLORC</td>
<td>State Law and Order Restoration Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNPLO</td>
<td>Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPDC</td>
<td>State Peace and Development Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSA</td>
<td>Shan State Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSNA</td>
<td>Shan State National Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSR</td>
<td>Security Sector Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSPP/SSA</td>
<td>Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNLA</td>
<td>Ta’ang National Liberation Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UEC</td>
<td>Union Election Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDP</td>
<td>Union Solidarity and Development Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWSA</td>
<td>United Wa State Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WNO</td>
<td>Wa National Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YCDC</td>
<td>Yangon City Development Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary

**Anti-insurgent groups**, or *Tha Ka Sa Pha* (သောင်က်န္းသူဆန္က်င္ေရး အဖြဲ႕): Pro-government militias formed in areas where the government did not have strong local support. Some of these groups were preexisting armed groups established by local leaders as either volunteer defense forces or units of ethnic armed organizations. These groups received limited, if any, training from the national armed forces, known as the *Tatmadaw*, and operated relatively independently of it. This militia arrangement dates back to the period of rule by General Ne Win (1962-1988). They were formed by the *Tatmadaw*, and are active mainly in non-Burman areas where insurgents have been active, particularly Shan State.

**Border Guard Forces** (နယ္ျခားေစာင့္ တပ္): Battalion-size militias of 326 members, created by the *Tatmadaw* in 2009 and 2010. Their formation involved the integration of soldiers from the *Tatmadaw* with units that originally were either ethnic armed organizations or militia groups. There are 23 BGFs in Kachin, Shan, Kayah, and Kayin states.

**Homeguards**, or *Ka Kwe Ye* (ကာကြယ္ေရး): A term used in reference to pro-government militias in general, and referring specifically to a type of *Tatmadaw*-directed militia active from the early 1960s to 1973. Several *Ka Kwe Ye* units became powerful through their involvement in illicit economic activities, including the trade in opium and other black-market goods. Most, if not all, *Ka Kwe Ye* militias were based in northern and eastern Shan State and operated in areas outside of their zones.

**People’s Militia Forces**: A term used by the government and others in reference to pro-government militias.

**Pocket army**: A term that emerged in the late 1940s and 1950s referring to the use of militias by politicians as their own armed forces.

**Pyusawhti** (ပ်ဴေစာထီး): A town and village defense scheme involving the use of paramilitary units, established in 1956. The name refers to a well-known warrior prince in early Burmese history.

**Pyithusit** (ျပည္သူ႔စစ္): A term for militias introduced in conjunction with the *Tatmadaw’s* doctrine of people’s war in the 1960s. The term *pyithusit* literally means “people’s war.” It is often used in English in reference to *Tatmadaw*-supported local militia units. The term is also used generically to refer to many types of local armed groups.

**Sitwundan** (စစ္ဝန္တမ္း): A Burmese term (literally “military burden carrier”) that refers to military units raised in the 1950s. These groups were initially known as Union Police Special Reserves.

**Tat** (တပ္): A Burmese term that means “military unit.” *Tat* are paramilitary units formed in the late colonial period, a practice that continued into the 1950s. Their main activities included performing military drills and providing security. After independence in 1948, many of them became armed and began to play a more prominent role in Burma’s politics.

**Transformed militias**, or *athwin pyaun pyithusit* (အသြင္ေျပာင္းျပည္သူ႔စစ္): This term refers to militias that have been integrated into the *Tatmadaw*. Many of them are former ceasefire groups. Indicators of their transformation are the adoption of standard-issue militia uniforms in place of their previous ones.
Map 1: Border Guard Forces and Militias (Selected)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Unit(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kachin State</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chipwi</td>
<td>BGF 1001, BGF 1002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsawlaw</td>
<td>BGF 1001, BGF 1002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waingmaw</td>
<td>BGF 1003, M2 Lawa Yang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putao</td>
<td>M1 Rawang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myitkyina</td>
<td>M3 Tarlawgyi (Red Shan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kayah State</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loikaw</td>
<td>BGF 1004, BGF 1005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hpasawng</td>
<td>BGF 1004, BGF 1005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mese</td>
<td>BGF 1004, BGF 1005</td>
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<td>Bawlakhe</td>
<td>BGF 1004, BGF 1005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demoso</td>
<td>BGF 1004, BGF 1005</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shan State</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Laukkai</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mongton</td>
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<td>Mongyawng</td>
<td>BGF 1008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tachilek</td>
<td>BGF 1009, M33 Mong Hai, M34 Mekong Border Security Battalion, M35 Nampong/Lo Taw Khan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matman</td>
<td>BGF 1010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konkyan</td>
<td>BGF 1006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunlong</td>
<td>BGF 1006, M20 Kunlong Special Combat Police Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manton</td>
<td>M4 Manton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Namhkan</td>
<td>M5 Namhkan Myo Ma, M6 Pang Hsay (Pan Say)</td>
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<td>Namtu</td>
<td>M7 Namtu Myo Ma</td>
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<td>Muse</td>
<td>M8 Monekoe, M9 Kyu Koke, M10 Mong Yu, M11 Mong Paw</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kutkai</td>
<td>M12 Kutkai Special Militia Group, M13 Pang Hseng, M14 Tarmoenvye, M15 Manje, M16 Shaw Haw, M17 Special Militia Group, M18 Nam Hpat Kar (Nampaka), M19 Kawng Kha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lashio</td>
<td>M21 Manpang</td>
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<td>Hsipaw</td>
<td>M22 Mong Khay, M23 Sein Kyawt (Hseng Keow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mong Yai</td>
<td>M24 Mong Hin Mong Ha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Town</td>
<td>Locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangyan</td>
<td>M21 Manpang, M24 Mong Hin Mong Ha, M25 Naung Mo, M26 Mong Kaung, M27 Naw Kaw, M28 Nawngpha, M29 Tangyan Myo Ma</td>
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<td>Laikha</td>
<td>M30 Wantpan</td>
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<td>Khunhing</td>
<td>M31 Kali</td>
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<td>Mongphayak</td>
<td>M32 Mongphayak</td>
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<td>Mong Hsat</td>
<td>M36 Punakok</td>
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<td>Namsan</td>
<td>M38 Matkyan (Marrkieng), M39 Narpwe, 40 Nayai</td>
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<td>Hopong</td>
<td>M41 Pa-O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hsiseng</td>
<td>M41 Pa-O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinlaung</td>
<td>M41 Pa-O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langkho</td>
<td>M42 Homong (Homein)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pekon</td>
<td>M43 Shwe Pyi Aye, M44 Kayan National Guard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Kayin State**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hlaingbwe</td>
<td>BGF 1011, BGF 1012, BGF 1015, BGF 1016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hpapun</td>
<td>BGF 1013, BGF 1014, M45 Padoh Aung San Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myawaddy</td>
<td>BGF 1017, BGF 1018, BGF 1019, BGF 1020, BGF 1022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kawkareik</td>
<td>BGF 1021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyain Sekgyi</td>
<td>BGF 1023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thandaung</td>
<td>M46 Thandaung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: M = Militia, BGF = Border Guard For
Executive Summary

This report provides historical background on militias in Myanmar and discusses the challenges presented by militias to resolving the country’s ongoing conflict. Most militias are allied with Myanmar’s armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw. A few other militias support ethnic armed organizations. The primary duties of militias involve providing security for their communities, and some actively participate in Myanmar’s armed conflicts. In 2011, a quasi-democratic government led by President Thein Sein came to power and initiated a peace process aimed at resolving over sixty-five years of armed conflict. The peace process has produced a significant number of ceasefires, and recently entered a stage of political dialogue involving a broad range of actors. Yet despite their role in Myanmar’s ongoing conflicts, the issue of militias remains marginalized in analyses of conflict and the peace process.

Militias pose several challenges for peacebuilding efforts in Myanmar. First, only limited information is available about militias. In consequence, several basic features of militias, such as how they operate, their numbers, and the roles they play in conflicts, are not well understood. Second, militias are armed and numerous, and they play active roles in armed conflict, but engagement with militias and discussion of their roles has been limited in the peace process. Often they are considered subordinate to either the Tatmadaw or ethnic armed groups. Third, the Tatmadaw’s incorporation of ceasefire groups into its militia system has made militias a political issue. The recent transformation of ceasefire groups into militias involved a decrease in the military strength of ethnic armed organizations. But several ethnic armed organizations did not accept the proposal to transform into militias, and have instead pushed for political dialogue with the military. Understanding these challenges is important for peacebuilding efforts.

Given the challenges presented by the multitude of militias operating outside of Myanmar’s formal peace process, a more systematic look at militias and their role in the transition from conflict to peace is in order. To do so, this report begins with a brief overview of militias and the challenges that militias present for peacebuilding. The next section provides historical background on the roles played by militias in Myanmar’s armed conflicts and political struggles. Section three presents a typology of militias, as an analytical tool for understanding the complexity of the current array of militias operating in Myanmar. The fourth section examines the roles played by militias in the economy, politics, conflict, and the communities in which they operate. The final section draws on instances of peacebuilding in other countries, and considers issues regarding militias in Myanmar’s current period of reform.
Section One: Introduction

Myanmar’s armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw, and dozens of ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) are often viewed as key actors in the country’s longstanding conflicts. An enduring feature of Myanmar’s security landscape, however, is the presence of a large number of smaller armed groups collectively known as militias. Little known and often less recognized as actors in conflict, the majority of militias in Myanmar are pro-government and operating under the command of the Tatmadaw. A few are associated with EAOs.

Militias have been part of armed conflict in Myanmar for over six decades. Despite their long-term presence, however, much basic information about militias is unavailable. Their exact number, for example, is unknown. Available estimates suggest that there are hundreds, or possibly even thousands. Analyses of armed conflict in Myanmar often neglect the role of militias, which has also been only marginally addressed in Myanmar’s peace process.

The lack of attention to militias is surprising. They have played a significant role in previous conflicts in Myanmar, and remain important actors in the country’s ongoing armed struggles. Apart from the Tatmadaw and the police, militias are one of the few groups, if not the only group, sanctioned to carry arms by the government. In consequence, a better understanding of issues related to militias is important for efforts to resolve Myanmar’s armed conflicts and political problems.

Militias have been under-emphasized in the analyses of Myanmar’s armed conflicts and the peace process. This report calls attention to the existence of armed organizations other than those formally involved in the peace process. Given the complex array of militias in Myanmar, there is a need to examine their role more systematically. This report provides information and analytical tools to better understand that role. It presents a historical perspective on Myanmar’s militias and a typology of militia groups.

A central feature of militias is their affiliation with either the Tatmadaw or EAOs. Militias affiliated with EAOs – EAO militias – constitute one type. Three other types of militia are under the supervision of the Tatmadaw. There is striking diversity among them, especially in their relationships with the Tatmadaw, which involve different levels and types of integration with its command structure. Tatmadaw-integrated militias are directly incorporated into the Tatmadaw’s command structure, and include both former pro-government militias and former anti-government EAOs. These groups became integrated into the command structure of the Tatmadaw in 2009 and 2010, and are known as Border Guard Forces (BGFs). A distinguishing feature of BGFs is the presence of soldiers originally from the Tatmadaw in their ranks.

Unlike the BGFs, Tatmadaw non-integrated militias are not directly integrated into the Tatmadaw, but they are still under the Tatmadaw’s command and supervision. Some of these groups were originally EAOs or breakaway factions, while others were formed independently. Nevertheless, Tatmadaw authorities supervise them.

A third type is the Tatmadaw-supported community militia. Unlike the other two types, these militias are recruited from the local population, and they tend to be smaller than the other groups. Many are unarmed, or armed with just a few weapons. They are trained and supervised by local Tatmadaw units.

Myanmar’s militias are diverse, and they operate in different environments. Understanding their evolution and their role in Myanmar’s continued ethnic violence and political instability will be important for any long-term solution to the conflict. Not much information is available about militias in Myanmar, and the systems of militias operated by the Tatmadaw and EAOs are not well understood. Scholars and journalists have tended to ignore these armed groups, or when they have examined
them, have tended to focus on a particular unit or issue. This report aims to provide a broader view. It examines the various roles militias play in economics, politics, society, and conflict; it draws on the experience of conflict involving militias in other countries, and it highlights the potential for militias to undermine the stability of post-conflict settlements.

1.1 What Is a Militia?

The term “militia” refers to a broad range of armed organizations and paramilitary groups. In this report, it is used in reference to a military force that serves another armed actor in maintaining security. These are militias that assist either the Tatmadaw or EAOs. In some cases, these militias may not be armed, but they have received training and may be armed on a case-by-case basis, depending on the threat situation.

In the Burmese context, journalists sometimes apply the term “militia” to EAOs that have reached ceasefire agreements with the Tatmadaw. Also often placed under the “militia” heading are a variety of civilian groups that have received Tatmadaw paramilitary training, generally referred to as “auxiliary forces” to the Tatmadaw. This report does not consider auxiliary forces or EAOs as militias.

Box 1: Definition of “Militia”

A militia is a body of armed fighters, often representing specific ethnic, religious, tribal, clan, or other communal groups or political parties. Militias may serve the government directly or indirectly, operate independently to combat other militias or insurgent groups, pursue criminal activity, or support an insurgency.

1.2 Militias: An Overview

Since Myanmar became independent in 1948, militias have served the security interests of the state by safeguarding the country from both domestic and internal threats. In that year, the Tatmadaw first encountered challenges from organizations pursuing armed struggle to advance their political demands. A few months after independence, armed movements broke out in many sectors of the population, including among the Burman (Bamar) majority. From 1948 to 1988, the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) pursued a long-running armed struggle. In the early 1970s, the deposed prime minister U Nu launched a short-lived, armed opposition movement, and after the suppression of the 1988 pro-democracy movements, a number of small armed struggles began among the Burman-majority population. In recent decades, armed organizations have been predominately ethnic nationalist in character, and their political goals have included greater autonomy from the central government. One response by the Tatmadaw to these challenges has been their employment of militias. The Tatmadaw and other government actors also employed militias to contain threats presented by the incursion of Chiang Kai-Shek’s Kuomintang (KMT) Army in the 1950s.

Government-allied militias have come to play a significant role in the national security plans of the Tatmadaw. In particular, the Tatmadaw’s doctrine of people’s war, developed in the 1960s, includes a central role for militias in combating both domestic insurgents and incursions by foreign armies. Militias remain an important pillar of the Tatmadaw’s national defense plans.

During a period of direct military rule (1989-2011), the Tatmadaw adopted a ceasefire approach to deal with ethnic armed organizations. For powerful EAOs, the ceasefire agreements meant a cessation of hostilities and the acceptance of economic benefits. These ceasefires did not involve political dialogue leading to a political solution. Tatmadaw officials offered some EAOs the status of “peace groups,” with financial support and positions as government militias, under the rubric of economic development. In the period leading up to the transition to a quasi-civilian government (2009-2010),
Tatmadaw leaders pressured EAOs to transform themselves into government militias – BGFs and People’s Militia Forces (PMF).

The current array of government-allied militias is strikingly diverse in terms of the number of soldiers, their relationship with the Tatmadaw, and their backgrounds. They range in size from less than twenty soldiers to a few with several hundred. In some cases, militia members are inactive, and many are not armed. They remain in reserve until there is a situation that requires their involvement. The level of militia activity varies from one region to another.

The regions where the Tatmadaw conducts military operations also have the highest concentration of militia activity. These are places with predominately non-Burman populations, and sites of long-running armed conflicts pitting the Tatmadaw against EAOs. They include areas in Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, and Shan states with significant non-Burman ethnic populations. Even within these regions, however, there are noticeable differences among militias. Pro-government militias in areas where the Tatmadaw has engaged in combat with EAOs, such as northern Shan State, tend to be larger and more active than those in areas where recent conflict has been limited, such as Mon and Chin states. In some cases, their support for the Tatmadaw involves participation in Tatmadaw-led combat operations.

Pro-government militias also provide indirect support for the Tatmadaw. This assistance may include monitoring suspected members of EAOs, collecting information about potential threats, informing local Tatmadaw units about the presence of enemy armed groups, and guiding Tatmadaw units through unfamiliar terrain.

In areas where security threats are negligible, militias are less active than in areas with active security threats posed by EAOs. In the case of Tatmadaw-supported community militias, they may not be armed.

Pro-government militias also engage in non-security activities to generate revenue. The economic activities that militias pursue to finance themselves vary significantly from one to another, as does the income earned. Many militias rely on taxes from the local population. Some militia leaders and their associates operate businesses, which can range from gas stations, transport companies, and hotels to natural resource projects such as agro-industry, logging, and mining, to investment in the real estate sector. Illicit activities are another source of income for some militias. The BGFs and EAO militias also receive support from their parent organizations.

A few militias operate in conjunction with EAOs. The arrangements vary, but one general trend is for large EAOs to coordinate with locally organized militia units that engage in self-defense of their villages. Some also employ local militias as reserve forces. Information about these groups is limited, however, and given the disparity among EAOs in their access to resources, their level of popular support, and the security environment in which they operate, these arrangements with local militias are likely to vary widely.

Some of the largest EAO militias are in areas under the control of two EAOs, the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), that formed in the late 1940s and early 1960s, respectively. The Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO) is a militia that operates under the Defense Department of the KNU and alongside its formal armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). The Mungshawa Hpyen Hpung (MHH), or Kachin People’s Militia Group, is a militia organized by the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the political wing of the KIA.

In 2009 and 2010, Tatmadaw leaders pressured EAOs that had agreed to a ceasefire – so-called ceasefire groups – to join its BGF and PMF programs, in an attempt to bring Myanmar’s armed groups under its command as called for in the 2008 Constitution. Several EAOs refused to comply, arguing that political dialogue with the military was necessary before any changes or reductions in their armed
forces. The Tatmadaw’s insistence that EAOs become militias, the refusal of some to comply, and the outbreak of fighting in the Kokang areas of Shan State against the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) raised tensions and deepened mistrust between the Tatmadaw and the EAOs. Despite the steps taken by the Thein Sein government (2011-2016) in initiating a peace process, the issue of a future role for militias remains uncertain.

1.3 Methodology

Research for this study includes information collected from October 2015 to March 2016. The research draws on English and Burmese language sources, including newspapers, books, and exhibits displayed at the Defense Services Museum in Nay Pyi Taw. The report also draws on over twenty-five interviews conducted in Thailand, Yangon, and Kayah, Kachin, and Shan states with a broad range of actors including members of civil society organizations, researchers, members of armed groups, and retired government officials.

The interviews focused on the following questions: What is the history of local militias? How and why were they created? What are the activities and responsibilities of militias in the area? How do they interact with the local community? These interviews draw the history of individual militias at a local level into a broader account of a militia system operating on a countrywide level.

The analysis of militias in Myanmar involves the use of several terms that are sometimes not clearly defined, which can lead to confusion. For instance, Chao Tzang Yawngwhe, a political scientist and former leader of the Shan State Army (SSA), uses the term Ka Kwe Ye to refer to a Tatmadaw-led militia arrangement prevalent in the period from 1967 to 1973. However, he also uses Ka Kwe Ye to describe government militias operating before 1967. Ka Kwe Ye and several other terms, such as pyithusit and “people’s militia groups,” are often used without sufficient attention to their specific meaning.

That the Tatmadaw, EAOs, observers, and militias themselves often use different terms to describe militias is also a source of confusion. The Tatmadaw’s periodic reforms of its relationship with militias have involved changes in the terms used to characterize militias and their relationships with the Tatmadaw, further complicating the study of militia practices. Finally, the ad hoc arrangements between Tatmadaw regional commanders and militia units have often meant that the practices of a particular militia unit differ from other units. Consequently, identifying trends in the militia system can be quite complicated.

1.4 Structure of the Report

The remainder of this report is divided into four sections.

Section 2, Historical Background of Militias, traces the use of militias back to Myanmar/Burma’s colonial period. It also points to the initial proliferation of militias as a response by state security and civilian officials to armed threats in the 1950s. The formulation of the Tatmadaw’s doctrine of people’s militias, and its rationale for the incorporation of militias into the Tatmadaw, are also examined. Finally, the section looks at the Tatmadaw’s ceasefire agreements and the transformation of EAOs into militia units.

Section 3, A Typology of Militias, suggests an analytical framework for understanding the disparate array of militias in contemporary Myanmar by providing a typology. The typology examines the status of militias with respect to their alignment with either the Tatmadaw or EAOs. For the Tatmadaw-affiliated militias, the various levels of integration within the Tatmadaw are disaggregated into three types. Four types of militias are discussed:
• Tatmadaw-integrated militias
• Tatmadaw non-integrated militias
• Tatmadaw-supported community militias
• Ethnic armed organization militias

This section concludes with a discussion of the available estimates of the number of militias in Myanmar.

Section 4, Key Considerations for Understanding Militias, identifies four dynamics useful for understanding the significance of militias in contemporary Myanmar: how militias sustain themselves, their role in politics, their interaction with local communities, and their role in conflicts.

Section 5, Conclusion, examines the relationship of militias to the peace process. The analysis draws on other instances of peace processes involving militias, and discusses several issues of importance for peacebuilding in Myanmar.
Section TWO: Historical Background of Militias (1930 to Present)

The predominance of militias in contemporary Myanmar reflects processes and events that date as far back as the British colonial period. Over the last 85 years, militias have played far-reaching and diverse roles in Myanmar’s civil wars and political struggles. During the late colonial period, militias operating in remote areas near Burma’s border with China provided security from external threats. Paramilitary groups operating in areas inhabited by ethnic Burmans became conduits for expressions of nationalist sentiment. In the post-independence period, militias assisted the Tatmadaw in containing multiple security threats. During this period of conflict, the Tatmadaw developed the doctrine of people’s war, which includes a role for militias in its national defense plans. Since 1989, the conferral of the status of militias to ethnic armed organizations has become a part of the Tatmadaw’s approach to conflict management. Appreciating the complex history of militias is critical for understanding the present political situation in Myanmar. The history of militias is divided into the following five periods.

2.1 The Pre-Independence Period (1930 to 1948)

The antecedents of the current militias date back to the end of the British colonial period. Several ethnic Burman political leaders formed paramilitary organizations known as tat. In 1930, M.A. Maung Gyi formed the first tat, known as Ye Tat or “Brave Army.” Other political and religious organizations followed suit. For instance, in 1939 the thakin – Burman, nationalist leaders – formed the Bama Let Yan Tat or Steel Corps. While members of tat engaged in military drills, colonial officials did not allow them to carry guns. In the 1930s, local leaders in the area of present-day Shan State also formed militia units, when the sawbwa of Hsenwi (or Hseni Township), a traditional leader, authorized local leaders to establish militias, also referred to as Home Guards, in the Kokang, Pang Hseng, and Mong Paw areas located near Burma’s border with China. After World War II, the tradition of tat continued. Their expansion reflected the political and security concerns of British officials and local leaders. The deteriorating security situation in the ethnic Karen areas provided an impetus for the creation of militias. In the period between 1945 and 1948, the British government authorized the formation of small militias in these areas, known as peace guerillas. Nationalist leader Aung San formed the People’s Volunteer Organization (PVO), or Pyithu Yebaw Aphwe. The organization became his political tool to enhance his leverage in negotiations with the British government over Burma’s independence. U Saw, a politician implicated in masterminding the assassination of Aung San on July 17, 1947, was also the head of the Galon Tat, or Garuda Militia. During this time, tat groups associated with politicians from the Socialist party and with dacoits (armed bandits) also emerged.

2.2 The Early Independence Period (1948 to 1962)

Following Burma’s independence on January 4, 1948, militias proliferated. Their emergence reflected a combination of domestic political rivalries and a worsening security situation. The power struggles that surfaced among rival political factions led to the continued formation of tat by politicians. Popularly known as “pocket armies,” they were used as personal security forces by politicians, and they engaged in violence and intimidation. At the same time, the emergence of several security concerns, ranging from insurgencies, to mutinies by Tatmadaw units, to incursions by Chinese troops, led state officials at the local and national level to establish militias to counter these threats.

The diversity of the rebel groups that emerged in the late 1940s and 1950s led the government to refer to them as the “multi-colored insurgents.” The scope of threats ranged from ethno-nationalist revolts by the KNDO, the Pawngyawng National Defense Force (PNDF), the Arakan People’s Liberation Front, and the Mon People’s Front, to leftist insurgencies by the White Flag and Red Flag branches of the CPB and the White Band faction of the PVO, to the Mujahids, a Muslim resistance army that launched...
operations in the northern Arakan area in an attempt to join with the newly created Muslim state of East Pakistan.\textsuperscript{21}

The Tatmadaw also experienced several debilitating mutinies by units within its ranks that defected en masse. Many mutineers either joined the insurgents or formed their own insurgent groups. For example, Captain Naw Seng, commander of the Tatmadaw’s 1st Kachin Rifles, led his unit to form the PNDF, which constitutes the first ethnic Kachin revolt. Other Tatmadaw and militia units also defected to either the leftist or ethno-nationalist insurgents. These included some units of the Peoples Volunteer Organization (PVO) created by the martyred national hero Aung San. The 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Karen Rifles, ethnic Karen units of the Tatmadaw, also mutinied. They formed the Kawthoolei Armed Forces (KAF) in June 1949, and became an armed wing of the KNU.\textsuperscript{22} After Aung San’s assassination, attempts by state leaders to disarm the pro-communist faction of the PVO led them to revolt in July 1948.\textsuperscript{23}

In 1949, the end of the Chinese civil war introduced a new threat to newly independent Burma. Chinese troops from Chiang Kai Shek’s defeated KMT army began crossing into Shan State to escape the advance of the Chinese communists in Yunnan province. The KMT leaders established contact with the emerging, regional, anti-communist alliance of Taiwan, Thailand, and the United States. From these allies, the KMT remnants received arms and supplies and became increasingly involved in Shan State’s blossoming opium trade.\textsuperscript{24}

The rapid and successive emergence of armed threats portended the collapse of the newly independent government of Prime Minister U Nu. One government report cited in a study of the Tatmadaw notes that by 1949, “75 percent of the towns in Burma had fallen to one insurgent group or another.”\textsuperscript{25} Prime Minister U Nu’s government became known as the “six-mile Rangoon government” in reference to the small area of Rangoon over which it exercised control. The emergence of threats to the security of the newly independent country outpaced the Tatmadaw’s capacity to contain them. Faced with the prospect of military over-extension and possible defeat, security leaders formed militias as part of their strategy to address the growing threats. The organization of these militias varied, and involved frequent changes in their structures.

In 1948, Prime Minister U Nu authorized the creation of the Union Police Special Reserve – later known as the Sitwundan (literally “military burden carrier”). Some local politicians formed their supporters into Sitwundan battalions, with the aim of defending against attacks by communists.\textsuperscript{26} However, government officials proved incapable of controlling some of these units. Paul Keenan notes that the involvement of some Sitwundan units in killings of the Karen population helped precipitate the Karen rebellion.\textsuperscript{27} Hundreds of Sitwundan members also defected to the rebel groups, including the Karen and communist insurgents, leading the government to disband units in nine districts. The remaining Sitwundan units were integrated into the army and were finally outlawed in 1955.\textsuperscript{28}

Security officials of the U Nu government also sanctioned the raising of paramilitary units called “levies” across Burma. In the Shan State, local rulers known in Burmese as sawbwa formed able-bodied men with limited training into units to counter the threat presented by insurgents and KMT forces. These units became known as the Shan levies. And by 1953, local officials began organizing local militias known as Volunteer Defense Forces in ethnic Shan and Kachin villages in the northern Shan State.\textsuperscript{29}

By 1956, the Tatmadaw had established the Directorate of National Guard Forces, a forerunner of later coordinating directorates, to coordinate militias (see Table 2). One of its responsibilities was training volunteers from among university students.\textsuperscript{30}
Table 2: Administration of Militia Units (1956 to Present)\(^{31}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directorate of National Guard Forces</th>
<th>January 1, 1956 (estimated)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directorate of Public Relations and People’s Militias</td>
<td>January 22, 1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directorate of People’s Militias and Territorial Forces</td>
<td>April 1, 1990 to Present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1956, the government also introduced the *Pyusawhti* program, which was a town and village defense scheme intended to assist the *Tatmadaw* in counter-insurgency activities. The name came from a famous warrior prince in early Burmese history.\(^{32}\) The program involved the coordination of local militias, under local committees staffed by officials from the police, the *Tatmadaw*, and the civil administration, and featured a variety of arrangements. In villages, the committees formed two types of militias known as village defense forces: residential and mobile. In urban areas, they created city defense forces, which came under the command of local police officers.\(^ {33}\) However, some *Pyusawhti* units fell under the sway of influential politicians and became known as another “party army.”\(^{34}\)

By the late 1950s, the threats presented by the multicolored insurgents began to subside. In 1958, the U Nu government’s Arms for Democracy initiative, offering amnesty for rebels, led to a significant decline in the number of insurgents. In 1958, the *Tatmadaw*, led by General Ne Win, took control of the government, initiating a period of military rule from 1958 to 1960 that became known as the “caretaker government.” During this period, the Ne Win government disbanded many of the militia units. Some units became part of a government-sponsored paramilitary formation known as Special Police Reserve Units.\(^{35}\)

The threat presented by the KMT also waned. In 1961, following the return of an elected government, the *Tatmadaw* and the People’s Liberation Army of China engaged in a joint campaign along the Burma-China border, Operation Mekong River, that pushed most of the remaining KMT soldiers into northern Thailand. While a United Nations-led operation airlifted some of them to Taiwan, many stayed and continued operations along Thailand’s border with Shan State.

### 2.3 The Ne Win Period (1962 to 1988)

In 1962, General Ne Win led a coup d’État against the elected government and established a political system featuring single party rule, initially by the military-led Revolutionary Council (RC), and subsequently by the new Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), which was dominated by serving or former *Tatmadaw* officers. By the early 1960s, a second wave of insurgent challengers emerged. The outbreak of armed revolt among ethnic Shans in 1959 and ethnic Kachins in 1961, and the CPB’s push into eastern Shan State from China in 1968, posed new, serious challenges to the military government. 

During this period, the *Tatmadaw’s* use of militias became widespread and formalized as part of its doctrine of people’s war, and *Tatmadaw* commanders employed different militia arrangements on the basis of the local situation and requirements for security.

In the early 1960s, *Tatmadaw* commanders in Shan State began establishing militias to combat the growing threat posed by the growth of ethno-nationalist insurgents.\(^{36}\) Maung Aung Myoe identifies three types of government militias that had emerged by the late 1960s. These are people’s militias (or *pyithusit*), anti-insurgent groups (or *Ta Ka Sa Pha*) and *Ka Kwe Ye* militias.\(^ {37}\) (See Section 4 for classification of these militia arrangements.) The *pyithusit* are the forerunners of the *Tatmadaw* community-based militias, and the anti-insurgent groups are the predecessors of the *Tatmadaw* non-integrated militias.

In this context, the term “people’s militias,” or *pyithusit*, refers to militias created by the *Tatmadaw* in the early 1960s under the Ne Win regime.\(^{38}\) As Andrew Selth notes, the people’s militias were:
“created in the 1960s as part of the regime’s national counter-insurgency strategy and, by the mid-1980s, consisted of an estimated 35,000 rural villagers. They tended to be poorly trained and armed, however, and were of limited use in any combat role. They assisted with village defense and served as guides and informers.”

Unlike some of the previous militias, these were coordinated by the Tatmadaw rather than politicians or local officials. Most initially operated in lower and central Myanmar, where government control was firm. In the early 1960s, pyithusit militias appear to have been used in areas that were under government control in the southwest part of the country.

Tatmadaw leaders also designated two other militia types – the Ka Kwe Ye militias, and the anti-insurgent groups also known as Ta Ka Sa Pha – for use in areas with limited government authority and insurgent activity. The anti-insurgent groups received little training, and the Tatmadaw had less control over them. Not much information is available about this type of militia, but various sources indicate that militias known as anti-insurgent groups, formed out of soldiers from ethnic armed groups, operated in southern Shan State and Karen State.

Another militia type is widely referred to as Ka Kwe Ye. In Burmese, Ka Kwe Ye means “defense,” and the term sometimes refers to a particular militia arrangement utilized by the Tatmadaw from perhaps as early as the late 1950s until 1973. The arrangement involved the Tatmadaw recognizing armed groups as Tatmadaw-allied militia forces and tacitly approving their illicit business activities.

During this period, local leaders built up small armed units on their own for purposes of self-defense. For many groups, the status as a Ka Kwe Ye militia offered the benefits of official recognition by the state and economic opportunities. Beginning in 1961, attempts by the leaders of the KIA to forcibly disarm groups headed by traditional ethnic Kachin leaders, known as duwa, led some of them to accept the status of pro-government militias. A few units of the SSA also accepted the Tatmadaw’s offer of militia status. Other armed groups involved in opium trafficking also became militias. After being arrested on drug trafficking charges in 1963, Lo Hsing Han, an ethnic Chinese from northern Shan State, formed a Ka Kwe Ye group in his home region of Kokang and helped the Tatmadaw establish control over it. One of the most powerful of the Ka Kwe Ye units was the Loi Maw militia from Tangyan Township, Shan State, led by Khun Sa. By 1966, he had received recognition as the de facto leader of the Ka Kwe Ye groups. After Tatmadaw officials became suspicious of him, they detained him in 1969 (see Box 3).

In 1968, after units of the CPB began extending their influence in northeast Shan State, militias operating in that area assumed new strategic significance for the Tatmadaw. The militias became an important source of intelligence, and a bulwark against the CPB’s advance. At the same time, the CPB won over several local militias in eastern Shan State. The leaders of two groups – Chao Ngii Lai and Pao Yu Chang – became party members and received leadership positions. Later, in 1989, they joined a mutiny against the CPB’s ethnic Burman leadership that led to the party’s implosion. In that same year, they founded an organization known as the Burma National United Party (BNUP) – the forerunner of the United Wa State Army (UWSA) – and entered into a ceasefire agreement with the Tatmadaw.

The rise in opium production in Shan State in the early 1960s also posed an indirect threat to the Tatmadaw. As a valuable cash crop, it gave armed opposition groups a way to finance their military operations by taxing or trading opium. On the other hand, the involvement of the Ka Kwe Ye militias in the opium trade suited the Tatmadaw’s counterinsurgency goals. As government-allied militias, they could dispatch their units to transport opium via government-controlled roads and towns. The arrangement positioned them to export opiates and to import contraband goods for Burma’s burgeoning black market. And the militias absorbed opium revenues that might otherwise have gone to insurgents. By 1973, one estimate notes, the Ka Kwe Ye militias had taken over the trade and transported an estimated ninety-five percent of the opium produced in Shan State.
Like many national armed forces, the Tatmadaw employs militia units as part of its national defense plans. Although militias in Myanmar date back to the late colonial period, the institutionalization of militias within the Tatmadaw did not begin until the late 1960s. This process reflects the emergence of the Tatmadaw’s doctrine of people’s war, which borrows from the concept of total war and its emphasis on the participation of the population in countering external and internal threats.

In the 1950s, state officials, both civilian and military, turned to the use of various militia forces as a way to address a chaotic security situation. The presence of CIA-supported remnants of Chiang Kai-Shek’s KMT forces, and their attempts to establish a base of operations in areas of China adjacent to Burma, heightened concerns among state leaders and the population that their presence might provoke an armed Chinese incursion into Burma. At the same time, the spread of insurgents across Burma, and their adoption of new tactics, proved a threat to the Tatmadaw. By the mid-1950s, Tatmadaw leaders recognized the need to develop a national military doctrine appropriate to Burma’s changing security situation. Maung Aung Myoe, a scholar of the Tatmadaw, notes, “As the BCP changed its strategy from conventional to guerilla warfare in the mid-1950s, the military doctrine of the Tatmadaw, which emphasized positional warfare, was not suitable.”

Maung Aung Myoe identifies the annual meeting of Tatmadaw officers in 1964 as an “important landmark in shaping a new military doctrine and strategy.” There, Tatmadaw officers adopted the doctrine of people’s war and devised a plan to form pyithusit militias. Soon after the meeting, a delegation of Tatmadaw officers traveled to Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany to study their use of militias.

In 1966, the Tatmadaw experimented with the use of pyithusit militias in conjunction with Tatmadaw units in combat operations against units of the CPB in central Burma. Based on its success, the government formulated plans for training and procedures for introducing the use of militias on a larger scale. It was at this time that another development in the Tatmadaw’s counter-insurgency practices was taking place. In the mid-1960s, the Tatmadaw adopted the “four cuts,” or pya leh pya, a doctrine of counter-insurgency that aimed to weaken armed resistance groups by cutting their access to food, funds, intelligence, and recruits. The approach involved the creation of strategic villages under Tatmadaw control, and the designation of areas where the government did not have a strong presence as “black areas,” which were considered controlled by insurgents. Local Tatmadaw commanders formed militias in these strategic villages.

In 1968, the Tatmadaw officers met to discuss the formalization of the doctrine of people’s war. They adopted guidelines that, among other things, prioritized the formation of people’s militias in areas with strong government presence and the mobilization of militias on an ideological basis. But for conflict areas, the Tatmadaw employed other types of militias, including anti-insurgent units (Ta Ka Sa Pha) and Ka Kwe Ye militias. By 1972, the BSPP, the political party of the Tatmadaw-led Revolutionary Council, formally endorsed the doctrine of people’s war.

Since their institutionalization, the configuration of the Tatmadaw’s arrangements with militias has undergone several changes. Nevertheless, the speeches and press releases annually issued by the Defense Services on Armed Forces Day emphasize the continued importance that Tatmadaw leaders place on militias and their role in safeguarding national security. In 2007, the address delivered by Senior General Than Shwe at the annual Armed Forces Day parade highlighted the importance of the people’s militia strategy in Myanmar’s history, noting that “during the time of [the] anti-fascist movement, our Tatmadaw, hand in hand with the entire people, practiced the people’s militia strategy.” In a 2015 speech delivered by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, commander in chief of defense services, to commemorate Armed Forces Day, he emphasized the continued relevance of
militias, noting that “the national defense strategy of our country has been accepted as the militia strategy.” A recent white paper issued by the Tatmadaw in February 2016 also indicates a continued role for militias in national security. According to a news report on the publication, one of the objectives of the Tatmadaw is “to further strengthen the strategy referred to in the paper as ‘national defense with the people’s war.’”

In 1974, the government promulgated Burma’s second constitution, and this change also involved revisions of the militia system. According to a display in the Defense Services Museum, during the time from when the Revolutionary Council took power in 1962 until it transferred power to the Parliament in 1974, the Regional Military Commands of the Tatmadaw formed pyithusit militia units in 212 townships and 1,831 villages, with 67,736 members, equipped with 15,227 firearms.

The year 1973 was a crossroads for the Tatmadaw’s use of militias. The Tatmadaw leaders created the Directorate of People’s Militias and Public Relations on January 23, 1973. At the same time, Tatmadaw leaders also tried to rein in the Ka Kwe Ye militias in Shan State. After months of negotiations, Tatmadaw commanders set a deadline of April 1973 for the twenty-three Ka Kwe Ye militias to surrender their weapons and disband or join the Tatmadaw. The responses by the Ka Kwe Ye militias were mixed. The most powerful groups refused to obey the order, whereas many of the smaller groups complied. Of the twenty-three Ka Kwe Ye groups, nine refused to obey. Several of these militia leaders, including Lo Hsing Han and Mahasan, allied with the SSA.

Analysts have advanced different explanations for the Tatmadaw’s decision to restructure their militia arrangements and disband the Ka Kwe Ye militias. One is that it reflected concerns among Tatmadaw leaders that their association with militia groups engaged in both the opium trade and Burma’s emerging black market in consumer goods was a source of popular discontent. Another explanation is that the decision reflected changes in Burma’s relations with the United States. In the early 1970s, with the Nixon administration’s declaration of a “war on drugs,” the US State Department began pursuing cooperation on counter-narcotics as part of its foreign policy. In the case of Burma, the US government created counter-narcotics assistance incentives for the Tatmadaw to take a tougher stance on the narcotics trade.

Another explanation is that the use of Ka Kwe Ye militia units proved inimical to the Tatmadaw’s counter-insurgency goals. Some Ka Kwe Ye units retained close ties to the insurgents. Moreover, the trade in opium and black-market goods had allowed a few of the militias to grow powerful. By 1972, for example, Lo Hsing Han headed a militia with an estimated strength of 1,500 men. The growing strength of the militias, and the possibility that the Tatmadaw could not control them, was a concern to its leaders. And earlier attempts by local Tatmadaw commanders to rein in powerful Ka Kwe Ye militias had failed, dramatizing the difficulty of regulating powerful militias in Shan State. For instance, in 1969, the government’s arrest of Khun Sa, at that time the unofficial leader of the Ka Kwe Ye militias in Shan State, prompted his militia to go underground and ally with insurgents.

In 1974, a new constitution promulgated by the Revolutionary Council provided a legal basis for militias. Article 171 stated that “every citizen shall in accordance with law – undergo military training, and undertake military service for the defense of the State.” After 1973, the Tatmadaw reconstituted some of the local defense forces, which had earlier surrendered their weapons, into people’s militias. During this period, the Tatmadaw continued to establish new militias on an ad hoc basis with an arrangement guided by local security concerns. By the mid-1980s, a rough estimate placed the number of people in militia forces at 35,000. The militia system featured two main arrangements: the people’s militia forces and the anti-insurgent forces. In Shan State, Tatmadaw commanders continued to form militias to fight the CPB, which had advanced across eastern Shan State and consolidated control. After being released as part of a general amnesty by the government in 1980, Lo Hsing Han reestablished a militia near Lashio. In the 1980s, Tatmadaw commanders authorized the creation of the Kutkai
Rangers, a militia in Kutkai Township in northern Shan State, to assist in countering the threats presented by the CPB.76

2.4 The Ceasefire Period (1989 to 2009)

A nationwide protest movement against the Ne Win-led BSPP government in 1988, and the collapse of the CPB in 1989, had far-reaching consequences for the Tatmadaw’s use of militias. One was that the Tatmadaw began engaging EAOs through ceasefire agreements, in some cases leading to their transformation into pro-government militias.77 At the same time, the Tatmadaw also restructured its use of militias as part of a broader military reform.

In 1988, the eruption of popular protests against the government of Ne Win’s BSPP led the Tatmadaw to engage in a “self-coup” that involved the installation of General Saw Maung, a trusted Ne Win supporter, and later, in 1992, General Than Shwe, as leader of a newly established governing body known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). A promise by Tatmadaw leaders to hold elections in 1990 helped quell popular demands for further democratic reforms. At the same time, the Tatmadaw also took measures to shore up its authority that included its own reorganization.

Along with a dramatic increase in weapons procurement, an expansion of personnel, and reforms of its command and control structures, the Tatmadaw also engaged in a reconfiguration of its militia system.78 The extent of the changes at that time is not clear, but reports indicate that in some non-Burman areas, such as Kachin State, the Tatmadaw disbanded militias.79 In other non-Burman areas, however, such as Mon State, the Tatmadaw introduced militia training courses for civilians.80 Andrew Selth, a scholar of Myanmar’s security affairs, notes in his 2002 book on the Tatmadaw:

“According to the DDSI [Directorate of Defense Services Intelligence], there are no longer active PM [people’s militia] units in each village, along the lines seen before 1988.81 In most rural areas, the arms issued to these units have been collected and placed in army stores. However, villagers are still required to perform certain security functions (particularly in specially created “strategic villages”), and to assist the Tatmadaw if required.”82

As Selth adds, the militias were “expected to contribute military service to the state when required.”83

Another change taking place in the Tatmadaw’s management of militias was the formation of the Directorate of People’s Militias and Territorial Forces on April 1, 1990. Its establishment was part of the reorganization of the Directorate of People’s Militias and Public Relations (see Table 2).84

Another significant development in the Tatmadaw’s management of militias involved its conferral of militia status on EAOs formerly engaged in armed resistance against the government.85 This began in 1989 with a mutiny within the ranks of the CPB that that led to the rapid collapse of Burma’s largest armed insurgency, which splintered into four groups. The CPB’s demise provided SLORC leaders with the opportunity to adopt a new approach to managing EAOs. Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, head of the Military Intelligence Services (MIS) of the Tatmadaw, took the lead in coordinating the negotiation of ceasefire agreements with EAOs.86 Ceasefire agreements with the four post-CPB groups, concluded in 1989, thwarted the attempts of EAOs to form an alliance with them against the Tatmadaw.
### Table 3: Myanmar Government List of Ceasefire Groups (1989 to 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Current Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major Armed Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA)</td>
<td>Mongton, Shan State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan State Nationalities People’s Liberation Organization (SNPLO)</td>
<td>Naung Htaw, Shan State</td>
<td>Surrendered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mong Tai Army (MTA)–Khun Sa</td>
<td>Langkho, Shan State</td>
<td>Surrendered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCP (Rakhine State)</td>
<td>Maungdaw, Rakhine State</td>
<td>Surrendered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Democratic Army–Kachin (NDA-K)</td>
<td>Pangwah, Kachin State</td>
<td>BGF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAADAA)*</td>
<td>Laukkai, Shan State</td>
<td>BGF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karenni Nationalities People’s Liberation Front (KNPLF)</td>
<td>Hoya, Kayah State</td>
<td>BGF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan State Army–North**</td>
<td>Sein Kyawt, Shan State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachin Democratic Army (KDA)</td>
<td>Kutkai, Shan State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pa-O National Army (PNA)</td>
<td>Kyauk Ta Long, Shan State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayan National Guard (KNG)</td>
<td>Phekon, Shan State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayan New Land Party (KNLP)</td>
<td>Pyin Saung, Kayah State</td>
<td>Ceasefire Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)</td>
<td>Laiza, Kachin State</td>
<td>EAO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Wa State Army (UWSA)</td>
<td>Pansang, Shan State</td>
<td>EAO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA)</td>
<td>Mong La, Shan State</td>
<td>EAO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mon State Party (NMS)</td>
<td>Ye Chaung Pya, Mon State</td>
<td>EAO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)</td>
<td>Shadaw, Kayah State</td>
<td>EAO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan State National Army (SSNA)</td>
<td>Shan State</td>
<td>Surrendered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minor Armed Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTA–Mong Hin Mong Ha</td>
<td>Mongyai, Tangyan, Shan State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTA–Man Pan</td>
<td>Tangyan, Shan State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mong Paw Militia Group</td>
<td>Muse, Shan State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan State National Army (SSNA)–Breakaway Group</td>
<td>Shan State</td>
<td>Dissolved, Merged with SSA-South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTA–Shwe Pyi Aye</td>
<td>Pekon, Shan State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karenni National Democratic Party (KNDP)–Na Ga</td>
<td>Loikaw, Kayah State</td>
<td>Allied with BGF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon Peace Organization–Myeik Region</td>
<td>Myeik, Mon State</td>
<td>Surrendered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3: Armed Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization (KPF) (Haunghayaw)</th>
<th>Myawaddy, Kayah State</th>
<th>BGF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lasang Awng Wa Group</td>
<td>Waingmaw, Kachin State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homong (ex-MTA)</td>
<td>Langkho, Shan State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matkyan (ex-MTA)</td>
<td>Namsan, Shan State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayai (ex-MTA)</td>
<td>Namsan, Shan State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karenni National Peace and Development Party (KNPDP)</td>
<td>Loikaw, Kayah State</td>
<td>Allied with BGF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan State Army—South 758th Brigade</td>
<td>Wanpan, Shan State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karenni Solidarity Organization (KNSO)—Ka Ma Sa Nya</td>
<td>Kayah State</td>
<td>Allied with BGF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Peace and Development Group (Padoh Aung San)</td>
<td>Hpaan, Kayin State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Than Daung Special Regional Peaceful Group⁹⁰</td>
<td>Thandaunggyi, Kayin State</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Than Daung Special Region</td>
<td>Thandaung, Kayin State</td>
<td>Inactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KPC)</td>
<td>Kawkareik, Kayin State</td>
<td>EAO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* After 2009, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) split. There remains a non-BGF faction.
** After 2009, the 3rd and 7th Brigades of the SSA became militias. The 1st Brigade, known as the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA), did not, and remains an EAO.
*** The Arakan Army is a breakaway group from the Arakan Liberation Party. The group is distinct from the Arakan Army that formed in the Kachin State in 2008 and is currently operating.
**** Units led by Saw Lah Pwe rejected the BGF proposal and formed the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army–Kloh Htoo Baw. In October 2015, DKBA–Kloh Htoo Baw became a signatory of the NCA.

During the period from 1989 to 2009, forty armed organizations entered into ceasefire agreements with the military government (see Table 3). The success of the ceasefire reflects a combination of military pressure from the Tatmadaw and incentives for a cessation of conflict, along with the promise of economic assistance and political dialogue. The agreements were military truces that suspended open hostilities, but they were not political solutions. The military government maintained that it was a transitional government drafting a new constitution through the National Convention (NC). The NC first convened in 1993. After fifteen years, the NC produced the 2008 Constitution. While representatives of some ceasefire groups attended the NC, some expressed disappointment that the NC did not involve substantive political dialogue, and that the 2008 Constitution did not address their political concerns.⁹¹

The ceasefire approach pursued by the Tatmadaw produced a two-tiered system of ceasefire groups. The first tier included EAOs, which the Tatmadaw has referred to as “major armed groups.” The second tier included splinter groups – breakaway factions of EAOs – which the Tatmadaw labeled “minor armed groups.”⁹² Ceasefire terms tended to be more favorable for the first tier than for the second. First-tier groups received economic assistance from the military government, and in some cases their territory was demarcated and designated a special region. In contrast, terms for some of the second-tier groups led to reduction in their arms and territory.
The second tier consists of EAOs that accepted ceasefires and then became militias. Andrew Selth notes that “many of the insurgent groups which have negotiated ceasefire agreements with Rangoon have been given ‘militia’ status and sometimes act as surrogates for the Tatmadaw.”

The circumstances under which these groups achieved militia status vary. In some cases, EAOs engaged in negotiations with the Tatmadaw did not become ceasefire groups, but converted directly to militias. For instance, after the Mong Tai Army (MTA), an EAO led by Khun Sa, agreed to an unconditional surrender in 1996, several former commanders became leaders of pro-government militias (see Box 3).

Other EAOs signed ceasefire agreements and disarmed, and their membership then became militia units. For many, this conversion into pro-government militias took place in the period from 1989 to 2008. The experience of the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA) provides an example of a ceasefire group that became a pro-government militia after disarming. The PSLA became a ceasefire group in 1991, but disarmed on April 21, 2005. The Tatmadaw then began providing militia training and formed members of the PSLA into pro-government militias in Mongton Township in Shan State. The 758th Brigade of the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA), or Shan State Army–South, is another example of a splinter group that left their parent organization and became a government militia in July 2006. The Kayan National Guard (KNG), which served as part of the Kayan New Land Party, an EAO, broke away in 1991 and agreed to a ceasefire with the Tatmadaw in February 1992. The group is now a pro-government militia in Pekon Township of Shan State.

While Shan State has the highest number of EAOs and splinter groups that have become militias, they are also present in other areas of Myanmar. In Kayin State, several groups that broke away from the KNU, such as the Thandaung Peace Group and the Padoh Aung San Group, became militias. In Kayah State, several splinter groups served as militias. Several of them reportedly have become business groups affiliated with the two BGF units (nos. 1004 and 1005) operating in Kayah State.

The Lasang Awng Wa Peace Group is an example of a splinter group in Kachin State that became a ceasefire group and later a pro-government militia. The origins of this group go back to the KIO. In 2004, Colonel Lasang Awng Wa, then chief of the KIO’s Intelligence and National Security Department, split from the organization after reportedly launching an unsuccessful coup against the leadership of the KIA/KIO. After its apparent failure, Lasang Aung Wa and his supporters negotiated a ceasefire agreement with the military regime. They received the status of “peace group” and permission to operate in an area near Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State. This group was then known as the Lasang Awng Wa Peace Group until it was reportedly transformed into the Lawa Yang Militia on October 16, 2009.

While not formally militia per se, several ceasefire groups assisted the Tatmadaw in their security roles. The Democratic Buddhist Karen Army (DKBA), a group of armed soldiers and officers that broke from the KNU in 1994, previously supported Tatmadaw units in operations against the KNU.

During this period, the Tatmadaw continued militia training programs for civilians. The training followed a pattern in which local Tatmadaw units directed villagers to form militias in communities inhabited by non-Burman ethnic groups. These areas included Chin, Shan, Kachin, Kayin, and Mon states and Tanintharyi Division (currently referred to as Tanintharyi Region).

This ceasefire system operated from 1989 to 2008. Beginning in 2009, the Tatmadaw changed its approach to managing EAOs, which altered the ceasefire system. The changes involved the proposal by the Tatmadaw that EAOs become pro-government militias, and, later, the initiation of a peace process, which involved a new round of ceasefires.
Box 3: Khun Sa and His Legacy

Khun Sa (1934–2007) is the most famous of Myanmar’s militia leaders. Despite his death in 2007, the legacy of his influence over the militia system in Shan State continues. Although his career as the country’s most powerful militia leader is exceptional, it provides insights useful for understanding the evolution of Myanmar’s current militia system.

Born in 1934, Khun Sa was of mixed Chinese-Shan-Palaung heritage and grew up in the Loi Maw region of Tangyan Township in Shan State. His authorized biography recounts that as a young man he formed a small, armed band with his boyhood friends for protection from the remnants of the KMT that had entered Burma. These KMT were to become his long-time adversaries. To obtain arms for his growing army, he organized a raid on a KMT unit and captured thirty of their weapons.107

By the late 1950s, local Tatmadaw commanders had begun using local militias to help contain internal and external threats. According to Khun Sa’s biography, “On January 6, 1960, Colonel Maung Shwe, the commander of the Eastern Strategic Command (Shan State), offered him the status of a volunteer militia chief and a free hand in the build-up of his strength in return for his pledge to fight the KMT and the Communist Party of Burma.”108 During this time, he parlayed opium into resources to build his militia, and extended his control beyond Loimaw into eastern Shan State.

Khun Sa’s first stint as a militia leader was short-lived. In 1964, the military government ordered the demonetization of widely held bank notes as part of its socialist-oriented economic reforms, wiping out many people’s savings. Some of the hardest hit were those in the cash-oriented, black-market economy, including opium traders such as Khun Sa. Outraged, Khun Sa led his militia underground, adopting “United Anti-Socialist Army” as the name of his group, and entered into an alliance with ethnic Shan resistance groups.

Khun Sa’s first stint as a rebel, however, was also brief.109 His initial experience with the Shan insurgents did not go well. Despite his efforts to assist the various ethnic Shan resistance armies, he became entangled in a conflict with Bo Dewing, one of the first leaders of the Shan rebellion, which Khun Sa attributed to manipulation by his rivals, the KMT. By 1966, Khun Sa had resumed his position as head of a militia force, one known as the Loi Maw Ka Kwe Ye.110

On October 20, 1969, state authorities detained Khun Sa in Taunggyi, where he was attending a meeting. A government account of the Tatmadaw’s perceptions of Khun Sa’s militia notes, “in view of their military buildup and frequent violations of the law, it was conceivable that they would no longer be loyal to the government.” Authorities arrested Khun Sa under section five of the Public Tranquility Law.111 His lieutenants led the organization underground and cooperated with the Shan State Army, changing their name from the Loi Maw Ka Kwe Ye to the Shan United Army (SUA) in an attempt to demonstrate their political reorientation.112

In 1973, Khun Sa’s officers abducted two Soviet doctors from a hospital in Taunggyi. In exchange for their release, Burmese authorities agreed to free Khun Sa from Mandalay prison. According to his biography, after his release in 1974, he came under the watchful eye of Burmese Military Intelligence Services. Nevertheless, Khun Sa managed to rejoin his army based along the Thai-Shan border.113

By 1976, Khun Sa had returned to his men and slowly rebuilt the military strength of his force. He expanded his control over the Thai-Shan border so that he could tax the flow of opium entering Thailand. In the mid-1980s, he brought two other ethnic Shan armies under his command and renamed his organization the Mong Tai Army (MTA). He continued to increase the strength of his army, to more than twenty thousand troops, and his control over Shan State’s opium trade.114
By the mid-1990s, the walls began closing in on Khun Sa. Ceasefire agreements with many of Shan State’s EAOs now allowed the Tatmadaw to concentrate its resources on pressuring the MTA to surrender. And there was dissension in the ranks, epitomized by a mutiny led by one of Khun Sa’s trusted officers, who established the Shan State National Army (SSNA). Khun Sa now faced encirclement by forces of the Tatmadaw and the UWSA. The establishment of fixed headquarters at Homong near the Shan State border with Thailand had limited his maneuverability. Khun Sa directed his most trusted aides to secretly open negotiations with the Tatmadaw about surrendering.\(^{115}\)

In January 1996, the Tatmadaw neutralized the threat of Khun Sa’s MTA, one of the largest EAOs in Myanmar at that time. Its demise came through political negotiations rather than bloody conflict. Despite the strength of its estimated 15,000 troops, the terms of the MTA’s agreement were different from most of the ceasefires with other large EAOs. Rather than accepting a ceasefire, Khun Sa surrendered. Tatmadaw officials allowed Khun Sa to retire to Yangon and live in the protective custody of the government. The MTA did not become a ceasefire organization. Rather than keep their massive arsenal, MTA leaders delivered it to the Tatmadaw as part of the surrender.\(^{116}\) As for the thousands of former MTA soldiers, the Tatmadaw formed many of them into militias (see Table 4).\(^{117}\)

Not all of the MTA soldiers accepted the surrender. Yawd Serk, a young officer, rejected the surrender, broke away, and set up an EAO to oppose the government. He attracted several thousand soldiers and formed the Shan State Army–South, which later became known as the RCSS/SSA.

### Table 4: Ex-MTA Militias (1996 to Present)\(^{118}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Township(s)</th>
<th>Name(s)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mahaja</td>
<td>Langhko</td>
<td>Southern Shan State Company; Homong Region Development and Welfare Group</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo Mon</td>
<td>Tangyan/Lashio</td>
<td>Manpang (Manpan)</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lt. Col. Yishay, Wilson Moe(^{119})</td>
<td>Nampong/Mongton</td>
<td>Nampong/Loi Taw Khan People’s Militia Force</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhou Sang</td>
<td>Namsan</td>
<td>Nayai</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sai Khun Mein</td>
<td>Petkon</td>
<td>MTA Shwepyiaye; Former MTA Members Development Group</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma Guowen</td>
<td>Tangyan/Mongyai</td>
<td>Mong Hin Mong Ha</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekka–Ai Ya</td>
<td>Mongkerng</td>
<td>Mongyawn</td>
<td>Militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naw Kham*</td>
<td>Tachilek</td>
<td>Hawngleuk Militia</td>
<td>Dissolved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The formation of the Hawngleuk militia was not part of the 1996 surrender agreement.
Of the former MTA militia leaders, Naw Kham, a former supply officer, became one of the most well known for his campaign of piracy along stretches of the Mekong River adjacent to the Laos and Myanmar borders. Sometime after the MTA surrender, Naw Kham became the head of a government militia in Tachilek Township. After the removal from office of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt in 2004, Naw Kham came into conflict with state security authorities and fled Tachilek. He relocated to the banks of the Mekong River, where he set up a protection racket involving the taxation of commercial river traffic. During this time, he established close ties with the communities along the river in both Laos and Myanmar. When a boat with twelve murdered Chinese sailors washed up on the Thai banks of the Mekong River on February 25, 2008, Naw Kham became the target of an international manhunt led by Chinese officials. Naw Kham evaded the dragnet for months by maneuvering between hideouts in Laos and Myanmar. Eventually, authorities apprehended him in Laos, and he was tried and executed in China.

2.5 The Transformation and the Peace Process (2009 to Present)

In the period since 2009, as the political system changed from direct military rule to a more open, quasi-democratic government, the militia system also experienced changes. In 2009 and 2010, this involved the Tatmadaw’s initiative to transform ceasefire organizations into militias, and an increase in the training of civilians for militia service. After 2011, when President Thein Sein took power, his government initiated a peace process. One step made by the new government was to delink the issue of militia transformation from participation in the peace process. Nevertheless, some non-Burman areas have become more militarized as a result of the Tatmadaw’s formation of new militias.

In 2006, the Tatmadaw announced its intention to hold a referendum on a proposed constitution in May 2008 as a step in its proposed roadmap for political reform. The passage of the referendum signaled the beginning of a period of uncertainty in Myanmar’s political system. In the period after the approval of the constitution, but before the general elections scheduled for November 2010, Tatmadaw leaders took steps to push ceasefire groups to transform into pro-government militia units.

On April 27, 2009, the Tatmadaw announced its intention to transform ceasefire organizations into pro-government militias. To coordinate this process, Lieutenant General Ye Myint, head of Military Security Affairs (MSA), became the head of the Committee for the Transformation of the Border Guard Forces. In the lead-up to the November elections, he met with leaders of ethnic armed ceasefire organizations in an attempt to persuade them to accept the order.

The militia proposal involved two different arrangements. The first was the BGF scheme, which included the following procedures: First, Tatmadaw soldiers would integrate into the unit and make up 3 percent of its force composition. Second, each group would form into battalion-size units of 326 men. The allotment of units for the larger armed groups was greater than the allotment for the smaller ones. For instance, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) transformed into eleven individual BGF units. By contrast, the two ethnic Lahu militias, led by Jakuni and Ja Pikwe, combined to form a single BGF unit.

Five ethnic ceasefire groups and four local militia units become BGFs (see Table 5). The ceasefire groups were from the National Democratic Army–Kachin (NDA-K) in Kachin State, the Karen National People’s Liberation Front (KNPLF) in Kayah State, the DKBA (Buddhist) in Kayin State, and the MNDAA in northern Shan State. The militia groups that became BGFs were all in Shan State, and included an ethnic Lahu militia group in Mongton and Mong Hsat townships headed by Major Japi Kwe, a former member of the Lahu Defense Force (LDF), an EAO; a militia group in Tachilek headed by Maj. Sai Aung; the Makman militia group located in Mong Ping (Mong Pyin) Township; and a group of militias in Talay Township. Their origins trace back either to EAOs that were ceasefire groups, or to government militias. These are areas with predominately non-Burman populations, and most militia members
are also non-Burman. The ethnicity of the Tatmadaw soldiers appointed to serve in BGF units is not known, but they likely include ethnic Burmans.

Table 5: Border Guard Forces (2009 to Present)\textsuperscript{125}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BGF No.</th>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Commander</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Previous Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kachin State</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001</td>
<td>Chipwi and Tsawlaw</td>
<td>Maj. Deltan Khaung Lum</td>
<td>8-Nov-09</td>
<td>NDA-K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1002</td>
<td>Chipwi and Tsawlaw</td>
<td>Maj. Lanjaw Saung Taint</td>
<td>8-Nov-09</td>
<td>NDA-K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1003</td>
<td>Waingmaw</td>
<td>Maj. Wamthe Dai Khaun</td>
<td>8-Nov-09</td>
<td>NDA-K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayah State</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1004</td>
<td>Hpasawng and Loikaw</td>
<td>Maj. Ree Samar</td>
<td>8-Nov-09</td>
<td>KNPLF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1005</td>
<td>Mese and Bawlakhe</td>
<td>Maj. Se Moenel</td>
<td>8-Nov-09</td>
<td>KNPLF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan State</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1006</td>
<td>Laukkai</td>
<td>Maj. Yang Xiao Kying</td>
<td>4-Dec-09</td>
<td>MNDAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1007</td>
<td>Mongton</td>
<td>Maj. Japi Kwe</td>
<td>30-Mar-10</td>
<td>Lahu militia (formerly LDF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1008</td>
<td>Mongyawng</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>30-Mar-10</td>
<td>Combined forces of Lahu militia and Jakuni militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1009</td>
<td>Tachilek</td>
<td>Maj. Sai Aung</td>
<td>18-May-10</td>
<td>Lahu militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1010</td>
<td>Metman/Markmang</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>20-May-10</td>
<td>Metman militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayin State</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1011</td>
<td>Hlaingbwe</td>
<td>Maj. Henry</td>
<td>18-Aug-10</td>
<td>DKBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1012</td>
<td>Hlaingbwe</td>
<td>Maj. Than Shwe</td>
<td>18-Aug-10</td>
<td>DKBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1013</td>
<td>Phapun</td>
<td>Maj. Saw Hla Kyaing</td>
<td>18-Aug-10</td>
<td>DKBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1014</td>
<td>Phapun</td>
<td>Maj. Saw Maung Chit</td>
<td>18-Aug-10</td>
<td>DKBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1015</td>
<td>Hlaingbwe</td>
<td>Maj. Saw Win Naing Sein</td>
<td>20-Aug-10</td>
<td>DKBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1016</td>
<td>Hlaingbwe</td>
<td>Maj. Saw Myat Khaing</td>
<td>20-Aug-10</td>
<td>DKBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1017</td>
<td>Myawaddy</td>
<td>Maj. Dee Dee</td>
<td>20-Aug-10</td>
<td>DKBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1018</td>
<td>Myawaddy</td>
<td>Maj. Saw Maung Win</td>
<td>20-Aug-10</td>
<td>DKBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1019</td>
<td>Myawaddy</td>
<td>Maj. Saw Like Theik</td>
<td>20-Aug-10</td>
<td>DKBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1020</td>
<td>Myawaddy</td>
<td>Maj. Saw San Lin</td>
<td>21-Aug-10</td>
<td>DKBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1021</td>
<td>Kawkareik</td>
<td>Maj. Saw Beelu</td>
<td>21-Aug-10</td>
<td>DKBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1022</td>
<td>Myawaddy</td>
<td>Maj. Moe Tho</td>
<td>21-Aug-10</td>
<td>DKBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1023</td>
<td>Kyain Sekgyi</td>
<td>Maj. Saw Eh Htoo</td>
<td>21-Aug-10</td>
<td>KPF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A second arrangement offered to ceasefire groups was to transform them into militias, referred to by the Tatmadaw as People’s Militia Forces (PMF). The procedures are less strict for becoming a PMF than a BGF. PMFs are required to assist the Tatmadaw by collecting information about other armed groups, helping them navigate the difficult local terrain, and supporting them in combat operations. Like the BGF proposal, it involved the downsizing of forces. However, unlike the BGF, this militia arrangement did not require the integration of soldiers from the Tatmadaw.

The PMF proposal led several ceasefire groups that had not earlier become militias to join the Tatmadaw’s militia program. According to a government press release in 2011, fifteen ceasefire groups became militias in the period from 1989 to 2010. These included not just EAOs, such as the Kachin Defense Army (KDA) and the Pa-O National Army (PNA), but also the splinter groups, including the 3rd and 7th brigades of the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA), and others.

During a 2011 press conference, Minister of Information U Kyaw Hsan explained the rationale behind the proposal:

“During negotiations, ethnic leaders said that their subordinates would face a lot of difficulties in trying to adapt themselves to ordinary civilian life, asking permission to hold arms and also jobs and food, clothing and shelter.

Consequently the government, taking into account laws, rules, and agreements, has transformed ethnic armed organizations into border guard forces – BGFs – or people’s militia forces – PMFs – so that members could enjoy jobs and life security and serve the nation with dignity. As these forces become units under Tatmadaw’s command, matters concerning their monthly salaries, rations, uniforms, and arms and ammunition have to be carried out according to rules and regulations and proper bookkeeping system.”

Not all of the ceasefire organizations complied with the Tatmadaw’s request to transform into militias. Several of the more powerful ones rejected the order, including the UWSA, the KIO, and the New Mon State Party (NMSP). The RCSS/SSA split over the issue: the 3rd and 7th brigades became Tatmadaw militias, while the 1st Brigade did not. A common objection was that the proposal required changes in their armed forces in advance of the anticipated political dialogue with the Tatmadaw. The KIO made counter-proposals that included becoming a national guard force not under Tatmadaw command, but the Tatmadaw did not agree.

Efforts by the Tatmadaw to form BGF units in Kayin State and the Kokang area of northern Shan State led to armed conflicts between Tatmadaw units and two EAOs – the MNDA and the units of the DKBA led by the late Saw Lah Pweh – that refused to abide by the Tatmadaw’s request to become BGFs. The outbreak of fighting over the BGF program highlights the political challenges of integrating ceasefire groups into the militia system (see Section 4.4).

During this transition period, the military government was expanding its recruitment and training of civilians for local government militias. In 2009 and 2010, reports indicate that the Tatmadaw stepped up its efforts to form militias in Arakan, Chin, Shan, Kayin, and Mon states, and Tanintharyi Division (now Region).
Table 6: Bilateral Ceasefire Agreements between the Government and Ethnic Armed Organizations (2011 to Present)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of New Ceasefire</th>
<th>Date of Previous Ceasefire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. United Wa State Army (UWSA)</td>
<td>October 2011</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA)*</td>
<td>December 2011</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)–Htoo Baw*</td>
<td>December 2011</td>
<td>1995 (Signed as part of Democratic Karen Buddhist Army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Chin National Front (CNF)*</td>
<td>January 2012</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Karen National Union (KNU)*</td>
<td>January 2012</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. New Mon State Party (NMSP)</td>
<td>February 2012</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KPC)*</td>
<td>February 2012</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)*</td>
<td>April 2012</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO)*</td>
<td>August 2012</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. All Burma Students’ Democratic Front (ABSDF)*</td>
<td>August 2013</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The quasi-democratic government led by President Thein Sein (2011-2016) initiated a peace process to resolve the conflict between the Tatmadaw and EAOs. A pledge by President Thein Sein on August 18, 2011, to make ethnic issues a national priority signaled that the new government was willing to drop the issue of militia transformation. This gesture removed the impediment posed by the Tatmadaw’s militia transformation proposal and created an atmosphere conducive to negotiations between EAOs and the government. The government succeeded in negotiating new bilateral ceasefire agreements with fourteen armed organizations (see Table 6). On October 15, 2015, after three years of negotiations among the Tatmadaw and at least seventeen active armed groups, a multilateral agreement, known as the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), was signed. Significantly, the NCA calls for political dialogue between the military and the EAOs.

The NCA is a multilateral ceasefire agreement signed by eight armed organizations, including the country’s oldest ethnic armed opposition group, the Karen National Union (KNU). But seven other EAOs that had concluded bilateral ceasefires with the Thein Sein-led government did not sign the NCA. And another four ethnic organizations, which have no ceasefire agreement with the government and are involved in ongoing conflicts with the Tatmadaw, did not join the process. These groups include both the recently established Arakan Army (AA) and Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the much older Myanmar National Alliance Army (MNDAA), established in 1989, and KIA, formed in 1961. The KIA accepted a ceasefire agreement in 1994, which broke down in 2011. Despite participating in
the early stages of drafting the NCA, the KIA did not become a signatory. A few smaller armed groups without bilateral ceasefires have agreements that will allow them to participate in the political dialogue. They include the Wa National Organization, the Lahu Democratic Union, and the Arakan National Congress.

In the lead-up to the 2010 election, the steps taken by the SPDC to transform ceasefire organizations into militias, and its expansion of civilian training for militia service, had several far-reaching effects. One was that the formation of militias led to the further militarization of some areas. Another is that the transformation of units from the SSPP/SSA and MNDA into pro-government militias weakened them militarily. The BGFs and the newly formed militias served as proxy forces for the Tatmadaw to exercise influence in areas not under their direct control, and enhanced their ability to apply indirect pressure on EAOs. From a political perspective, the conferral of militia status on EAOs represents an expansion of the militias system’s function to include the integration of EAOs into the Tatmadaw. However, several EAOs have been unwilling to accept this arrangement. The issue of militias and the prospect of transforming EAOs into militias remain politically contentious because of uncertainty and a lack of consensus about the role of militias in Myanmar’s future.

**Box 4: The Legal Basis for Militias in the Constitution**

The long-standing use of militias by the Tatmadaw is reflected in law and in both the 1974 and 2008 constitutions.

Article 171 of the 1974 Constitution assigns duties to citizens that involve their preparation to defend the country, but it does not explicitly provide a role for militias. The article states, “Every citizen shall, in accordance with law (a) undergo military training, and (b) undertake military service for the defense of the State.”

The 2008 Constitution charges the Defense Services of Myanmar with the administration of militias. Article 340, which came into effect in 2010, states:

> “With the approval of the National Defense and Security Council, the Defense Services has the authority to administer the participation of the entire people in the security and defense of the Union. The strategy of the people’s militia shall be carried out under the leadership of the Defense Services.”

The 2008 Constitution also identifies duties for citizens regarding the defense of the country, which include undergoing military training. Article 385 states, “Every citizen has the duty to safeguard independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.” Moreover, Article 386 adds, “Every citizen has the duty to undergo military training in accord with the provisions of the law and to serve in the armed forces to defend the Union.”

The Thein Sein government has cited the 2008 Constitution as a legal basis for the transformation of ethnic armed groups into militias. For instance, a government spokesperson indicated that armed groups must assume “the State’s duties as border guard forces and regional militia forces in compliance with the Constitution under the command of the Tatmadaw.” Article 337 of the 2008 Constitution provides justification for this, as it holds that, “All the armed forces in the Union shall be under the command of the Defense Services.”

Myanmar’s legal code has provisions regarding militias, but these laws do not yet appear to have been legally promulgated. In November 2010, before the transition to the Thein Sein government, the military regime of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) enacted the People’s Military Service Law. Its provisions allow the government to recruit civilians for military service. However, the
government does not yet appear to have implemented the provisions. ¹⁴⁵ Legal precedents for this law include the National Service Law and People’s Militia Act of 1959. As Selth notes, while this law permitted conscription for military service, “it is not clear whether this law ever formally entered into force, as no official notification appears to have been made as required by Section 1(2) of the Act.” ¹⁴⁶

Several commentators have noted that while the 2008 Constitution acknowledges a role for militias in the security and defense of the country, important details are not included. ¹⁴⁷ For instance, a report from Burma News International (BNI) notes, “There is no official government document about the BGF policy. The people’s militia force is mentioned in the Defense Service, Chapter 7, of the 2008 Constitution. However, the wording is vague, and no details about the role of the people’s militias are provided.” ¹⁴⁸
Section THREE: A Typology of Militias

This section offers a framework for understanding the current militia system by providing a typology of four types of militias that identifies their different roles and positions within civil-military relations. The primary feature assessed in the typology is the status of militias. “Status” refers to whether they are allied with the Tatmadaw or with EAOs, and the ways pro-government militias are integrated into the Tatmadaw’s command structure. There are three other secondary features: (1) the extent of their influence, which involves the number of members, their area of operation, and other factors related to their strength and pervasiveness; (2) their origins, such as their previous interactions with their communities and the Tatmadaw; and (3) their source of revenue — how they support themselves financially. The militias are broken down and classified into four types:

- Tatmadaw-integrated militias
- Tatmadaw non-integrated militias
- Tatmadaw-operated community militias
- ethnic armed organization militias

This typological framework is useful because any aggregate estimate of the number of militia groups without proper contextualization can easily conflate militias with as few as five civilian members, recruited by the Tatmadaw and with only minimal training, with others comprising hundreds of well-armed, veteran soldiers belonging to an EAO that joined the peace process after armed conflict with the government. One caveat is that there may be militias included in one type that do not meet all of the criteria.

3.1 Type I: Tatmadaw-Integrated Militias

Tatmadaw-integrated militias, officially known as the Border Guard Forces, operate under the command of the Tatmadaw and are integrated into its formal command structure. At present, there are twenty-three battalions of BGFs (see Table 5). The primary characteristics of Tatmadaw-integrated militias are as follows: The units are integrated into the formal command structure of the Tatmadaw. The Tatmadaw issues standard uniforms and provides direct financial and material support. The units have soldiers from the Tatmadaw serving in their ranks. Each unit receives arms and supplies from the Tatmadaw.

Tatmadaw-integrated militias are responsible for assisting the Tatmadaw in maintaining security and are part of its national defense plans. Their activities range from providing information on the activities of EAOs in their areas and serving as guides to navigate the local terrain, to combat operations against EAOs. BGF units have engaged in fighting with the KIA, the KNLA, and, prior to the NCA, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)–Kloh Htoo Blaw.

Under the official guidelines, each BGF unit has 326 members, including eighteen officers. As part of the Tatmadaw, the BGFs have access to heavy weapons.

As their name suggests, BGFs are located in townships that are near, but not necessarily adjacent to, international borders. BGF units operate in Kachin, Shan, and Kayin states. The areas of BGF operations appear to correspond roughly to those where armed groups wielded influence prior to becoming a BGF. The details concerning their freedom of movement are unclear, but BGFs appear to be more restricted than some Tatmadaw battalions. As one reports notes, “a Myanmar army battalion under LID [Light Infantry Division] 88 in Magwe region can be deployed in Kachin state, while a Karen BGF cannot be deployed in Kachin state.”

One of the most significant aspects of Tatmadaw-integrated militias is the inclusion of Tatmadaw soldiers in the ranks of what were previously militias and EAOs engaged in ceasefire agreements with
the government.\textsuperscript{154} The guidelines for the formation of BGF units call for the integration of thirty soldiers from the Tatmadaw, of which three must be officers. As Kyaw San, the former minister of information, notes, “Normally, a BGF unit has three officers and 27 from other ranks of the Tatmadaw to help run its organizational functions smoothly and correctly. You see, a small number of servicemen have to be included in the organizational set-up of every BGF.” The commander of the unit holds the rank of major and is from the original group. Commanders have the authority to issue promotions. There are two deputy commanders, one of which is an officer from the Tatmadaw. Tatmadaw officers hold positions that control supplies and logistical planning (see Table 7 and Annex I).\textsuperscript{155}

The guidelines for the transformation into BGFs reportedly include a provision that requires the retirement of militia members over the age of fifty years. This regulation has led to new patterns of accommodation between the Tatmadaw and the leaders of the transformed armed groups. Several former leaders have become members of state-level advisory committees for Border Guard Forces. The Tatmadaw has taken steps to address their formal separation by appointing them as honorary gazetted officers in the Tatmadaw. At a ceremony held in May 2014, Tatmadaw officers conferred these honorary appointments on several leaders from units in Kayin and Kayah States. According to one analyst, “Appointing some leaders of these groups as honorary gazetted officers is a means of reminding them where their loyalties lie.”\textsuperscript{156}

Financial support for Tatmadaw-integrated militias comes from the Tatmadaw and their own income-generating activities. According to a report in the state-run New Light of Myanmar: “The government provides members of the border guard force with the same supplies as that for a Tatmadaw member: salary, rations, military uniforms, and health care.”\textsuperscript{157} Moreover, a BGF recruitment pamphlet indicates that members of BGFs and their families also receive other benefits, such as discounted travel on buses, railways, and air flights (see Annex II).\textsuperscript{158}

A public statement issued in 2011 by U Kyaw Hsan, a government spokesperson at that time, indicates that one of the objectives of the BGFs was to provide members of EAOs with alternative livelihoods (see earlier discussion in sec. 2.5).\textsuperscript{159} This statement indicates that the provision of economic assistance by the government is to support the integration of soldiers into units under the command of the Tatmadaw.

The economic activities of BGFs are diverse. Members of BGF units tax the population and commerce, and operate businesses, including industrial agriculture projects, real estate, mining, logging and others.\textsuperscript{160} In some cases, reports indicate that members of BGFs are also involved in narcotics trafficking.\textsuperscript{161}
Table 7: Official Distribution of Soldiers by Rank from the Tatmadaw and Original Unit(s) in a Border Guard Force Unit\textsuperscript{162}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tatmadaw</th>
<th>Number (Rank)</th>
<th>Original Unit(s)</th>
<th>Number (Rank)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commander</td>
<td></td>
<td>Commander</td>
<td>1 (Major)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} Commander</td>
<td>1 (Major)</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} Commander</td>
<td>1 (Major)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(admin)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain (Adjutant)</td>
<td>1 (Captain)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain (Quarter Master)</td>
<td>1 (Captain)</td>
<td>Company Commander</td>
<td>3 (Captain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Platoon Commander</td>
<td>10 (Lieutenant and 1\textsuperscript{st} Lieutenant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regimental Sergeant Major</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrant Officer – II (Office)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Warrant Officer - II</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrant Officer – II (Quarter)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergeant (Clerk)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sergeant (C.Q.)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Corporal</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lance Corporal</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Type II: Tatmadaw Non-Integrated Militias

Tatmadaw non-integrated militias are remarkably diverse in size, strength, command structure, history, and sources of revenue.\textsuperscript{163} Despite these differences, a common feature of these militias is that they are under the command of the Tatmadaw, but are not fully integrated into the Tatmadaw like the BGFs. In addition to having no Tatmadaw soldiers in their ranks, Tatmadaw non-integrated militias have no uniform system of rank, and no prescribed number of soldiers like the BGFs. They are not required to attend training programs conducted by the Tatmadaw, or obligated to operate full time. Finally, they do not receive salaries from the Tatmadaw.\textsuperscript{164} These features distinguish them from the Tatmadaw-integrated militias (type I).

Other features of Tatmadaw non-integrated militias are as follows: Like the BGFs, many have taken part in transformation ceremonies, in which Tatmadaw officials recognize them as government militias.\textsuperscript{165} These militias perform security roles for the Tatmadaw that include assisting in protecting their communities from internal threats such as EAOs. The extent and type of assistance vary, and reflect the security situation on the ground. Some of these units have supported Tatmadaw operations and have come into conflict with EAOs such as the TNLA, KIA, and SSPP/SSA.
The influence of Tatmadaw non-integrated militias varies considerably. Most comprise fewer than one hundred men, and some may have fewer than ten. A few may have more than one hundred, and even as many as several hundred. For example, the Manpang (Man pan) militia group led by Bo Mon (formerly of the MTA), the Pan Hsay militias, and the militias formed out of the KDA and the PNA reportedly have several hundred men. The number of men in a unit can be greater than the number of weapons issued by the Tatmadaw, a discrepancy that appears to be common among these militias.

The membership of Tatmadaw non-integrated militias consists largely of non-Burmans from nearby communities, and they appear to operate within the confines of their regions of origin, which are non-Burman areas. The designated zones of operation for militias that were formerly ceasefire organizations correspond roughly to the areas covered by their ceasefire agreements. One report indicates that some militias “are not allowed to patrol outside their active area and are not allowed to use heavy weapons.” However, other reports show that members of this type of militia support combat operations by the Tatmadaw in areas beyond their normal areas of operation. Their support often involves serving as guides for Tatmadaw troops, particularly in difficult-to-navigate, mountainous regions.

The Tatmadaw non-integrated militias are made up of units with different origins and backgrounds. Some were initially EAOs that fought against the Tatmadaw. These groups signed ceasefire agreements with the Tatmadaw during the SLORC/SPDC period, and then became militias. Other Tatmadaw non-integrated militias were originally organized by local leaders for self-defense, and joined one or more of the various militia arrangements created by the Tatmadaw over the last few decades. Some militia units can trace their origins back to the 1950s. Most other Tatmadaw non-integrated militias that are not ceasefire groups were established later (see Section 2.4).

Like other features of Tatmadaw non-integrated militias, how they support themselves varies significantly. Many rely on some form of taxation to raise revenue. A few also operate businesses and receive business concessions from the government. Militia leaders are permitted to operate their own businesses to generate revenue, and several have connections with business people. Some of their business activities involve the transport sector, real estate development and agribusiness, and some have resource concessions for timber, mining, farmland, and jade. Several reports also allege involvement in illicit activities such as narcotics.

3.3 Type III: Tatmadaw-Supported Community Militias

Tatmadaw-supported community militias are made up of civilians recruited from a community, trained, and armed by the Tatmadaw. Local Tatmadaw units supervise and coordinate their activities. The role played by the Tatmadaw in organizing these militias is one of the features that distinguish them from the Tatmadaw-integrated and non-integrated militias (types I and II). In some cases, village headmen select members of a community to attend a Tatmadaw militia-training course. By contrast, the militias of types I and II were already formed when they came under Tatmadaw command. Another difference is that these groups tend to be smaller than the other types.

Tatmadaw-supported community militias operate in both villages and towns. In municipal areas they are designated as myo ma (Burmese), and sometimes serve where there is limited or nonexistent police or Tatmadaw presence. In other instances they work with local civilian officials such as the police and local administrators.

The primary role of Tatmadaw-supported community militias is providing security. An earlier report on armed groups in Mon State, published in 2007, notes:

“These Pyi Thu Sit militiamen are active in their home villages, providing security against ‘bandits’ and other subversive elements. Moreover, they must patrol along with SPDC columns that arrive at their village and serve as guides so long as the soldiers remain active in the
surrounding area.”

Their duties vary, depending on the local security conditions, and may include serving as sentries – watching for suspicious activities by strangers and filing reports with local security officials. In some villages, where the presence of the either the Tatmadaw or the Myanmar Police Force is negligible or nonexistent, these militia forces may have greater security responsibilities.

The strength of an individual Tatmadaw-supported community militia unit reflects at least two factors. One is the size of their community. In areas with small populations, militias may have as few as five active-duty members. In more populous areas, the community militia is likely to be larger. A second factor is whether or not there are security threats in the area. As a senior officer of an ethnic armed group in Kayah State explains, “The militias are civilians. In times of need, they put on uniforms and the military gives them guns.” Local Tatmadaw units issue weapons to these militias. In areas where EAOs are not active, however, they may be unarmed.

Like other armed groups in Myanmar, taxation supports these militias, whether formally or informally. The forms of taxation vary. For instance, one method appears to be that local government officials collect taxes from households to support militia activities. Militias may also collect these taxes directly, paid in currency or in kind, for example in rice.

The use of community militias under the direct control of local Tatmadaw units is a practice that began in the late 1960s. Tatmadaw-supported community militias represent a continuation of the earlier pyithusit militia arrangement devised by the Tatmadaw under the doctrine of people’s war in the 1960s, and are part of the Tatmadaw’s national defense strategy. When necessary, the Tatmadaw may mobilize this type of militia to fight against foreign and local threats.

While Tatmadaw-supported community militias are probably the most widespread, they are also the ones about which the least information is available. Part of the reason that not much is known about these militias is that they are small and often inactive, and tend to keep a low profile. Several accounts in the early 2000s quoted the DDSI, a now-defunct intelligence arm of the Tatmadaw, to the effect that village militias had been disbanded and their arms put in storage, adding to the confusion about their status and prevalence.

Nevertheless, villagers in many areas of Myanmar have received militia training from local Tatmadaw units. Reports indicate that Tatmadaw commanders have continued to recruit and train civilians for community militias in Rakhine, Kayin, Mon, Shan, Chin, and Kachin states, and in Tanintharyi and Bago regions. How many of these trained civilians are active is unclear, however, as many may remain as reserves. Their activation appears to depend on how Tatmadaw officials view the local security situation, and in areas with minimal threats, militias may remain inactive and unarmed.

3.4 Type IV: Ethnic Armed Organization Militias

EAO militias support ethnic armed organizations. Their roles may include protecting their communities from the Tatmadaw, government militias, or other EAOs, but these militias also may have reservists who can be mobilized to support the EAO’s military operations. Their membership includes civilians and retired soldiers.

The large number of EAOs operating in Myanmar over the last sixty-five years makes characterizing this type of militia complicated. Not only are there several armed groups, but they also appear to have developed different militia arrangements based on local needs and their varying capacities.

Among EAOs, the ones with greater resources and larger areas of control are the ones that have militias. For instance, the KIO, which is the political wing of the KIA, operates the Mungshawa Hypen
Hpung (MHH). Lack of resources constrains many smaller EAOs from equipping militia members with the weapons needed to exercise coercive force.198

The KNDO is Myanmar’s oldest EAO militia, dating back to 1947. At present, it operates in conjunction with the KNLA, which is the armed wing of the KNU. They are one of at least two armed groups that function as militia in KNU-controlled areas. The KNU also cooperates with village-based militias known in Karen as Gher Khaw – involving part-time soldiers based in their own villages who often arm themselves.199

The KNDO is more formalized than the Gher Khaw. The KNDO operates under the command of the KNU’s Department of Defense.200 The Karen Human Rights Group describes the KNDO as a “militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the Karen National Liberation Army and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.”201 The KNDO has a headquarters and seven battalions, one in each of the KNLA’s seven brigade areas, each of which has an estimated strength of between 130 to 150 trained troops.202

The KNDO has some of the oldest roots among all of Myanmar’s EAO militias. When the KNU first formed in 1947, its armed forces were called KNDOs. In 1949, a mutiny by ethnic Karen units of the Tatmadaw led to a reorganization of the Karen armed groups into the KAF, but many of the units continued to be known as KNDOs. The KNU’s official armed wing was later renamed the KNLA, and the KNDO became a militia force of the KNU’s seven districts in southeast Myanmar in the 1970s.

The data on EAO militias is also scarce. One of the main constraints is that many EAOs, especially the smaller ones, may lack resources for financing these groups. Nevertheless, they appear to operate on a decentralized level, with the primary objective of self-protection.

3.5 The Number of Militias?

In an article published in 2015, Andrew Selth, a veteran analyst of the Tatmadaw, notes:

“Despite its dominance of Burma’s national affairs for decades, the Tatmadaw remains in many respects a closed book. Even the most basic data is beyond the reach of analysts and other observers. For example, the Tatmadaw’s current size is a mystery, although most estimates range between 300,000 and 350,000.”203

In the case of militias, much basic data is also beyond reach.204 The exact number of militias and militia personnel is unknown and perhaps unknowable. There are hundreds if not thousands of militia groups operating in Myanmar. A comparison of available estimates and analyses provides the basis for understanding their significance.

Available estimates of militia strengths and numbers are unofficial and vary significantly. In 2010, Major General Maung Maung Ohn, then head of the Directorate of People’s Militias and Territorial Forces, reportedly estimated that the total strength of the militias is over 80,000. The report also noted that only 30,000 of them are armed.205 A report by the Shan Herald Agency for News that cites a government document indicating the presence of 396 militias in northern Shan State alone lends credence to the scale of the previous estimate. It also reports that the militias in this area have a “core strength numbering 8,365 and reserve strength of up to 16,320.”206 One of the highest estimates puts the number of militia members at over 180,000 serving in 5,023 militia groups.207 One media account reports that after 2008, Tatmadaw leaders planned to establish militia groups in each of the country’s 13,725 village tracts.208

When weighing these unofficial estimates, it is useful to take into account that they do not precisely define “militia.” In many areas, militias are not only small, but may be inactive. It is unclear whether
these estimates take into account that civilians who have received Tatmadaw militia training may also be inactive. Nevertheless, reports indicate that Defense Services continues to make use of militia units, and that they play a role in the Tatmadaw’s national defense plans. 209
Section FOUR: Key Considerations for Understanding Militias

In addition to their security roles, militias are involved in other types of activities. This section examines how militias sustain themselves, their interaction with communities, and their roles in both politics and conflict.210

4.1 How Do Militias Sustain Themselves?

A significant feature of the Tatmadaw’s arrangement with militias is that militias wholly or partly finance themselves. This setup allows the Tatmadaw to employ militias on a widespread basis with minimal administrative or financial commitments. This self-financing arrangement dates back to the turbulent 1960s. Given the government’s lack of resources at that time, Tatmadaw officials permitted militias to engage in economic activities. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Ka Kwe Ye militias in Shan State trafficked opium to Thailand and returned with contraband goods for Myanmar’s black market.211 The present arrangement continues the involvement of militias in revenue generating activities that include not only taxation and legal businesses, but also illicit activities. And while BGF units receive direct support from the Tatmadaw, their leaders also engage in these income-generating activities.

Taxation is one of the most ready means for militias to generate revenue. It requires fewer inputs than many other business activities. How militias levy taxes vary from one to another. Some collect transit fees from people passing through their checkpoints. For militias in border areas, cross-border trade presents a lucrative source of income.212 In other instances, militias may tax households and businesses.213

A few government militias have engaged in business activities. Militias operating in areas where the Tatmadaw has regularly conducted military operations against EAOs are more likely to be involved in business ventures than those in areas with limited Tatmadaw activity. The members of some militias are involved in real estate and agro-industry projects. Some run bus lines, hotels, restaurants, gem stores, sawmills, or gas stations. A few militias have received natural resource concessions from the government for logging,214 gold and jade mining,215 and land for commercial agriculture projects.216 A few militias have opened offices in Yangon and other cities across Myanmar. The government has also issued car import permits to BGFs, militias, and EAOs.217 In some instances, business-oriented militias have come to resemble businesses with a few armed employees rather than armed groups with business interests. However, in some cases, such as the BGF units of the Tatmadaw-integrated militias, the Tatmadaw provides direct assistance, such as salaries and material support. Similarly, EAO militias like the KNDO receive support from their parent organizations.218

While some militias have benefited from their business ties, others have not. For instance, infrastructure and resource-extraction projects have impinged on the authority of some militias. In 2002 and 2003, a project to remove rapids in the Mekong River by blowing them up led the Tatmadaw to increase deployments in areas of Shan State adjacent to the river. Local Tatmadaw commanders ordered local militias, who had taxed riverine trade, to withdraw from their outposts along the river, denying them their tax revenues. The Tatmadaw ordered a few militias to disarm.219

Drug trafficking is another way some militia leaders have enriched themselves. The areas of opium cultivation in Myanmar have also experienced some of the most intense conflict, and have some of the highest levels of militia activity. Several reports have indicated, for example, that militias in Shan State, where the Tatmadaw has worked with local militias to combat EAOs, are engaged in trafficking and taxation of illegal narcotics, including opiates and methamphetamine,220 and media coverage has emphasized the links between Shan State militias and narcotics trafficking.221

In the opium-producing areas of Shan and Kachin states, where pro-government militias operate, several community organizations and EAOs have launched counter-narcotics activities, including the
KIA and TNLA and community groups such as *Pat Jasan*, a civilian-led, ethnic Kachin, anti-narcotics organization. In their efforts to eradicate opium production, *Pat Jasan* and the KIA have come into armed conflict with pro-government militias, including the former NDA-K BGFs and the Pan Hsay militia.\textsuperscript{222}

The far-reaching economic reforms implemented during President Thein Sein’s regime have created new business opportunities for militias. The development of transportation infrastructure and the increase in cross-border trade have allowed militias operating along trade routes to raise revenue through taxation. In Kayin State, the increased volume of trade facilitated by the improvement of transportation infrastructure, coupled with the decline in armed conflict, presents new opportunities for armed groups to tax trade.\textsuperscript{223} In July 2015, attempts by the *Tatmadaw* to restrict taxation along the Asia Highway precipitated an outbreak of conflict involving BGFs, the DKBA (Kloh Htoo Baw) and the KNU. The fighting led to the displacement of several communities.\textsuperscript{224}

Recent government-led economic reforms involving new land classification laws have also provided militias and others businesses with economic prospects in the agricultural sector. The new procedures for granting land-use rights have made large-scale agricultural projects a lucrative business.\textsuperscript{225} But at the same time, the involvement of militia-connected businesses in industrial agriculture has led to the dispossession of farmers from their land, and in some cases triggered protests.\textsuperscript{226}

While economic reforms have unleashed new business opportunities, others have been reined in by changes in the political system. The post-2011 political reforms include measures promoting better governance through improved government regulation and greater emphasis on the rule of law, and some militias have recently found their business activities being regulated by non-military officials. In 2016, the Yangon City Development Council (YCDC) issued an order to temporarily suspend construction of a high-rise development near Inya Lake in Yangon on property owned by Kyaw Myint, head of the militia based in the Pang Hsay area of northern Shan State. The suspension order was issued after Khin Hlaing, an elected member of the YCDC, and May Win Myint, an NLD Member of Parliament, spoke out against high-rise construction projects taking place in Myanmar without proper legal authorization.\textsuperscript{227}

Under the Thein Sein government, state-level officials also took steps to limit taxation by militias in some areas. In southern Shan State, one NGO worker notes, “Some militias get permission from the local officials to collect taxes from the people. But not after the new [Thein Sein] government came to power.”\textsuperscript{228} And in northern Shan State, state-level officials succeeded in disbanding a string of toll gates operated by militias along the highway connecting the border town of Muse, a primary conduit for cross-border trade with China, with Lashio, one the commercial centers of northern Shan State.\textsuperscript{229}

The growth of militias in tandem with changes in the political and economic landscape has led to new patterns of militia business activities as well as the continuation of earlier practices. Their involvement in business allows for the replication of the militia system on a widespread basis. And the limited oversight that militias receive creates opportunities for predatory and illicit economic activities.

### 4.2 How Do Communities Interact with Militias?

Militias are local organizations, and local conditions structure their interactions with their communities. As local conditions and the interests of local communities differ, patterns of interaction between militias and society may also differ dramatically from one militia to another. These differences fall along three principal axes of interaction between militias and communities: recruitment, taxation, and the provision of goods by militias.

Militia recruitment is one critical dimension of interaction between militias and society. The recruitment practices of militias range from voluntary enlistment to forced conscription. The attitudes among communities towards militias and their recruitment practices also vary.\textsuperscript{230} For instance, the Tarlawgyi
community in Myitkyina Township of Kachin State is primarily composed of ethnic Tai Leng (or Red Shan). They live in an area where renewed fighting has taken place over the last few years between the Tatmadaw and the KIA. They have endured forced recruitment and taxation by armed groups, including the KIA. In February 2013, the Tatmadaw conducted a militia training course for 200 Tai Leng villagers in Tarlawgyi. The Tai Leng community’s support for the formation of a local militia indicates that Tatmadaw-supported community militias may receive backing from a non-Burman community.

In other instances, members of communities have expressed resentment towards militia service. In a reported incident from September 2013, members of a militia in Kyakto Township in Mon State attempted to hand over their weapons to the local Tatmadaw unit and end their service. According to reports, villagers, following the KNU ceasefire, no longer wanted to serve in the militia, because it “prevents them from sustaining their livelihood.” This incident indicates that under some conditions, villagers may not feel the need to maintain militias for protection.

Another dimension of militia-society relations is taxation. One of the most widespread effects of the militarization of Myanmar is the spread of arbitrary taxation by armed groups. In many non-Burman areas, taxation by the Tatmadaw, militias, and EAOs severely impinges on people’s livelihoods. Methods of taxation by militias vary. Sometimes taxation is direct, as when militias have set up tollgates in their areas of control and collected fees from travelers and traders. Taxation may also be indirect, as when local officials collect taxes on behalf of militias for expenses related to militia training.

A third dimension of interaction involves militias’ provision of goods for a community. Militias offer communities protection and security, but the provision of this public good requires material support—again, taxation—whether in kind, such as rice, or in cash. During the decades of civil war, the Tatmadaw, EAOs, and militias have engaged in a “tax for protection” arrangement. A well-known reference to this phenomenon is seh kyei, a Burmese term for protection money paid to armed groups. But when the people paying the taxes do not perceive the threat from which they need “protection,” it breeds resentment towards the armed group collecting the tax. And when a community finds itself paying taxes to multiple armed groups, the burden creates resentment towards all the groups involved.

Protection is one good that militias can provide. However, a few capable militia leaders have expanded their provision of public goods to include patronage of public works and community development. The case of Khun Sa offers one of the most striking examples. As a Ka Kwe Ye militia leader, his patronage included the high-profile donation of expensive medical equipment to the Lashio General Hospital in 1969. Later, as the leader of an insurgency, he built several hospitals. His patronage established him as a benefactor of the community. A few currently serving militia leaders have adopted this approach, engaging in civic activities and serving as patrons of community cultural organizations, religious ceremonies, and programs for people displaced by conflict.

4.3 What Role Do Militias Play in Politics?

Militias are directly and indirectly involved in politics. The ongoing reforms in Myanmar’s political system signal an opening for individuals, including militia leaders, to participate in formal politics. At the same time, the change and uncertainty of the informal rules of the game create opportunities for militia leaders to exercise informal political influence. And militias are themselves a political issue. While the Thein Sein government dropped the issue from negotiations, the 2008 Constitution maintains that all armed forces are under the control of the Tatmadaw.

As the political system opens up, parliamentary elections at the national and subnational level have become a formal means for people to exercise political influence. Several militia leaders have contested seats and been elected to Parliament. One is T Khun Myat, who reportedly served from 1990 to 2010 as head of a militia group in Kutkai Township under the control of the Northeast Command of the
Twice elected to Parliament from Kutkai as a member of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), he became deputy speaker of the lower house of Parliament in February 2016 after receiving the NLD’s nomination.

Militia leaders also play indirect and informal roles in politics. In 2009, Zahkung Ting Ying, founder of the NDA-K, transformed his ceasefire group into three BGF units. In 2010, he was elected as an independent to the upper house of Parliament. In the lead-up to the 2015 election, Zahkung Ting Ying issued a letter to members of the opposition NLD, warning them not to campaign in his constituency. The local NLD officials filed a complaint with the Kachin State Union Election Commission (UEC) alleging interference in their campaign activities. UEC officials met with Zahkung Ting Ying and reached an agreement, which allowed parties to “campaign peacefully” in the former NDA-K territory.

The militia system itself, rather than individual militias, has become a political issue and plays an indirect role in politics. The Tatmadaw’s insistence that EAOs transform into militias politicized the issue of militias. Many EAOs and ceasefire groups balked at the Tatmadaw’s plan to integrate them into its command structure. In 2011, the new Thein Sein government changed tack and dropped its insistence that ethnic armed organizations transform into militias. Nevertheless, the issue of militia transformation remains a concern for EAOs in the peace process. The KNU is one of the largest armed organizations to join the NCA. In conjunction with its signing of the agreement, the KNLA, the KNU’s armed wing, released a statement on October 14, 2015, declaring, “We shall never accept the transformation of the KNLA into the Border Guard Force or Civil Police, but shall remain as the Karen National Liberation Army.”

4.4 What Role Do Militias Play in Conflicts?

Militias play both direct and indirect roles in Myanmar’s ongoing conflicts. One obvious role is that pro-government militias have battled EAOs, and EAO militias have fought against Tatmadaw troops. For instance, pro-government militias in Kachin, Kayin, and Shan States have come into direct violent conflict with EAOs, including the KIA, TNLA, MNDAAD, KNU, SSPP/SSA–North, RCCS/SSA–South, and the DKBA (Kloh Htoo Baw). Militias also play indirect roles in conflict through their support for either the Tatmadaw or EAOs. Militias have assisted Tatmadaw units in military operations against several ethnic armed groups by providing information and accompanying them on patrols.

The Tatmadaw’s proposal to transform EAOs into either BGFs or PMFs has also played an indirect role in catalyzing conflict. Following the proposal, and escalating tensions between the Tatmadaw and several of the larger EAOs, conflict erupted in the Kokang area of northern Shan State in 2009 between the Tatmadaw and the MNDAAD. The MNDAAD is an ethnic armed group established in the Kokang area of northern Shan State by Peng Kya Shin in 1989. Peng Kya Shin is one of the few active leaders from the early period of resistance in Shan State. He served with the Kokang Resistance Force in the early 1960s, and later with the CPB. After leading a mutiny against the CPB that precipitated its collapse in 1989, Peng formed the MNDAAD and engaged with the SLORC government in its first ceasefire agreement.

In 2009, the MNDAAD joined other armed groups in rejecting the military government’s proposal. In August, a standoff between state security forces and MNDAAD troops occurred when state officials launched an investigation into reported drug and weapons manufacturing in Kokang. A bloody conflict involving the Tatmadaw, police, and MNDAAD troops broke out, in which MNDAAD troops were driven from their positions. A faction within the MNDAAD led by Bai Xiaqian split from Peng and agreed to form a BGF. Six years later, in February 2015, the MNDAAD launched a surprise attack against the Tatmadaw in Kokang.

In 2010, the DKBA transformed into twelve BGF units (nos. 1011-1022) in Kayin State. The former DKBA troops that have become BGFs are among five ceasefire groups that acceded to the government’s
request that they become BGFs. On election day in November 2010, the DKBA’s Kloh Htoo Baw battalion, a unit led by Saw Lah Pwe, rejected the government’s order and launched a surprise attack on the town of Myawaddy in Kayin State. This move signaled its break with other DKBA commanders. The group took the name of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army–Kloh Htoo Baw. In October 2015, the organization became a signatory to the NCA.

At present, some of the most intense fighting in Myanmar, in northern Shan State, involves militias. In particular, the pro-Tatmadaw Pang Hsay militia and the TNLA have had ongoing clashes over the last several years, and units composed of Tatmadaw troops and pro-government militias engaged in brutal treatment of villagers. In Kachin State, the BGF units formerly of the NDA-K have also battled the KIA.
Collectively, militias represent a sizeable force and play influential roles, including their involvement in armed conflicts. Despite the participation of militias in violent conflict, they are largely absent from the peace process, and discussions of the prospects for a transition from conflict to peace neglect militia-related issues. This section has two parts. The first discusses the role played by militias in peace processes in other countries, and the second considers militia-related issues relevant to the current peacebuilding efforts in Myanmar.

The experience of other conflict settlements highlights the difficulties that militias pose for transitions from conflict to peace, and the critical importance of taking militias and the localized conditions in which they operate into consideration. Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sudan, and Timor-Leste are all instances in which militias have played a role in armed conflict. The experience of militias in peace processes in these countries provides a useful perspective for examining the role of militias in Myanmar’s ongoing transition from conflict to peace.

One concern raised in a comparative study of militias operating in conflict zones in Afghanistan, DRC, Sudan, and Timor-Leste is that there are “strong risks accompanying the imposition of security-promotion interventions from above, particularly if they are divorced from the political, social, and economic context in which such activities are embedded.” In particular, concerns are that conflict-resolution practices and peace efforts, at times drawing on Security Sector Reform (SSR) or Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) models, and involving changes in the structure and strength of armed groups, are too often approached in a “cookie cutter” fashion and executed in a way that does not take into account the specifics of local context and critical issues distinct to a particular area or armed group. As security concerns are one of the justifications for militias to hold arms, a key prescription is that post-conflict stability is best served by taking into account the specific motivations and characteristics of individual militias and the contexts in which they operate.

Drawing on the experience of peace processes in other countries, another concern is that militias often occupy a political space in which their political concerns are often either ignored or denigrated by other actors. For instance, armed opposition organizations often dismiss the political interests of government-allied militias because of their association with the national military, and sometimes resent their cooperation with its units in combat operations against them. Government officials may share this view that militias are already part of the national military and do not require a role in political dialogues. In some instances, the engagement of militias in illicit economic activities undermines the legitimacy of their political interests.

These dynamics are present in Myanmar. The political interests of pro-government militias have become depoliticized. The decision by leaders of armed groups formerly advocating political change to become pro-government militias is viewed by others as a sign that they have also surrendered their status as a political group. And the involvement of some militias in trafficking narcotics, extraction of natural resources, and predatory taxation supports a perception that they are profit-seeking actors. These views of militias overshadow and function to delegitimize their political interests. Nevertheless, they are armed organizations that participate in conflict, and their possession of coercive capacity makes consideration and discussion of their roles in a post-conflict Myanmar important.

Militias and the issue of militias are marginalized from the current process of political dialogue in Myanmar. Militias themselves are not involved in discussions about key issues regarding their post-conflict role, nor has the issue of the future of militias received much attention. These dynamics are not unique to Myanmar. A view common to governments, armed opposition, and conflict mediators involved in peacebuilding efforts in other conflicts is that including militias and other newly formed armed groups in peace negotiations is unnecessary, and that their inclusion in political dialogue creates
incentives for groups to take up arms and engage in violence. As one participant in Myanmar’s peace process explains, “The predicament for the [Government of Myanmar] is that by allowing groups not on the list [of recognized groups] to be around the table may encourage proliferation of armed groups. Likewise, their exclusion may also be a source of continuing conflict.”

The marginalization of groups or actors from peace processes is not unusual. Other types of stakeholders in Myanmar share this political no man’s land and are not directly involved in peace negotiations. In peace processes taking place in other countries, militias have also been excluded from conflict settlements. The inattention to militia-related issues appears to be premised on an assessment, or perhaps a hope, that they will not pose problems in a peace settlement. But a combination of their marginalization from the peace process and their possession of coercive capacity creates a situation in which their use of violence may become one of the few ways to bring attention to their interests and concerns. In some peace processes, their neglect has proven detrimental to long-term peace. In the case of Sudan, militias disrupted a peace process and brought a return to violence.

The NCA of October 2015 signaled the beginning of a new phase for Myanmar’s peace process, which calls for political dialogue. The political dialogue involves a broad range of actors, including representatives of the government, the Tatmadaw, parliament, EAOs, political parties, ethnic groups, and civil society. At this point, discussions of the role of militias in Myanmar’s future are largely marginalized from the peace process. Their neglect is puzzling. Militias are not only armed, but also involved in armed conflicts. As mentioned earlier (see Section 1.1), aside from the Tatmadaw and the Myanmar Police Force, government militias are one of the few groups, if not the only other group, permitted by the government and the Constitution to hold weapons. A few issues for consideration are listed below.

Militias are conflict actors. Their continued, direct involvement in armed conflicts and their possession of weapons make discussion of their role in post-settlement Myanmar important.

Along with their security roles, militias engage in self-financing. This arrangement allows for the widespread use of militias. However, in some cases, their engagement in economic activities lacks oversight. In the absence of adequate supervision, some militias have engaged in illicit and predatory economic activities in their areas of operation.

Militias also display a striking diversity. A few operate with EAOs, but most militia units are aligned with the Tatmadaw. Even among the Tatmadaw militias, there are significant differences in their strength, their economic activities, and the circumstances in which they formed. The strength of a militia unit can vary from fewer than a dozen members to several hundred. The range of economic activities can also vary. Some may receive economic support from the state officials, whereas others may be involved in illicit narcotics. Several militias were formerly EAOs, established with specific objectives such as self-determination, political reforms involving federalism and equitable control of resources, and security for their communities. Their transformation from EAOs into Tatmadaw militias has meant their marginalization from a direct role in political dialogues.

The possession of arms is a means by which all armed groups, including militias and EAOs, protect themselves and their interests. Discussions about changes in the structure and size of armed groups in Myanmar have drawn on models for DDR and SSR developed from the experiences of peace processes in other conflict-affected countries. The earlier transformation of EAOs into pro-government militias is one model for downsizing EAOs. Other proposals involve converting EAOs into local police forces or including their units in a federal army. In 2014, several EAOs presented a federal army proposal, sometime referred to as the “Union army,” at a meeting involving representatives of the government and EAOs. But Tatmadaw leaders did not accept the proposal. A consensus on whether or not to change the structures of armed groups, and to what, has not emerged. In part, this is because EAOs maintain that holding a political dialogue involving the Tatmadaw is necessary before changing the
structures of their forces. Any steps involving the features of DDR and SSR will benefit from taking into account the differences among various types of militias, and considering the context in which they operate, particularly their security and political concerns.

The degree and source of threats encountered by militias differ from place to place and from militia to militia. The recent support for the formation of militias in Tarlawgyi, in Kachin State, indicates that security threats remain a concern for some communities (see Section 4.4). By contrast, the reported attempt by members of a militia in Mon State to hand over their weapons to the Tatmadaw and end their duties suggests that some militia members feel that they no longer need to be active (see Section 4.2). These incidents dramatize the different conditions in which militias operate, and these differences are important in understanding their role in post-conflict settlements.

The experience of conflicts in other countries shows that taking militias and their diversity into account can be important for successful conflict resolution. In particular, the neglect of the issue of militias in peace processes has proven detrimental to peacebuilding efforts.

The resolution of Myanmar’s decades-long ethnic conflict is a priority for the newly formed government led by the NLD. The recent focus of peacebuilding efforts has involved addressing concerns of both EAOs and the Tatmadaw. But building a durable peace will require a broader approach that recognizes the role played by militias in conflicts, and the challenges that they pose to long-term stability.
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Interview, member of civil society organization from Mon State, Yangon, December 2015.
Interview, journalists, Myitkyina, November 2015.
Interviews, journalists, Yangon, March 2016.
Annex I: Command Structure of Border Guard Force (BGF)\textsuperscript{268}

Regiment Commander  
( Ceasefire Group )

Deputy Regiment Commander  
( Myanmar Army and Ceasefire Group )

2-IC  
( Myanmar Army )

- WO II (Chief of Staff)  
- Sergeant (Clerks)  
- Sergeant  
- WO II (CQ)  
- Corporal  
- Nurses

Adjutant Officer  
( Myanmar Army )

Quarter Master  
( Myanmar Army )

Company Commander  
( Ceasefire Group )

Other Ranks  
( Ceasefire Group )

Border Guard Force  
( Myanmar Army - 30 )  
( Ceasefire Group - 296 )
Annex II: Border Guard Force Recruitment Pamphlet
People’s Militia Strategy

1) The people militia strategy is a military strategy based upon the public’s conscience on national politics and organized by means of four major priorities namely the people; material; time; and morale; and five [principles on?] development, designed to wage a just war utilizing the military strategy to “organize [the Burmese word စည္းရံုး also means persuade; campaign] while fighting, fight while organizing”.

2) In the modern day, powerful nations in their bid to bully and influence smaller nations are not only using military tactics but also using the tactics of politics; diplomacy; propaganda and economy by means of information technology in the form of Multidimensional Warfare, prompting the need of a broader strategy on military operation forces in the country. The ‘military operation force’ of a country means waging combat against the enemy not only utilizing the armed forces organized by regular means but also with the support of organizations made up of all members of public. If the conventional military operations by regular armed forces fail, the members of public as part of the country’s military operation forces are to continue in guerrilla tactics. If the whole country falls in the enemy’s hand, the regular armed forces together with mass organizations must organize people’s militia groups made up of all public members to wage counter-attack with utmost effort aiming for absolute defeat of the enemy. This is the summary of the People’s Militia Strategy.
Endnotes

1 There is a broad range of publicly available estimates for the number of militias in Myanmar. The estimates range from a few dozen to as many as five thousand militia groups. One problem with interpreting these estimates is that they do not clearly define what constitutes a militia. For the lower estimates, see Shan Herald Agency for News, Show Business: Rangoon’s “War on Drugs” in the Shan State (Chiang Mai: Shan Herald Agency for News, 2003), 7. For higher estimates, see “Junta to Issue More Weapons for Militia Units,” Shan Herald Agency for News, December 15, 2010; Min Zaw Oo, Understanding Myanmar’s Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements (Yangon: Swisspeace, 2014), 33; Aung Naing Oo, “Myanmar and the ‘Ripe Moment,’” Myanmar Times, April 10, 2014.

2 An exception is a recent meeting of the Committee for Shan State Unity (CSSU), a coalition of various Shan groups, that convened in March 2016. A representative from the Sein Kyawt, or Hsengkeow, militia (formerly SSPP/SSA 3rd Brigade) in Shan State attended the meeting. See “Shan Conference in Rangoon,” Shan Herald Agency for News, March 7, 2016.

3 Exhibits at the Defense Services Museum in Nay Pyi Taw provide one source of information about militias and highlight their role in safeguarding the country from security threats. Field research, Defense Services Museum, Nay Pyi Taw.


5 Auxiliary forces include members of the Auxiliary Fire Brigade, the Myanmar War Veterans Association and Swan Ashin (the People’s Vigorous Organization). Maung Aung Myoe, Building the Tatmadaw: Myanmar’s Armed Forces since 1948, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 35; Selth, Burma’s Armed Forces, 81.

6 In the 1960s, security officials from the Tatmadaw developed a military doctrine known as the doctrine of people’s war, which became an integral part of the country’s national defense plans. See Maung Aung Myoe, Building the Tatmadaw; Yoshihiro Nakanishi, Strong Soldiers, Failed Revolution (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2013), 232-234; Defense Services Historical Museum and Archives, Tatmadaw Thamain [History of the Armed Forces], vol. 5: 1962-1974 (Yangon: News and Periodicals Enterprise, 1997-1998), 139-158.


10 Kachin News Group, “Burma Army Kills Kachin Farmer in Mansi Township,” November 19, 2013; BNI,


12 In interviews with various members of civil society and armed groups in Myanmar, informants used different terms to describe militias. Militia members and their associates tended to use technical terms, such as athwin pyaun pyithusit (transformed militias) and ta neh pyithusit. Other informants, particularly members of ceasefire groups and non-militia members, used other, less technical terms. A few dismissed the relevance of the technical terms.


14 For a discussion of tat, see Mary P. Callahan, Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), 36-40.


16 Callahan, Making Enemies, 36-40.

17 Interview, retired civil servant, Lashio, Shan State, November 2015.


19 Callahan, Making Enemies, 246.

20 Ibid., 36-40.

21 Martin Smith, Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity (Dhaka: University Press, 1999), 64; Bertil Lintner, Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948 (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 1999).

22 Lintner, Burma in Revolt, 14, 102.

23 Maung Aung Myoe, Building the Tatmadaw, 141.


27 Keenan, People’s Militia Forces, 5.

28 Callahan, Making Enemies, 129, 143.


31 Field Research, Defense Services Museum, Nay Pyi Taw.

32 This militia program is an early instance of the government drawing on other models of militias. Lintner notes that the Pyusawhti “borrowed features from the defense of collective settlements in Israel.” Bertil Lintner, Burma in Revolt, 154. Also see Pho Thar Aung, “From Pyusawhti to the Present,” Irrawaddy 11, no. 1 (January 2003).

33 Maung Aung Myoe, Counterinsurgency in Myanmar, 144.

34 Callahan, Making Enemies, 143.

35 Ibid., 186.

36 The details concerning the operation of militias in this period are not well known. However, evidence from several sources provides the basis for putting together a brief sketch of the militias operating in Burma in this period. See General Khun Sa (1993), 5; Yawngwhe, The Shan of Burma.

37 Maung Aung Myoe, Counterinsurgency in Myanmar, 149. Defense Services Historical Museum and Archives, Tatmadaw Thamain, 139-158.

38 Maung Aung Myoe, Counterinsurgency in Myanmar, 146-7.

39 Selth, Burma’s Armed Forces, 78.

40 Defense Services Historical Museum and Archives, Tatmadaw Thamain, 139-158.
41 Maung Aung Myoe, *Counterinsurgency in Myanmar*, 149.
42 Kevin Heppner and Jo Becker, “My Gun was as Tall as Me”: *Child Soldiers in Burma* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002), 155; interview, former militia member in Shan State, December, 2015, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
43 In the 1960s, this type of militia was also referred to as “people’s guerrillas” or *pyithu thaungya*, but commonly referred to as *Ka Kwe Ye* militias.
44 As noted earlier, the term *Ka Kwe Ye* sometimes denotes militias in general.
45 Interview with civil society leaders, Lashio, Shan State, November 2015.
47 Maung Wint Thu, *Myanmar’s Endeavours towards Elimination of Narcotic Drugs* (Yangon: Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC), 2003), 36.
53 For accounts of militia operations in the 1950s and early 1960s, see Taungdwin Bo Thein, *Tah Moe Nye Region*; Maung Wint Thu, *Myanmar’s Endeavors*, 35.
54 Callahan, *Making Enemies*, 17, 221-222.
55 Maung Aung Myoe, *Counterinsurgency in Myanmar*, 130.
58 Maung Aung Myoe, *Building the Tatmadaw*.
59 Smith, *Burma*, 258-9; Defense Services Historical Museum and Archives, *Tatmadaw Thamain*, 139-158.
60 Selth, *Burma’s Armed Forces*, 82-83.


Yawngwhe, *The Shan of Burma*, 26, 177.


Bunge (1984: 231), refers to a militia force formed by Lo Hsing Han in 1980, as the Shan State Volunteer Forces.

Selth, *Burma’s Armed Forces*, 82. Interview, retired civil servant, Lashio, November 2015. One account indicates that by 1988, the number of anti-insurgent groups formed by the Tatmadaw had reached 2,600. Tin Maung Maung Than, “Burma’s National Security and Defense Posture,” 49.


Interviews with members of armed groups, Myitkyina, Kachin State, November 2015. It remains unclear how many militias were disbanded.


The Directorate of Defense Services Intelligence was a powerful intelligence organization of the Tatmadaw, which was disbanded in 2004.

Selth, *Burma’s Armed Forces*, 82-83.

Selth, *Burma’s Armed Forces*, 311.


This approach dates back to the late 1960s, when the local Tatmadaw commanders began offering units of the Shan State Army (SSA) – an early ethnic Shan-led armed organization operating in Shan State – the status of militia units in return for their acceptance of government authority. Yawngwhe, *The Shan of Burma*, 22, 24.


It is important to note that these major armed groups and minor armed groups, also referred to as
national armed groups, are classifications used by the government. Some of the Major Armed Groups are also known as splinter groups, such as the KDA, which broke away from the KIA. See New Light of Myanmar, “Press Conference (1/2011) on Government’s Efforts to Transform National Race Armed Groups in Accordance with State Constitution Held,” August 13, 2011.

93 This practice dates back to the late 1960s, when the Tatmadaw offered militia status to units of the Shan State Army. After a ceremony involving the surrender of their weapons, they were reconstituted and armed as militia. Yawngwhe, The Shan of Burma, 24.

94 Selth, Burma’s Armed Forces, 311.

95 Shan Herald Agency for News, Show Business, 40.


103 Shan Herald Agency for News, Show Business.

104 Interview, member of militia organization, Myitkyina, November 2015.


108 General Khun Sa, 5.

109 Yawngwhe, The Shan of Burma, 18, 276-277.

110 Ibid.

111 Maung Wint Thu, Myanmar’s Endeavours, 36.

112 Yawngwhe, The Shan of Burma, 27, 176-177. Later the organization adopted the name of Shan United Army.

113 General Khun Sa, 7.


115 Lintner, Burma in Revolt, 411-13; Maung Pho Shoke, Why Did U Khun Sa’s MTA Exchange Arms for Peace? (Yangon: U Aung Zaw,1999).


120 The circumstances under which Naw Kham became a militia leader are not clear.


122 On August 30, 2003, Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt announced the military government’s plans for political reform, referred to as Myanmar’s “roadmap to discipline flourishing democracy.”

Recent conflict involves BGF units against a remaining splinter faction of the DKBA (Kloh Htoo Blaw). In 2010, the transformation of the DKBA into twelve BGF units (nos. 1011-1022) took place in Kayin State.
However, the late General Saw Lah Pwe, also known as Na Ka Mwe (“man with the mustache”), who was the commander of the DKBA’s Kloh Htoo Baw Battalion, did not comply with the government’s order. On Election Day in November 2010, he led a surprise attack on the Myanmar border town of Myawaddy, located in Kayin State, which signaled his break with other DKBA commanders. In April 2012, Gen Saw Lah Pwe adopted a new name for his organization, which involved a slight tweaking of the name of his former organization. His group became the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army, also known as the DKBA–Kloh Htoo Baw. On October 15, 2015, the DKBA–Kloh Htoo Baw became a signatory of the NCA. See Lawi Weng, “DKBA Splinter Group, Government Army and Allied BGF Clash in Karen State,” *Irrawaddy*, February 1, 2016.


Kramer, *Neither War, Nor Peace*, 35.


Plans for BGF units are that they be of roughly battalion strength, with 326 troops. Of these, three officers and 27 soldiers are to be drawn from the *Tatmadaw. New Light of Myanmar*, August 13, 2011. See Annex I and II for information on BGFs structure and composition.


For example, a recent news report issued in March 2016 indicates that fighting broke out between a BGF allied with Zakung Ting Ying and KIA units involved in opium eradication near Kampeiti. *Kachin News Group*, “KIA Clashes with Pro-government Militia in Poppy Growing Area of Kachin State,” March 28, 2016.


*Tatmadaw* non-integrated militias have a broad range of titles. In many cases, the titles are not clearly defined. For instances, some militias are known as “transformed people’s militias” or *athwin pyaun pyithusit*, which is a term used by several militias for ceasefire groups that have become government militias. Another expression used for militias is *tah nye*, which refers to their status as residential militia.


For instance, Ja Htaw, an ethnic Lahu militia leader in Tangyan Township, reportedly has about 250 members in his militia, but only 150 are armed. See *Mizzima*, “Prepare for Battle, with Better Weapons, Junta Tells Militias,” December 16, 2010.


For instance, Ja Htaw, an ethnic Lahu militia leader in Tangyan Township, reportedly has about 250 members in his militia, but only 150 are armed. See *Mizzima*, “Prepare for Battle, with Better Weapons, Junta Tells Militias,” December 16, 2010.


Accounts indicate that a few militias were originally village-based, volunteer defense forces raised by local leaders that cooperated with the *Tatmadaw* in containing varied external and internal armed threats. For instance, the militias in the villages of Tarmoenye, Shaw Haw, and Lon Tan, in Kutkai Township of northern Shan State, can trace their roots back to earlier village defense forces that assisted the *Tatmadaw* in fighting the KMT remnants and the multicolored insurgents in the early
1950s. By 1973, these groups reportedly surrendered their weapons to the Tatmadaw. The Tatmadaw commanders later reconstituted them as pro-government militia units to fight against the CPB. At present, they operate as militias in Kutkai Township. See Taungdwin Bo Thein, *Tah Moe Nye Region*.

For instance, the current Nampong/Loi Taw Khan militia in Shan State reportedly contains elements of an ethnic-Lahu militia headed by Wilson Moe, which traces its roots back to a militia formed in the 1970s. See Lahu National Development Organization, *Aftershocks along Burma’s Mekong: Reef-Blasting and Military-Style Development in Eastern Shan State* (Chiang Mai, August 2003), 15, 18. The Kutkai Special People’s Militia is an incarnation of the Kutkai Rangers. As mentioned earlier, this group was created to combat the threats presented by CPB forces in eastern Shan State. Selth, *Burma’s Armed Forces*, 82; interviews, Lashio, Shan State, November 2015. The Pang Hsay militia in Namkhan Township was set up by Kyaw Myint to assist the Tatmadaw in dealing with the CPB in the late 1980s. PWO, *Poisoned Flowers*, 26.


Defense Services Historical Museum and Archives, *Tatmadaw Thamain*, 139-158; interviews, Shan State, Kachin State, October and November 2015.

Interviews, members of community based organizations, Yangon, Taunggyi, and Lashio, Shan State, October and November 2015.

Interview, member of community based organization from Mon State, Yangon, December 2015.


For instance, a report in Thaton district of Mon State notes, “Depending on the size of the village, the soldiers have been ordering village heads to arrange between five and 10 individuals to serve in the Pyi Thu Sit for a period of five years.” Karen Human Rights Group, “State Agencies, Armed Groups and the Proliferation of Oppression in Thaton District,” September 24, 2007; also interview, member of civil society organization, Taunggyi, Shan State, October 2015.

Interview, official from ethnic armed organization, Chiang Mai, Thailand, December 2015.


Defense Services Historical Museum and Archives, *Tatmadaw Thamain*, 142-144.

The Tatmadaw’s employment of local militias has experienced several interruptions and reconfigurations. In 1973 and after 1988, the Tatmadaw disbanded local militias in several areas, but they later reconstituted some of them. Defense Services Historical Museum and Archives, *Tatmadaw Thamain*, 139-158.

Interviews, Loikaw, Kayah State, Yangon, and Taunggyi, Shan State.

Heppner and Becker, “‘My Gun Was as Tall as Me,’” 106-109; Selth, *Burma’s Armed Forces*, 81.


The news media have sometimes characterized ethnic armed organizations as militias. Media reports sometimes refer to ethnic armed groups, even large ones, such as the UWSA and others, as militias. For an account of the complex history of ethnic armed groups in Myanmar, see Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*; Smith, *Burma*.

For data on reserve forces for selected groups, see Keenan, *By Force of Arms*; BNI, *Deciphering Myanmar’s Peace Process* (2013).

Heppner and Becker, *My Gun Was as Tall as Me*, 135-6.

Interview, researcher, February 13, 2015.

Defense Department, *Official Karen Nation Union Webpage*.


Heppner and Becker, *My Gun Was as Tall as Me*, 131.


Among the difficulties, the details about militias are deemed politically sensitive by the Tatmadaw because of ongoing political negotiations. A report released by the International Labor Office in 2015 highlights the sensitivity regarding militias: “In the most recent SWG meeting, the ILO was informed that it was impossible for the Ministry of Defense to facilitate awareness raising with militia groups due to the complicated command structure between the militia and the Tatmadaw, and the current sensitivities around the peace process.” International Labor Office, *Review of the Situation in Myanmar on Issues Relating to ILO Activities, Including Forced Labour, Freedom of Association, and the Impact of Foreign Investment on Decent Working Conditions*, March 4, 2015.


The complexity and diversity of the militias make it difficult to characterize them and their practices. It is important to consider that these are trends and that these practices may involve only a few groups.

See McCoy, Politics of Heroin; U.S. Congress, *Proposal to Control Opium from the Golden Triangle and Terminate the Shan Opium Trade*, 40.

Interview, businessman, Loikaw, Kayah State, October 2015.

Interviews, civil society organization member, villagers, Taunggyi and Hopang, September 2015. For instance, a media report indicates that money from local businesses was solicited to support the Kachin State-based BGFs. *Kachin News Group*, “Burmese Junta Collects Funds for New Border Guard Force,” November 19, 2009.

*Environmental Investigation Agency, Organized Chaos* (September 2015), 6, 16.


*BNI, Deciphering Myanmar’s Peace Process* (2014), 53; Saw Yan Naing, “Peace Permit’ Bonanza
218 The lack of data about other militias makes a determination of their sources of revenue difficult.

219 LNDO, Aftershocks, 18.


221 Patrick Win, “Myanmar’s State-Backed Militias are Flooding Asia with Meth.”


223 One media report indicates that a BGF member in Kayin State reportedly involved in taxing riverine trade on the Moei River fired on a boat transporting cement. As a result, armed groups in this area have met to discuss how to prevent further incidents of violence at the twenty tax gates along the Moei River. S’Phan Shuang, “Govt Militia in Shooting Incident at Border Tax Gates,” Karen News, May 11, 2013.


228 Interviews, members of a community based organization, Taunggyi, Shan State, October 2015.

229 Interviews, Shan State, November 2015.

230 Heppner and Becker, “My Gun Was as Tall as Me,” 106.

231 Bill O’Toole, “‘Red Shan’ Caught between Violence in Kachin State Conflict,” Myanmar Times, November 16, 2012.


236 Ricky Yue, Warlords’s Learning Curve: A Case Study of the Pa-O Self Administered Zone (City


238 Interview, member of civil society organization, Shan State, October 2015.


240 Interviews, Shan State, October 2015.


242 A few militia leaders support local cultural and literary organizations. See Taungdwin Bo Thein, *Tah Myoe Nye*.

243 Interview, foreign researcher, Yangon, March 15, 2016.

244 Saw Chit Thu reportedly donated two million kyat (approximately US$1,700) to a Myawaddy-based organization to assist people displaced by conflict. Saw Nyunt Thaung, “Karen Groups Deliver Aids to Displaced Civilians to Kawkareik Township,” *Karen News*, July 24, 2015.


248 These include the following ethnic armed groups: KIA, USWA, MNDA, NDAA, and SSPP/SSA-North. See National Democratic Front, *NDF Report on Ceasefire Groups Resisting SPDC’s Pressure and Instability* (September 18, 2009).


An exception is a recent meeting of the Committee for Shan State Union (CSSU), a coalition of various Shan groups, that convened in March 2016. A representative from the Sein Kyawt, or Hsengkeow, militia (formerly SSPP/SSA 3rd Brigade) in Shan State attended the meeting. Shan Herald Agency for News, “Shan Conference in Rangoon,” March 7, 2016.


Ibid.


At the Union Peace Conference held in mid-January 2015, the first round of political dialogue took place. Representatives from the eight armed organizations that signed the NCA attended. With one exception, the representatives of ethnic armed organizations that had bilateral ceasefire agreements but did not accede to the NCA did not attend. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) was the only one of these groups to attend, but it was recorded as a “special guest.” The remaining groups, along with other civil society organizations, have boycotted the meeting on the grounds that the Tatmadaw continues to engage in armed conflict in some areas and the NCA is not inclusive. See Nagaland Post, “UPC Approves 4-Point Proposal,” January 18, 2016; United Nationalities Federal Council, UNFC on NCA and Internal Peace (January 5, 2016).

According to a media report, the director of the People’s Militias and Border Forces Directorate, Major General Maung Maung Ohn, reportedly noted, “There are only three organizations that are allowed to hold weapons, the Tatmadaw (the army), police, and militia units.” From Shan Herald Agency for News, “Junta to Issue More Weapons for Militia Units,” December 15, 2010. Also see Government of the Republic of Myanmar, Constitution (2008); New Light of Myanmar, “Information Minister Replies to Question of U Saw Thein Aung of Hlaingbwe Constituency about Aspiration of Kayin Nationals,” March 22, 2011.

See Keenan, The Kachins’ Dilemma, 3-4.


Leaders in Rakhine State have also supported the formation of new militias in their communities. Ei Ei Toe Lwin, “Speaker Pledges “Support” for Rakhine People,” Myanmar Times, October 4, 2013.


